

JESUS SAYS, “I AM WILLING”

Mark 1:40-45

Key Verse: 1:41

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”

In today's passage, a man with leprosy comes to Jesus by faith and is healed of the terrible disease. Jesus gives him a new life. We learn that anyone can have a new life when he or she comes to Jesus by faith no matter how bad the situation may be. May God help us to come to experience this grace of Jesus personally!

First, a sorrowful man with leprosy. Look at verse 40. *A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”* Mark describes this man simply as “a man of leprosy.” But Luke the physician describes him more carefully as a man “who was covered with leprosy” (Lk 5:12). What kind of disease is leprosy? What are its physical and psychological effects on the patient? Leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease characterized by sores, scabs, and white shining spots beneath the skin. Of all the diseases that afflict human body, leprosy may be one of the most hideous. It affects every part of the constitution. It causes sores and decay upon the skin, corruption into the blood and rotteness into the bones. In Jesus' times, the disease was incurable. Lepers were quarantined in order to prevent the disease from spreading (Lev 13:46). To prevent accidental contact with others, when they passed by some people, the lepers were required to cover their faces with rags and call out, “Unclean, unclean!” (Lev 13:45). What a humiliating requirement it was!

This leper might have already lost several fingers, and the rest of them must have looked like a wooden rake. He probably walked around limping, due to the numbness of his legs. He must have looked at people with his eyes oozing pus, barely supported by their sockets. At that time, a leper was so pathetic even to think about that people called him “a man with leprosy” instead of “a leper.” What could the man with leprosy do in his fateful condition? Probably, each time one of his fingers fell off, he would go to a sunny place and bury it in the dirt. Later he would return to the place to lie down and nurse his sorrow. This man's psychological suffering must have been worse than his physical distress.

There was still another thing that made him sorrowful. It was his loneliness. Man is a social animal. As such, this man had a desire to be accepted by others. But he was cooped up in a leper's quarantine. Maybe he tried to secretly run out of the quarantine to just walk around. Perhaps he saw some young people passing by, joking around and laughing. Oh, how he wanted to join them and mingle with them. But he had to swallow his loneliness again and again, and resign to his fate. On his way back, heavy rain began pouring down. He wanted to go into someone's house to avoid getting wet. But he could not because he was a man with leprosy. He had to stand alone under the eaves of someone's house until the rain stopped. He felt sorrowful, not so much because he was drenched, but because he was lonely. He began to cry out, “I'm a leper and I'm no good.”

It was too painful for him to live. Still he was too young to die. Like any other human being, he wanted to live a long time. But there was no hope for his life. Life without hope is a torture.

Second, he came to Jesus by faith. One day, he heard the wonderful news that there was a good shepherd who welcomes everyone. He heard that Jesus healed all kinds of sick people. And he didn't even charge for his medical care. It was news that could change his life. There was a trace of hope arising in his heart.

However, it was not easy for him to come to Jesus. After all, by law, he was not allowed to appear in public. In addition, because of his appearance, he hated to go where normal people gathered. But when he thought about how Jesus could heal him, he was able to muster all his strength to come forward. The news that Jesus healed a paralytic and opened the eyes of a blind man must have encouraged him. He made a decision of faith to come to Jesus.

Indeed, his coming to Jesus was an act of faith. At that time, leprosy was an incurable disease, like many cancers today. So it was difficult for him to believe that anyone could cure his sickness. But he overcame his doubt; he put faith in Jesus that he could heal him. His faith in Jesus enabled him to overcome obstacles within and without.

What did he do when he came to Jesus? He knew he didn't deserve the Messiah's mercy. He covered his face with his hands and knelt down. All he could do was beg him, *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."* He humbly asked for the Messiah's mercy. This man recognized Jesus as the God of mercy from his heart. Indeed, it was an act of faith for this man to ask Jesus to help him.

Third, Jesus reached out his hand. Look at verse 41. *Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!"* No one wanted to touch the man with leprosy. No one wanted to even see him. No one wanted to have a contact with a leper because leprosy was contagious and fatal. Like many health-care workers today who are afraid of contracting AIDS from a patient, people avoided contact with lepers. But Jesus did not run away from this man. He was not afraid of contracting leprosy. 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.

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. Jesus showed that he is the God of mercy when he 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.

Fourth, Jesus said, "I am willing. Be clean!" Look at verses 41-42. *Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.* 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 touch him. But Jesus was willing. Jesus was willing to take care of the man. Jesus was willing to heal him. Jesus was willing to restore the image of God in him and bring him to the kingdom of God. When people are asked to do something they don't like, they would say, "Well, let me see what I can do for you." Jesus could have said the same to this leper. But Jesus said to him, "I am willing." We can understand this mercy of God when we accept John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Look at verse 41 once again. *Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!"* In the Bible, leprosy is compared to the symptoms of sin. Leprosy was considered to be unclean (Lev 13:45-46). Any contact with a leper defiled the person who touched the leper. King Uzziah became a leper from middle age until death. After he became powerful, he became proud and unfaithful before God. One day, he entered the temple of the Lord and tried to burn incense, a duty reserved for the priests. While he was raging at the priests who advised against his presumptuous act, leprosy broke out on his forehead (2Ch 26:16-21).

Some people might say, "At least, I don't have leprosy." But many people are spiritual lepers because of their sin before God. Sin is a lot like leprosy. 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 and will. It wounds and forms pus in one's inner person. Just as leprosy does not cause severe pain 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 audacious 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 in the tragedy of sin. He is deceived by the numbness of sin. Sin corrupts one's soul until the soul is dead. No one can be truly happy in that condition. Every sinner must come to Jesus and hear his voice, "Be clean!"

King David experienced happiness that came from having his sins cleansed (Ro 4:7-8). One day he 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 by 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, he came to God and asked 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). "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" (Ps 51:7,10). God accepted his repentance and forgave him.

What happened to the man with leprosy when Jesus said, "Be clean!" to him? Verse 42 says that *immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured*. What a wonderful work of God on the man! His skin became as soft as baby's. Suddenly he was

turned into a handsome young man. When he came to Jesus and asked his mercy by faith, Jesus cleansed him and he became a new person. This 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!" Amen!

Fifth, Jesus healed his relationship problem (43-45). Look at verses 43-44. *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."* Jesus knew that one of this man's problems was his relationship problem. He had wanted to be accepted by other people in his society, but being a leper he was not. Now Jesus cleansed him and told him to go first to the priest and get a certificate of recovery so that he might live a normal life. Jesus was mindful of this man's future life. Jesus did not stop with cleansing his physical sickness; Jesus helped him to solve his social life problem. Jesus wanted him to be accepted by his hometown people. Jesus wanted him to be a useful member of his society.

Look at verse 45. *Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.* When Jesus healed a man with leprosy, all the people of Galilee realized that Jesus came to save them from their sins.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus is the God of mercy who is willing to touch and cleanse a sinner. Jesus touched the man with leprosy and gave him a new life. Does any area of our life show symptoms of spiritual leprosy? May God help each one of us to come forward to Jesus by faith and experience the mercy of God!