

## **JESUS SAID: “I AM WILLING. BE CLEAN!”**

Luke 5:12-16

Key Verse: 5:13

*Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.*

In today’s passage, a man with leprosy comes to Jesus by faith and receives his healing touch. Jesus gives him a new life. As we study this wonderful passage, let us think about how sin makes us unclean, but Jesus can cleanse us by his precious blood.

**First, a man with leprosy came to Jesus by faith.** Look at verse 12a. *While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.* Mark describes this man simply as “a man of leprosy” (Mk 1:40). But Luke the physician describes him more carefully as a man “who was covered with leprosy.” Then what kind of disease is leprosy and what are its physical and psychological effects on the patient? Leprosy is an infectious disease that causes sores and decay upon the skin. But it damages more than the skin of a person. It corrupts the blood and eats into the bones. It is both disfiguring and fatal. In Jewish society as in many other societies, Lepers were quarantined in order to prevent the spread of the disease (Lev 13:46). They had to leave their family and friends to live with other patients in a leper’s colony. When they happen to come out on street, they were required to cover their faces with rags and call out, “Unclean, unclean!” (Lev 13:45). What an unbearable stigma and humiliation they had to endure!

I remember a Korean poet named Han Ha-un (1919-1975) who had leprosy. He wrote the following poem as he was walking to a lepers’ island, not far from my hometown. “Onward, onward, along the muddy roads, limping into the stifling heat. Take off a shoe under a willow tree, to find another toe missing. Until I lose the two remaining toes, onward, onward, a thousand miles towards the Sorokdo Island.”

The man with leprosy in this passage might also have lost several fingers and toes. He was also limping, due to the damage in his joints. His eyes were sunken, barely supported by their sockets. He was hideous to look at. But his suffering was much more than physical. What made him most sorrowful was his loneliness. Man is a social animal. This man had a strong desire to be accepted and recognized by others. But he was cooped up in a leper’s quarantine. Maybe he attempted to secretly run out of the quarantine to refresh himself and just walk around. Perhaps he saw young people passing by, laughing and singing songs. He felt like to join them and mingle with them, but he could not because he was a man with leprosy. He was overwhelmed by his sorrow in being a lonely leper. He would cry out, “I’m a leper and I’m no good.” He felt too painful to live. But he was too young to die. Like any other human being, he wanted to live a long time. O, how he wished if somehow he could be cured of the terrible disease!

One day, he heard this wonderful news about a preacher from Nazareth. He heard that Jesus healed many sick people and drove out demons. He even healed a

paralytic and opened the eyes of a man born blind. Most of all, they said that Jesus welcomed anyone and everyone. The news gave this leper a ray of hope in his heart. Could Jesus heal him and make him a normal person? It was such an exciting thought that he could hardly sleep.

However, it was not easy for this man to come to see Jesus. After all, he could not appear in public without violating the law. He also knew that people both young and old would scream at him if they saw him. He didn't want to endure such humiliation. But this was once in a lifetime chance. He could not give up this opportunity. He thought about how Jesus could help him to begin a new life. Then he was able to muster all his strength to come forward. He made a decision of faith to come to Jesus. Indeed, his coming to Jesus was an act of faith.

What did he do when he came to Jesus? Look at verse 12b. He humbly knelt down before Jesus and pleaded with him, "*Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*" At that time, leprosy was an incurable disease. AIDS today is also incurable, but there are some drug cocktails that can prolong the patient's life. Lepers in Jesus' time had no such hope. So it was difficult for the man to believe that anyone could heal him. But he overcame his doubt; he put faith in Jesus that he could heal him. He believed that Jesus could heal him only if he was willing. There was no doubt in his heart that Jesus could make him clean.

Then why did he say, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean"? This man knew that he did not deserve the Messiah's mercy. So he humbly asked for the Messiah's mercy. He did not say, "You healed all these sick people, so now you must heal me." Some people today speak as though God owed them some favors. They don't honor God and thank him when good things happen to them. But when something goes wrong, they would blame God, saying, "God, how could you let this happen to me?" But the man in this passage did not demand Jesus to heal him. He humbly pleaded with the Messiah, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Pride can make a handsome ugly; humility can make an ugly leper beautiful in God's eyes.

**Second, Jesus touched the man and said, "I am willing!"** How did Jesus help the man when he humbly pleaded with him? Look at verse 13a. *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.* No one wanted to touch a leper because leprosy was contagious. Like many health-care workers today who are afraid of contracting AIDS, MERS or Ebola virus from a patient, people tried hard to avoid lepers by any means. No one even wanted to come near the man with leprosy, let alone touch him. But Jesus did not keep a distance from this man. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man, as a father touches his own sick son. Jesus touched him to heal him with his merciful hand.

Now Jesus did not have to touch the man with leprosy. He was capable of healing him at a distance. He could have simply said "Be healed!" and the man would have been healed. But Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. This personal touch meant a lot to the man with leprosy. No one ever touched him before, because he was so repulsive. But Jesus touched him. It was a touch of love. It was a touch of mercy. We learn from the gospel accounts that Jesus often touched people. He touched lepers,

blind men, children and even his enemies as well as disciples. Jesus still touches us with his comfort and compassion. He touches our wounds and pains. His touch comes in so many ways and it brings great comfort to us.

People today talk about mercy in different ways, such as mercy killing of terminal patients, mercy on the poor, or mercy on death row inmates, and so on. But human mercy is greatly limited and conditional. But God's mercy is based on his saving grace, and it is spiritual. Jesus is the God of mercy who reached out his hand of mercy and touched the man with leprosy. Jesus embraces all who come to him. When the man with leprosy came to him, Jesus welcomed him and was ready to heal him.

Look at verse 13 again. *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.* While he was touching the man with leprosy, Jesus said to him, "I am willing." No one was willing to even look at him, let alone help him. But Jesus was willing. Jesus was willing to take care of the man. Jesus was willing to heal him. Jesus was willing to welcome him to God's family.

When people are asked to do something by someone they don't like, they would say, "Well, let me see what I can do for you." Jesus could have said that to this leper. But Jesus said to him, "I am willing. Be clean!" What happened to the man with leprosy when Jesus said, "Be clean!" to him? Verse 13 says that *immediately the leprosy left him.* It wasn't a progressive healing. The man was cured of the disease instantly! It was a wonderful work of God! His skin became as soft as baby's. Suddenly he was turned into a handsome young man. Now he could have a new life with full of dreams. He could get married and establish a fruitful house church. He could become a missionary carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to people in a faraway country.

Jesus' healing of the man with leprosy reminds us of 2 Corinthians 5:17, which declares, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Indeed, Jesus reached out his merciful hand to us and touched us. He made us clean. You might protest, saying, "But I was never a leper." However, in a sense, we all were lepers. In fact, leprosy is mentioned many times in the Bible (more than 40 times), mainly because it provides a graphic illustration of how sin affects people. So what are some of the parallels between leprosy and sin? Just as leprosy was unclean (Lev 13:45-46), sin makes a person unclean. Just as leprosy starts as a small patch on the body, sin starts small and spreads, eventually killing the person. Just like leprosy, sin is destructive and fatal. Just as leprosy, sin is contagious. Just as leprosy, sin separates us from others, especially from God. Just as leprosy eats into the body, sin eats into the soul of a person. Sin corrupts the person's mind and heart. It decays the person's conscience. It damages one's inner person. Just as leprosy numbs the nerve while it disfigures the body, sin corrupts one's mind until the person is numb to his or her guilty conscience and pain. Numbness is one of the symptoms of sin-sickness. This is the reason why some people become bold after committing sin. One young man said, "I sinned last night, but I feel fine today." But such a person is not fine. He is infected of a terrible disease called sin. The disease makes him ugly. He is deceived by the numbness of sin. Sin corrupts one's soul until the soul is dead. Even with the

tremendous advances in medicine, there is no cure for the sickness called sin. It is a terminal disease with 100% mortality rate.

But the good news is that Jesus came to touch and heal our souls infected with the disease called sin. All of us were spiritual lepers. But when we make a decision to come before Jesus, humbly asking for his mercy, he says to us, "I am willing. Be clean!" He touches us with his hand of mercy. This is what the Bible promises in 1 John 1:9: "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (NLT).

We can imagine how happy the man with leprosy was when Jesus made him a new person. We can experience the same joy when we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The forgiveness of our sins is the cause of our true happiness. King David experienced this happiness when he realized that his sins were cleansed by God (Ro 4:7-8). One day David committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal generals. Then, to cover up his sin, he committed murder. He was a king and could have everything he wanted. But he was inflicted with sin-sickness. The pleasure of sin was momentary, but the price of sin was heavy. He was not happy because he was tormented by his guilty conscience. Finally, with the help of God's servant Nathan, he came to God and asked for his mercy, saying, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (Ps 51:1). "Cleansed 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" (Ps 51:7,10). David repented his sin and pleaded with God for his mercy, just as the man with leprosy in this passage did. And King David was happy when God forgave him and set him free from his guilty conscience. Likewise, we can come to our Lord Jesus with a humble plea for his forgiveness. Jesus will say to us, "I am willing. Be clean!" We can taste the same joy and happiness that King David experienced.

**Third, Jesus restored his broken relationships** (14-16). Look at verse 14. *Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."* Jesus knew that the man was so excited that he wanted to tell everyone about the miraculous healing. He told him to go to the priest first. Why? Because of the leprosy, this man had broken relationships with other people. He had wanted to be accepted and recognized by others in his community, but being a leper he was not. He was shunned and discriminated against. Now Jesus cleansed him and made him a healthy man again. And he directed him to offer sacrifices that Moses commanded to prove that he was clean. Jesus helped him to reenter the society as a normal person. Jesus was mindful of this man's future life. Jesus did not stop with healing his physical sickness; Jesus helped him to restore his broken relationships. Jesus wanted him to be accepted by the people in his town. Jesus wanted him to be a useful member of his community, and to be a witness of his mercy, saying, "You know, I used to be a hopeless leper, but by the mercy of Jesus, now I am a handsome young man."

Look at verse 15. *Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.* When Jesus healed a man

with leprosy, all the people of Galilee realized that Jesus came to save them from their sins.

In conclusion, may God help us to come to Jesus by faith so that we may receive his healing touch! Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was barely 5 feet tall, a midget among his English peers. He considered himself an ugly man with pale skin. But he became an influential hymn writer after meeting Jesus personally. Among 750 hymns he wrote is this one: "Alas! and did my Savior bleed/ And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head / For such a worm as I? / At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, / And the burden of my heart rolled away, / It was there by faith I received my sight, / And now I am happy all the day!" Because of Jesus, Isaac Watts lived for God's glory. May God help each one of us to come to Jesus humbly so that we may live a beautiful life of glorifying God!