

Mark 1:40-45

Authority Over Leprosy

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Introduction

Only a fraction of the miracles which Jesus performed are recorded in the Gospels. He went from town to town, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. He healed those who came to Him and cast out demons to authenticate His message. Jesus' enemies did not deny the miracles that Jesus performed, they denied the source of the miracles.

Today we will look at Jesus' authority over leprosy. Leprosy is a picture of sin. It eats away at the body, is contagious, and results in separation. Lepers were forced to live outside the cities in the wilderness. They were to cry out that they were unclean when others came near them. Jesus will trade places with this leper. Jesus starts the story in the city and the leper lived in the wilderness. At the end, the leper is in the city and Jesus is forced to be in the wilderness.

2

Mark 1:40-45

Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” ⁴² As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ However, he went out and began to proclaim *it* freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

3

The Leper’s Predicament

Mark 1:40

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Mark gives no details about the man who came to Jesus, except to explain that he was a leper. Luke adds that he was “covered with leprosy” (Luke 5:12). As such, his condition would have been obvious to anyone who saw him, rendering him an outsider in ancient Israel.

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Leprosy is a bacterial infection that attacks the nerves, skin, bones, and internal organs of the infected person. It is highly contagious and is spread by both air and touch. The priests were given the responsibility to examine a person, quarantine as necessary and finally declare the person clean or unclean. The person deemed "unclean" would have to live outside the cities to prevent the spread of the disease. Not only would the person suffer from physical effects of the disease, but also social isolation. (see Leviticus 13; Number 5)

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It was a shocking experience to all who were there when this leper came to see Jesus in a public setting. Driven by his desperation and violating all the necessary standards of exclusion, he made his way to the Great Physician, **imploring Him and falling on his knees before Him**. His actions may have been socially unacceptable, but his attitude toward Jesus was both respectful and reverential (cf. Matt. 8:2). Luke 5:12 notes that "he fell on his face." He flattened himself in humble submission before Jesus. Recognizing his own unworthiness, the leper called Jesus "Lord" (Luke 5:12), and entrusted himself to the Savior's sovereign prerogative and well-known power, saying, **"If You are willing, You can make me clean."**

6

Jesus' Provision

Mark 1:41

Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

Jesus could have been angered by the leper's behavior. The man had disregarded public health, social norms, and even the stipulations of the Mosaic law. But Jesus did not grow angry. Instead, He was **moved with compassion**. He sympathized with the man's condition and distress and grieved at the effects of sin in this world (cf. John 11:34). Motivated by genuine compassion, **Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him**. Ever since this man had been diagnosed with leprosy, no one had touched him. Yet here, in a moment of total vulnerability, as he lay in the dust begging for deliverance, the Son of God Himself reached out and healed him with a touch.

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In Leviticus 5:3, the Mosaic law included a regulation forbidding the Jews from defiling themselves by touching anything or anybody that was unclean, including a leper. But Jesus could not be defiled by anything. He could have healed him with a simple word. Jesus wanted to make a point. He identified with the leper (sinner) and brought healing. His love was such that He was willing to touch those whom no one else would even come near. He touched this untouchable man, and said to him, "**I am willing; be cleansed.**"

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Jesus' Provision

Mark 1:42

As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

The healing was instantaneous. Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. There was no period of recovery or rehabilitation. He who had come disfigured, defiled, and despicable was instantly transformed into a man in full health, completely cured, and ready to be restored to society.

Though medical advancements have made it possible to control the symptoms of leprosy, they cannot cure the disease or reverse its effects. Jesus could and He did so instantly.

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Jesus' Provision

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The former leper was not only cured of the disease, but he was also physically fit. Since leprosy had racked his entire body, considerable damage must have been done, not only to his external appearance, but also internally. When Jesus healed him, however, the man was made completely well. That his recovery was immediate is evident because Jesus instructed him (vs. 44) to go to Jerusalem (roughly a one hundred-mile walk) in order to be pronounced clean by the priest.

10

Jesus' Provision

Mark 1:43-44

And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Jesus followed His healing work for this man with two specific commands.

The first was, "**See that you say nothing to anyone.**" Jesus' primary goal was not the physical healing of the multitudes. It was to preach the truth of the Gospel. The physical ailments we see in the world are a result of living in a fallen world filled with sin. Jesus' acts of healing offer the validity to the truth of His teaching of forgiveness and restoration.

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The second command was "**show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**" Before resuming his place in society, this man needed to fulfill the requirements of the Mosaic law outlined in Leviticus 14.

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Jesus' Provision

Mark 1:43-44

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Jesus' final statement, that this would be "**a testimony to them**", was primarily directed at the priests serving in the temple. Any priests involved in pronouncing this former leper clean would have been confronted with the reality of Christ's undeniable healing power. I suspect that the priests would not have performed this ritual. Therefore, this healing in Galilee served as a powerful testimony in Jerusalem. Jesus' words also served as a testimony to any onlookers that He did not disregard Old Testament requirements. While He detested the hypocrisy of Pharisaical tradition-laden religion, Jesus always upheld the Old Testament.

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Jesus' Predicament

Mark 1:45

However, he went out and began to proclaim *it* freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

Though the Lord's instruction had been clear, the former leper proved disobedient. Overjoyed by his healing and restoration, "**he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the matter.**" That was precisely the opposite of what Jesus had commanded him to do.

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Jesus had been going from town to town preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. As a result of this healing, the news spread **“so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city”**.

It is easy to think that this is a good thing in how great crowds were coming to see Jesus. The problem is they were not interested in the message He was preaching, but the healings and “entertainment” that He provided.

Because of the crowds, Jesus was forced into the **“deserted places.”**
Even there the people **“came to Him from every direction.”**

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So What ...

This healing is a beautiful picture of salvation. We all were lepers. Sin was eating away at our essences, and the result was death. Jesus was willing to touch and make the man clean.

We exchanged places with Him also. He left heaven to come to this fallen creation (wilderness) and when He heals us from sin, we are able to enter into heaven and gather with God's people.

Have you accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness?

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