

# “I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”

Mark 1:40-45

Key Verse: 1:41

**“Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’”**

In today’s passage Jesus cleanses a man with leprosy. In this short story we can learn the core of the gospel and what Jesus really wants us to be and to do. Everybody wants to live a pure and holy life and to grow as a noble person. It is because we are made in the image of God. We are made to serve the living God, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (Lk 1:74b-75). If we don’t live like this, we are not happy even if we have lots of money, and enjoy many pleasures. So we really want to live a pure and holy life. However, as time goes by we commit sins that stain our souls with impurity and fill us with guilt, shame and regret. How, then, can we live a pure and holy life? The man with leprosy in today’s passage is a representative of all human beings, who are sin-stained. He shows us how to come to Jesus. Most of all, Jesus shows us how to be cleansed. And we can learn what to do after receiving God’s grace.

**First, a man with leprosy came to Jesus (40).** As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons, one day a man with leprosy came to him (40). The gospel writer Luke, a medical doctor, describes him in more detail, saying, “...**who was covered with leprosy**” (Lk 5:12). Leprosy is rare in America today. There are about 6,500 cases in our nation, while about one million Americans have HIV/AIDS. However, in Israel, during Jesus’ time, leprosy was not uncommon. Leprosy usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves. It is an infectious, epidemic and chronic disease. It causes severe pain in the beginning, as it steadily corrupts the skin and muscles. As it progresses, it disables the nervous system, making a person numb. So even though the disease becomes more destructive, the person feels less and less pain. Typically, people with leprosy begin to lose fingers and toes, become blind, and finally die. This man, “covered” with leprosy, must have been one of the worst cases. It seems that the disease had turned him from a human being into a monster. In addition to the physical, there were also serious emotional, mental and spiritual effects. Lepers had to be segregated and isolated. They were abandoned by society and marginalized. This man had to leave his beloved family members and live

## **“I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”**

only among other lepers. Though this may seem harsh, it is what the law prescribed. Leviticus 13:45-46 says, **“Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.”** To make matters worse, leprosy was regarded as a punishment by God. Historically, God had struck Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah with leprosy as a curse for their sins (Nu 12:10; 2 Ki 5:27; 2 Ch 26:16-21). It is hard to imagine how much this man had suffered with leprosy. He must have been one of the most miserable people on the face of the earth.

In many ways, the symptoms of leprosy are similar to those of sin. **First of all, sin disfigures the image of God in man, just as leprosy disfigures man’s body.** God made man very handsome and balanced, with two eyes and one nose, with two ears and one mouth. But when leprosy destroys man’s nose, or one of his eyes or ears, he begins to look hideous and loses his ability to function. In the same way, sin disfigures the image of God in man. God made man to be full of love, compassion, wisdom, righteousness, justice, grace and truth, and to be pure, sincere, noble, and responsible. But sin makes man immoral, violent, and utterly corrupt. Sin turns man into a monster. **Secondly, sin numbs man’s conscience, just as leprosy numbs man’s nervous system so that he feels no pain.** Pain has a good purpose. It is a deterrent to do wrong. So Philip Yancey said, “Pain is God’s gift.” And C.S. Lewis said, “God shouts in our pain.” At first, when a person sins, they feel pain in their conscience. This pain should motivate us to correct ourselves. But when we do not, and sin a second time, we feel less pain. Gradually we feel no pain. So even though we are dying due to lust, pride, hatred, bitterness, jealousy or selfishness, we can say, “I feel okay. I am okay!” But we are not okay. We are dying in our sins. **Thirdly, sin cuts man’s relationships, just as leprosy leaves one isolated.** People diagnosed with leprosy were forbidden to associate with others or enter the temple area. They were completely cut off from the camp. In the same way sin breaks all of our relationships. Sin leaves one isolated, cursed, and totally alone.

The man with leprosy had a hard time to survive each day. He fought against leprosy, fatalism, despair, loneliness and sorrow, and so on. He may have thought of committing suicide many times. He was hopeless, helpless and powerless. But one day he heard of Jesus, who accepted anyone who came to him and healed them. It was really good news to him. It gave him

## “I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”

hope and vision to be healed; it gave him the strength to leave his leper colony and venture out among people. Still, it was not easy for him to come to Jesus. There were many obstacles. Jesus was always surrounded by a crowd of people. It was illegal for this man to be near other people. If he was discovered, the crowd could stone him to death. He had to overcome self-consciousness. He had to overcome fear of death. He had to overcome doubt that Jesus would welcome him and that Jesus could cure his chronic disease. Leprosy was regarded as incurable. Only God could cure leprosy (2 Ki 5:7). Anyway, this man came to Jesus, overcoming all the barriers. He approached Jesus and begged him on his knees, **“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”** He teaches us faith. Faith is to come to Jesus as we are in a desperate situation. Faith is to look at Jesus alone. Faith is to believe that Jesus will welcome us and that Jesus can cleanse us. This man came to Jesus humbly. He was not demanding, but totally dependent on Jesus’ mercy. This is how we can come to Jesus. In his gospel, Luke contrasts a Pharisee and a tax collector (Lk 18). The Pharisee bragged about what he did for God and how he was better than other people. However, the tax collector was too ashamed to look up. He beat his breast and said, **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner!”** Jesus said that the tax collector went home justified before God. Jesus wants us to come to him like this, in humility and faith, just as we are.

**Second, Jesus touched the man and cleansed him (41).** When the man with leprosy came to him, how did Jesus respond? Let’s read verse 41. **“Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’”** Jesus’ indignation was not at the man, but at the ravaging effect of the disease. As the footnote says, Jesus was filled with compassion toward the man. This was not just pity. Jesus deeply understood this man with the mind of God and was determined to heal him. This is messianic compassion. Jesus did not treat this man according to the law, saying “Stay back! I will heal you from a distance.” Rather, knowing how the man had suffered from loneliness Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Jesus’ touch showed that he accepted this man as he was. Jesus did not heal him first. Jesus accepted him first. To Jesus, he was a precious man made in God’s image who had value and dignity. Jesus’ touch reveals his love for the man. Here we learn Jesus’ compassionate heart. It was compassion that enabled him to reach out and touch the man, crossing all barriers. If we have Jesus’ compassion, we too, can reach out and touch young college students with love and understanding. To be sure, there are many barriers:

## **“I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”**

generational, cultural, language and so on. Sometimes we think we need some kind of skill to reach them. But it is not a matter of skill; it is a matter of having Jesus' compassion. With Jesus' compassion we can overcome all kinds of barriers and touch them with the love of God. But it is not easy to practice compassion. Sometimes, we become tired, especially when others are in constant need. But when we remember how Jesus had compassion on us, it renews our hearts, and we can be compassionate toward others. Jesus' compassion enables us to endure all things and be useful to God in his work of saving people. Lord Jesus, grant us your compassion!

Jesus did more than touch the man. He said, **“I am willing...Be clean!”** Jesus did not heal this man out of obligation. Jesus was willing. Being willing makes a big difference. If we serve out of obligation we do just the bare minimum and stop without giving our hearts. But when we are willing, we give our hearts and do our best with all our ability and strength. When we willingly teach the Bible, students feel loved and served and respond well. Even though the contents of Bible study are not exceptional, they continue to come. On the other hand, if we are not willing, Bible students are burdened and do not come back again, though the material is excellent. Having a willing heart is so important. What is God's attitude toward us? God is willing, as Jesus reveals to us. When Jesus came into this world, he knew what God wanted. So Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself for our sins. He said, **“Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God”** (Heb 10:5-7). Jesus went to the cross willingly in order to please God and to save us. Jesus' willingness reveals God's love for us, which is described in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15). While his son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. This shows us how God receives us when we come to him. He is willing to welcome and accept us, not as a servant, but as his child. He does not give us a probation period before accepting us. Rather he receives us fully, unconditionally, instantly.

**“I am willing...Be clean!”** also tells us that Jesus wants us to be clean from our sins. Jesus wants to restore God's image in us. In order to do that, Jesus willingly shed his blood, the blood of the sinless Son of God, which has power to cleanse us. Hebrews 9:14 says, **“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself**

## **“I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”**

**unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God.”** Many of us look fine outwardly, but inwardly we are as sick as a man with leprosy. We are filled with shame and guilt and suffer from loneliness. God wants to cleanse our selfishness, hatred, jealousy, pride and lustful desires. God wants to restore his holy image in us. How can we be cleansed? It is impossible to cleanse our sins with soap and water. Only Jesus’ blood can cleanse us. 1 John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** We should come to Jesus honestly, just as we are. We should not try to clean ourselves up first, but just come as we are. Then Jesus’ blood cleanses all our sins. Let’s come to Jesus. *“Just as I am, without one plea But that thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come! Just as I am, and waiting not To rid my soul of one dark blot, To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”*

**Third, after receiving grace, what should we do? (42-45).** When Jesus said, **“I am willing...Be clean!”** immediately the leprosy left the man and he was cleansed (42). His skin became as clean and fresh as a newborn baby. He became a new man. He had received a great blessing from God, and now it was time for him to bear this blessing. It was time to listen to Jesus. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them”** (43-44). Jesus knew that this man was very excited and liable to spread the news about his healing at random. But if he did that, Jesus’ plan to visit villages and preach the good news would be hindered. Jesus did not want to advertise his messianic ministry in this way. Isaiah 42:2 says, **“He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.”** Jesus wanted to serve people quietly, according to their needs. So Jesus gave him a strong warning not to tell anyone, but instead to go the priests and offer sacrifices according to the law. **This man needed to be recognized as a cleansed man so that he could re-enter society and live a normal life. Moreover, he needed to give thanks to God for his cleansing by offering sacrifices. So Jesus gave him clear direction.** But the man did not obey Jesus’ words. He went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. He became the center of attention and enjoyed a newfound fame and acceptance among people. It must have felt good to him. However, as a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed

## **“I AM WILLING...BE CLEAN!”**

outside in lonely places. In order to heal a man with leprosy, Jesus, the Son of God, became isolated. It reveals his servant's attitude. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere (45).

Here we learn how to respond after receiving Jesus' grace. The key is to listen to Jesus' word, whatever he tells us, being ready to obey. That is the attitude God always wants his people to have. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”** The words “Hear, O Israel” are called the shema in Hebrew. This is the key word of Hebrew education. God wants us to hear his word with an obedient heart. God's word is deeper than the ocean. As we listen to his word, we can enter the vast ocean of his grace. But if we stop listening to God's word after receiving his grace, we stop growing. Though we have saving grace, we do not make progress in sanctification. Our hearts are filled with dirty things. We remain childish and do not mature. Though our physical age increases, our inner person remains the same, or even degenerates. That is the reason why we must grow in Jesus' grace. If we listen to Jesus and do what he really wants us to do, then his grace will increase more and more, and we will grow in holiness and have joy of life.

Today we have learned that Jesus is willing to heal us from all the stains of sin and restore God's holy image within us. Let's come to Jesus as we are. Let's listen to Jesus and obey him so that we may grow continually in his grace.