**I AM WILLING; BE CLEAN**

***Mark 1:40-45***

***“Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’” (v. 41)***

In the previous passage, we learned that Jesus began his ministry by teaching the word of God, freeing the demon-possessed, and healing the sick. After introducing Jesus’ main Messianic ministry, Mark especially recorded Jesus’ healing of specific individuals – a leper and a paralytic. Today we want to think about how a man with leprosy could be healed from his chronic and hopeless condition. Leprosy was like AIDS today. Biblically it meant more than a physical disease. Let’s learn from this healing process, so that we may experience the same grace and mercy! Furthermore, may God bless this passage to prepare each of our hearts for the Fall Bible Retreat!

**First, a man with leprosy came to Jesus (vs. 40)**

Look at verse 40a. ***“A man with leprosy came to him…”*** While Jesus was in one of the towns in Galilee, a man with leprosy came to him. In Luke’s Gospel, Dr. Luke describes the man’s severe condition, calling him *“a man…who was covered with leprosy” (5:12a).* The man was in an advanced and serious stage of leprosy. Leprosy, today known as Hansen’s disease, is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium. For most cases, leprosy gets transmitted to others through personal contact. The disease begins with a white sore, usually on the face and sometimes on the abdomen. The skin infection grows and spreads causing degeneration of peripheral nerves and other tissues including tendons, ligaments, cartilage, mucous membranes and the eyes. The affected person feels no pain around the sores, and as their body decays, they continue to lose their sensation of pain. This may cause further injury including cuts and burns and subsequent infection of those injuries. In advanced cases, infected people lose extremities including their nose, fingers, and toes. They may become blind, and if the infection reaches critical organs like the kidneys, they die. In biblical times, leprosy had no cure apart from God’s special intervention. Only two cases in the Old Testament were cured by God’s mercy, Miriam (Nu 12:13-14) and Naaman, the Syrian general (2Ki 5:14). So Jewish Rabbis thought that it was as difficult for a leper to be healed as a dead man to come back to life.

Leprosy was greatly feared, not only due to the physical symptoms, but also due to its social and religious impact on the afflicted. According to Old Testament law, lepers were to be isolated outside the camp or town. People with such sores were considered unclean. No one should come into contact with them. Lepers were to wear torn cloths, let their hair be unkempt and cover the lower half of their face. If they passed near healthy people, they were to shout out, “Unclean! Unclean!” (Lev 13:45-46) This leprous man must have been an outcast for years. His family and friends had long since deserted him. He couldn’t participate in public worship service. In his utter loneliness and sorrow, he was dying.

The Israelites considered lepers to be cursed by God, for there were some people in the Old Testament who were afflicted due to their sins, like Miriam (Nu 12:9-10), Gehazi (2Ki 5:27), and King Uzziah (2Ch 26:16-21). Actually, there are striking similarities between leprosy and sin. Originally mankind was created in the image of God. But Sin corrupts the inner person and disfigures the beautiful image of God, making people ugly and unclean. Sin is contagious like leprosy. It infects others’ souls through bad influence. It also spreads from generation to generation. Sin numbs man’s conscience. At first people feel guilt because our conscience is naturally sensitive to sin. But chronic exposure to a sinful lifestyle degrades the conscience – the ability to discern what is right and wrong. Sin becomes stronger, and the man becomes weaker as sin takes over his being. So sin makes the individual powerless and hopeless, feeling worthless. It deprives people of their ability to live noble lives and do useful work. The worst of all, sin causes man to be separated from God. It also separates a person from others. And it eventually leads to death – both physical and spiritual. Sin is incurable.

Likewise, the man with leprosy, separated from God and people, was dying in his deep despair. But somehow the leper heard about Jesus. He heard that Jesus welcomes any kind of sinners and heals the sick with various diseases. Nevertheless, it was by no means easy for him to go to Jesus. He was unclean, forbidden to approach any healthy person. He knew how people around Jesus would react to his presence, even throwing stones at him. Furthermore, his condition was too serious and looked hopeless. Amazingly, however, he overcame all these obstacles and came to Jesus.

How was it possible for him to overcome these obstacles and come to Jesus? Look at verse 40 again. ***“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘if you are willing, you can make me clean.’”*** Firstly, he had great desire to be healed. He did not consider his leprosy and his deformed condition as normal. He eagerly wanted to be freed from the disease, live a truly new and meaningful life, worshiping God and serving people. Secondly, he believed in Jesus’ power to heal. He had heard of Jesus’ healing of many people, but his case was very particular. However, he did not think, “Even though all other people get healed, I am hopeless.” He did not doubt that Jesus could heal even leprosy, the incurable disease. So he fixed his eyes on Jesus and came to him by faith. Before Jesus, he fell on his knees and begged him, ***“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”*** He didn’t assume that he was worthy of healing, but only asked Jesus’ mercy and grace out of his humility.

In this sinful world, we may take it for granted living deformed and degenerated lives caused by our chronic sins like lust, anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, or greed as if these conditions were normal. But actually they’re not normal. We need to be restored in God’s image. Jesus came to restore and heal us. Some may think, “Oh, my condition is too serious to be healed. There is no hope for my life.” But Jesus welcomes and heals any kind of sinner. Recognizing our sin and sin-sickness, and coming to Jesus by faith and with earnest spiritual desire is the beginning of healing and restoration. Let’s come to Jesus, asking, ***“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”***

**Second, Jesus touched the man (v. 41a)**

What was Jesus’ response? Look at verse 41a, ***“Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man…”*** Jesus was indignant. He was very sorrowful for this human being’s degenerated status caused by sin. At the same time, he was filled with compassion for the man. He understood the man’s suffering and agony. This is the mind of Jesus. This is the mind of God, hating man’s sin, but loving sinners. Next, Jesus extended his hand toward the man and touched him.

Jesus could have healed the man by his words. But why did he extend his hand and touch the lawfully unclean man who was emitting bad odor? Jesus understood the man’s need of his touch. All people need touches and hugs. Mother Theresa once said, “The poorest of the poor are those who feel that they are unloved.” This man had not been loved by anyone for long. He had felt no handshake, let alone a hug. Everyone turned away from him. But Jesus extended his hand and touched the man’s wretched body with warmth and love. By doing so, Jesus deeply consoled his soul and wanted to heal his loneliness and sorrow. Jesus’ touch showed his unconditional acceptance for the man.

Jesus’ touch reminds us of the touch of the prodigal son’s father in Luke 15. When the father saw his son coming back after having squandered his wealth in wild living, the father was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him (Lk 15:20). Even though the son was covered with filth and a bad odor from the pigsty, the father did not care about his condition. He embraced his son and kissed him. Likewise, Jesus’ touch was the manifestation of our heavenly Father’s love and welcome for anyone who comes back to him. Through this touch, Jesus assured the man that God had not abandoned or rejected him. Jesus proclaims that the leper was not cursed, but so loved by God.

To meet the need of the man, Jesus did not mind making himself ceremonially unclean. He did not mind identifying himself with the leper. He seemed not to mind even contracting his leprosy. This is a shadow of what Jesus would do on the cross. The holy Son of God did not mind becoming sin and a curse on the tree. He did not mind being branded as a sinner and treated as such in our stead. He willingly took up all our sins on himself and suffered and died for us. Jesus’ touch melts any kind of sinner’s heart and gives him or her new life. I pray that each of us may be touched by Jesus personally.

**Third, Jesus healed the man (vs. 41b-45)**

After touching the man, Jesus said to him, ***“I am willing. Be clean!”*** This was Jesus’ answer to the leper’s prayer. Jesus’ words reveal the mind of God. God is deeply concerned about us and is willing to free us from all sicknesses and sufferings. Jesus used the word, ***“Be clean!”*** instead of “Be healed.” Cleansing is removing the uncleanness that made the man worthless and disqualified before God and men. ***“Be clean!”*** – this was the voice of God’s forgiveness and restoration of the man to be God’s child. Look at verse 42. ***“Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.”*** Immediately the man was healed from the inside out. The pus and blood from his festering wounds disappeared and his skin became clean and fresh like that of a young boy. Jesus sent the man to the priest, so that he could be officially restored to his family and society (43-44). Jesus not only restored his being, but he restored his life in the world, giving him a promising future. The man was restored in his body, mind and spirit and became a new creation. His heart was full of joy and thanksgiving. The healing of the leper testifies that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

Jesus came to earth to restore the original, normal condition of man. Jesus has the power through his word to cure the incurable sin-sickness of man. He has power through his word to sanctify people spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is most important for us to know our human condition, the decayed state of our being before God, and to come to Jesus with absolute faith that he is willing to heal us and make us clean. We can know with complete confidence that Jesus will touch us when we seek him, and speak to us through his word to restore us to God.

We can see a great example of what a man can do with his sin problem through King David. David was afflicted by sin when he gave in to temptation. He fell into adultery with another man’s wife. Moreover, to cover up his sin, David murdered her husband, one of his loyal officers, by placing him on the front line of battle. David’s sin grew to consume his life. His reputation among his people was tarnished, and he lost the respect of his family. David couldn’t do anything at this point to restore the situation. Then he came to God. He fell before the Lord, repented of his sin with tears and pleaded for God’s mercy. He cried in Psalm 51:1-10, *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions…Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow…Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* Then God said to David, ***“I am willing. Be clean!”*** God washed away his sins and declared him to be clean again. After experiencing God’s grace of restoration, David expressed his happiness in Psalm 32:1-2, *“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*

Pastor Bob Henkins, who is currently ministering at IIT UBF, shared his testimony at our World Mission Report in June this year. Newly independent from his overbearing step-father, in his undergraduate school, he enjoyed the party life all the time. Due to his excessive partying, he had been kicked out of school twice with academic probation, fired from two jobs, kicked out of his apartment, and sued in court. In the midst of this, God sent him a Bible teacher, and he began to study the Bible. However even though he studied the Bible, he continued to live a double life for quite a long time. The real changing point in his life came when he got the chance to deliver a morning devotion message at a conference. But even right before this conference he sinned with his girlfriend and still attended the conference. Knowing this, his Bible teacher challenged him to write Psalm 51 one hundred times to help him see his sin and to repent. It was tough to write it so many times, but he humbly followed the guidance. Through this word of God, his heart was convicted and he realized his sins for the first time. Then something amazing happened. When he woke up Sunday morning, it had snowed overnight even though it was April. For the first time, the pure white snow became beautiful to him. He never cared about it before, but now it was beautiful. One of the verses he had been writing 100 times says this, “*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7).* Through this verse, he tasted the grace of God and he wept looking at the snow. For the first time in his life he realized how wretched his sins were to God. But he was washed, cleansed by the grace of God. From that time on, he made a decision to honestly try and follow Jesus. God dramatically restored his life fully. By God’s grace, he could continue to study and got good grades. Later he could even finish his master’s degree. The very next week after his graduation, God provided a job for him, and a year or so later, God prepared a beautiful, gracious, loving wife for him. God blessed his family with four beautiful children. Over time, God restored his relationship with his step-father. Now he is joyfully caring for God’s flock as a lay pastor of a student ministry at IIT. He confessed, “In the past, I never would have been able to do any of those things, but God has enabled me to serve him. I’m not bragging. What I want to do is to thank God for his wonderful love and tell everyone about the salvation we receive through his Son Jesus... Praise God for his wonderful love and grace!”

All people desperately need God’s mercy. Jesus came to cleanse sinners from their sin and sin-sickness. Cleansing from Jesus restores anyone to God, and it also brings restoration among men. It gives people back their power to live meaningful, fruitful, full lives. Out of his compassion, Jesus never fails to extend his grace with a healing touch when we humbly and submissively acknowledge our condition and come to him by faith.

I pray that God may bless each of us to encounter Jesus personally through our upcoming Fall Bible Retreat. May God help us to prepare our hearts with earnest prayers as the man with leprosy prayed, ***“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”*** May God answer our prayers with, ***“I am willing. Be clean!”*** so that we may taste the joy of healing, restoration and freedom from all the bondage of sin and serve God and his kingdom work powerfully.