

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 22, 2009

Cleansing The Unclean

by Dan Trygg

“And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’⁴¹ And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.⁴³ And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away,⁴⁴ and He said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.’⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.”

Mark 1:40-45

One of the most dread diseases of Jesus’ day was a skin disease, translated as “leprosy”. It was characterized by open sores, scaling of one’s skin, swelling, redness or whiteness in one’s flesh, especially when it was deeper than the surface of the skin. Often this also was accompanied by a discoloration of hair growing in the infected area, and/or a falling out of one’s hair. **Whenever anyone began to exhibit these symptoms, he was to be examined by the priest. If he or she displayed the symptoms mentioned within the Mosaic Law (Lev. 13,14), he or she was to go outside the camp to live, until such time that healing took place.** In the Middle-East, there are numerous skin diseases that could afflict a person, which would fall under this general description. Anything from psoriasis, to a pimple or boil, to elephantiasis or ulcerated sores, to the progressive skin disease known as Hansen’s disease, would all result in exclusion from the community. An afflicted person could not live within a walled city, but was allowed to dwell in an unwalled village. **The leper must tear his clothes, as a sign of grief and humility before the Lord and men. As he or she travelled about, they were to go about with their head uncovered, and, with their hand covering their upper lip, they were to cry out, “Unclean, Unclean!” as they went.** This gave warning to others of their presence, so that they could avoid any contact with them. Even though the ancient Israelites did not know about microbiology or infectious diseases, they knew that “uncleanness” or “defilement” were passed along by physical contact. **To touch a leper meant that you were immediately defiled, and had to wash and avoid others for the rest of the day.** God’s intent was that people would move aside for the afflicted, but, people being sinful and selfish, often turned this around so that they threw stones at those who were unclean with leprosy, to keep them away. **No treatment is given by God within the Jewish Torah, only specific instructions for recognizing the disease, and for quarantining those who were affected by it.** It was a horrible fate, because it meant exclusion from society, and **it was often perceived as a *personal judgment of God upon the person*, ...another rationalization for heaping abuse upon the poor soul who suffered from any visible physical symptoms.** It also meant the loss of employment, and any social interaction, except from a safe distance. Often lepers were driven out of the city, and left to fend for themselves. Often family members even deserted them, and they were forced into extreme poverty under the worst of conditions.

Jesus had been going through the land, healing various diseases and casting out demons. This, however, was Jesus’ first recorded encounter with a leper. This man came up to Jesus, fell on his knees, and was imploring Him, saying, “If You might desire, You are able to cleanse me.” **The man was *absolutely convinced* that Jesus had the *ability* to heal him.** He probably had watched all the other people being healed from a wide variety of sicknesses, and had witnessed the incredible transformation in them, as they were re-energized and made whole once again. He heard them praising God. He also witnessed Jesus commanding the demons to leave, and saw a variety of afflictions leave or cease when the demons left. He became convinced that the same power that was able to heal and deliver these other people would be able to deal with His leprosy. **The only question was, “Would Jesus be *willing* to help me?”** Was this skin disease really a judgment of God upon him, as people said (and possibly he himself had come to believe), ...or was this something that Jesus would be willing to help him with? Would Jesus, and the crowds, be angry that he had *dared* to even come close? Would the Lord rebuke him, or would He choose to have mercy upon him? Would the

crowd turn on him, and throw stones at him to drive him away? **One thing he knew. He had never seen anyone do what Jesus was doing. If there was any hope for him, it was going to come through this Healer sent from God. He had to take the risk to come up and appeal to Him for help.**

Verse 41 is remarkable because literally *half* of the words in the verse are verbal forms in the Greek. Of the 12 words in the verse, 6 of them are verbal forms. These are significant, so let's go through them one by one:

1.) **“And moved with compassion...”** The word in Greek is a passive participle, meaning that the action happened *to* Jesus. The root word refers to one's intestines, or inner parts, and was a reference to tender emotion, compassion, love and tender affection. In other words, Jesus felt a warmth and compassion within His belly. This experience of a core emotional response to affliction is recorded on several incidents immediately before Jesus healed people (Matt. 14:4; 20:34; Mk. 6:34; 8:3; Lk. 7:13). Interestingly, Jesus mentioned that the Holy Spirit would flow out of our belly (Jn. 7:37-39). *A sudden warmth or movement within one's belly may be indicative that God wants to move.*

2.) **“Jesus stretched forth His hand...”** This indicates purposeful action on Jesus' part to reach across empty space to touch this man. This also reveals to us that the leper maintained some distance. Even though he came up to Jesus, and fell on his knees, he did not grab hold of the Lord, or violate His personal space. He probably was “too close for comfort” from the standpoint of one under quarantine, but he did not actually endanger Jesus or purposefully touch anyone. He remained far enough away that Jesus would have to intentionally reach out to touch Him. It is not recorded that the Lord “stretched forth His hand” to touch anyone else in the NT, but it is recorded in all three accounts of this healing, so it must have been quite noticeable, and therefore purposeful on Jesus' part (Matt.8:3; Lk. 5:13).

3.) **“and touched him...”** Jesus did not just wave His hand over the man, but reached across the invisible barrier of isolation, disease, uncleanness and shame to *express* His compassion and solidarity with the man. This was a shocking act to those present, because no rational person would risk their own safety to just touch a leper, even for the purpose of comforting him or her. Furthermore, the religious figures they were acquainted with would not defile themselves for the sake of some sinner. ***How different is God's love from the world's self-centeredness!*** “God demonstrated His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God's love *compelled* Him to reach out to us when we were hopelessly lost in our sin, and even were hostile in mind toward Him (II Cor. 5:14; Rom. 5:10). He sought us out and willingly *bore our sins* in His body on the cross, even to the extent of *becoming sin* on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (I Pet. 1:24; II Cor. 5:21). The richness of God's mercy, which motivated Him to make a way for us to receive life, when we were spiritually dead and in opposition to Him, is *here* expressed in a very personal, tangible way in the tender, kind touch of Jesus upon this poor leper.

4.) **“and He says to him...”** Jesus verbally expressed the thoughts and compassion of His heart. It was not enough to merely feel the feelings, or express the action. He wanted to further clarify and reinforce it with words. Feelings without expression accomplish nothing; words without actions can be empty; and actions without words can be misunderstood. Reaching across the empty space between them to gently touch the leper was a powerful *act*, but much more effective when combined with *words* of explanation and clarification.

5.) **“I am willing...”** The word means “I desire to”, or, “I want to”. In other words, by His actions, and now by His words, Jesus affirms the man's worth and value. He also expressed His own personal desire to help.

6.) **“be cleansed.”** Note the simplicity of Jesus' command. There was no dramatic show, no casting of spells or incantations, no long involved prayer, not even anointing with oil (in *this* case). One of the most refreshing things about Jesus was His direct, no-nonsense style, and the complete lack of any formula to follow. No one could fault Jesus for being a religious showman. He seemed totally void of any concern or desire to impress

others. The use of the word, “cleanse”, dealt with not only the curing of the disease, but also the sense of defilement that went with it.

“And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” Of course, Mark employs his favorite word, “immediately”, to heighten the intensity and rapidity of the events. But then the Greek is, “the leprosy went-away-from away-from him, and he was cleansed.” The repetition of the “away-from”, both in the verb and then as an additional preposition, is there for emphasis. The leprosy simply “left” him, and was there no more.

We are only half way through the six verses that describe this episode in Mark. The last three verses are quite interesting as well. **Jesus strongly charged the healed man to speak to no one, but to travel immediately to show himself to a priest at Jerusalem**, and make the offering prescribed by God in the Law, as a testimony to what had happened. Jesus had miraculously cleansed the man, but only the priest had the legal authority to examine him and lift the quarantine that had been pronounced upon him. **Jesus was concerned to make sure the healing was properly documented.** This is an important observation, because some people discourage those who have been healed to go to the doctor. Jesus encouraged an examination and certification of the miracles He did. He saw it as giving a testimony to the officials that God was, indeed, working through Him. The man, however, did not do as Jesus commanded him. The Greek says that he went out and began to proclaim everywhere what had happened, and thoroughly disseminated the report of his healing. Consequently, Jesus could no longer openly come into the towns or cities, because so many people were flocking to Him for healing. From this we see, once again, that **Jesus was trying to restrain His growing popularity. He was not promoting Himself, or “tooting His own horn”.** He was trying to avoid too much exposure. Like the Servant in Isaiah 42:1-7, He gently ministered to the bruised and poor, and brought forth their vindication.