

THE CURE FOR LEPROSY!

Matthew 8:1 (NKJV)

1 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.

The location where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount is thought to have been not far from Capernaum. Great crowds followed Jesus down from the mountain where He had just given the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 8:2 (NKJV)

2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”

In this context, a leper came (cf. Mk. 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16). Note it says, “**And behold**”. Behold indeed! This was unthinkable! Lepers were supposed to be quarantined, and if anyone approached, they were to cry out “**Unclean, Unclean**” (cf. Lev. 13:45-46; Num. 5:1-4).

Presumably, as this leper approached Jesus, the crowds (with a “**And Behold**” emphasis) practiced “social distancing” so as to insure they would not make any contact with him.

Leprosy was a terrible, life-wrecking disease for which there was no cure. It was terrible in terms of physical consequences as well as social consequences. No one would dare touch a leper because it made you ceremonially unclean, not to mention it was highly contagious. Indeed, it was thought to be a sign of God’s judgment on the person (cf. Num. 12:9-12; 2 Chron. 26:20). To be a leper was to be an “**untouchable**”.

Leprosy began with pain but then extremities such as fingers and toes would become numb and eventually fall off. Lepers often emitted an unpleasant odor. Leprosy also often affected the voice box, so the person had a raspy hoarse voice. They looked, smelled, and sounded pitiful. You really don’t want this kind of a person interrupting your service – unless of course you are Jesus.

“Among the sixty-one defilements of ancient Judaism, leprosy was second only to a dead body in seriousness. The Talmud [a collection of Jewish teachings] forbade a Jew from coming closer than six feet to a leper, and if the wind was blowing, the limit was one hundred fifty feet.” – **John MacArthur**

BEHOLD, this leper came worshipping Jesus and calling Him **“Lord”**. Now it is true that the word “worshipped” can simply mean “bowed down” and “Lord” can mean “polite address” in the sense of “Sir”. However, the context argues for more than this. This leper believed Jesus had the POWER to cleanse him, which is to say heal him. In his mind He was not merely a respectable “Sir”. He was the Lord who had authority over this ailment!

To approach Jesus for full healing indicated that he thought Jesus was someone special and unique. In the whole of the Old Testament, there are only three people on record as having been healed of leprosy, and in each case, it was a direct act of God’s healing. In Exodus 4:6-7, Moses’ hand became leprous and then was instantly healed. In Numbers 12:10-15, Miriam became leprous, and then God healed her. And in 2 Kings 5:1-15, Naaman the Syrian leper was healed. That is it in the whole of recorded Old Testament history, and in each case, it was God who directly healed them.

“By kneeling before Jesus and addressing Him as Lord [Gk. kurios] the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Yahweh, the man recognized Jesus as far more than just a man. His confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal his condition hints that his act of worship involved full recognition of Jesus’ deity.” - **HCSB**

Notice he said to Jesus, **“Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”** He didn’t presume to know if Jesus would or not. He believed Christ had the power to do so, but yielded to Christ’s prerogative on whether or not He would do so.

This is a great lesson on faith. So many false teachers today say, **“If you just believe it, it will happen.”** They say, **“name it and claim it”**. This leper didn’t do that. He named it, but he didn’t claim it. He left it in the realm of possibility, not certainty. He left it up to Jesus, which is right. Faith believes in the Lord’s ABILITY but does not presume to say how God will act in any given situation. This is God’s domain!

Daniel 3:17–18 (NKJV)

17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve **is able to deliver us** from the burning fiery furnace, and **He will deliver us** from your hand, O king.

18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

Faith has confidence in God’s ability, but leaves room for **“But if not”**. God’s ways are not our ways. He does not always work like we might want Him to or according to our thinking. God-honoring faith trusts in God’s

power, but does not know the outcome of how God might work in any given situation. Faith recognizes dependence upon God but also realizes that how God deals with us is His prerogative. Thus, faith is humble before God, not trying to tell Him what to do, which is flat-out blasphemous arrogance.

Costi Hinn, the converted nephew of Benny Hinn, has written a book titled ***God, Greed, and the (Prosperity Gospel)***. In the book, he writes:

“By an early age, as part of the Hinn family, I viewed Jesus Christ as our magic genie – rub him right, and he’ll give you whatever your heart desires. ... The prosperity gospel certainly denies the sovereignty of God to the extent that it demeans God to the position of a puppet and elevates the man to the position of a puppet master who makes confessional demands by faith. It does this by considering faith as a force and God as the one who must respond to our faith.” (p. 38, 96).

This is exactly what the leper did NOT do! He made no demands. He did not try to manipulate Jesus! Rather, he humbly recognized Jesus’ sovereign authority and power but yielded to His will. In effect, he made a humble plea that recognized Jesus’ sovereign prerogative in the matter. The so-called “faith healers” could learn a lot from this leper. His example serves as a corrective to a lot of errant theology.

Matthew 8:3 (NKJV)

3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

We could almost put another “BEHOLD” here! This is amazing! The Law of Moses forbade the touching of anything unclean (cf. Lev. 5:3), but Jesus was above the Law (cf. Matt. 12:8). The Law said that if you touched anything unclean, you would be made unclean, but not Jesus. When He touched the leper instead of being made unclean, He made the leper clean. His cleanness overcame the uncleanness, which is something only God can do. This shows the supreme authority of Jesus over the worst of diseases.

Notice Jesus took the initiative here, putting out His hand and touching him. He could have just said the Word, as we see in His next miracle, but instead He purposely reached out and touched this leper. This man had probably not been purposely touched in years – but Jesus touched him, saying, ***“I am willing; be cleansed.”***

And shockingly, “***Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.***” There was no long, drawn-out process. No requests for money. No circus show. Just a simple touch and comment, “***be cleansed,***” ***and it was done!***

Footnote:

The Jews believed there were four physical ailments that could only be corrected by God Himself. It was thought that when God would send the Messiah, He would perform four unique miracles that no other man could perform. They are known as “***the four Messianic Miracles***”.

The Four Messianic Miracles

- 1) Cleansing a Leper
- 2) Casting out a Deaf and Dumb Spirit
- 3) The Healing of Birth Defects
- 4) Raising the Dead after three days

The Jews thought that leprosy was inflicted by God Himself and that only God could remove it. Therefore, leprosy was called “***The Finger of God***”. This background shows all the more that this leper must have recognized Jesus as Lord-God or, at the very least, that the power of God was working through Him in a very special way, as God would work through the Messiah.

Matthew 8:4 (NKJV)

4 And Jesus said to him, “See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

Why did Jesus tell this man, who had the greatest news in his whole life to “***tell no one***”? Commentators grapple with understanding the reason for this prohibition.

Probably the best explanation is the one given by Jesus right here in the text – even though we might not understand it completely. Jesus specifically said, “***go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them.***” Christ wanted this miracle to be a special, unvarnished testimony to the priests at the temple. He evidently wanted it verified before them before they got a whole lot of secondary information from all kinds of sources.

This would have involved quite a process. The man would have to travel all the way down to Jerusalem from up north in Galilee; he would have to carry out the detailed process of ceremonial cleansing rituals stated in Leviticus 13-14 involving 116 verses of Scripture. The process would take 8 days. So a lot was involved here.

But alas, according to Mark 1:45, the healed leper failed to obey.

Mark 1:45 (NKJV)

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.

It seems that in some ways, the leper spreading his story did hinder Christ's urban ministry. The crowds were so overwhelming that He couldn't function in that context and so had to go out to deserted places. Scripture reveals no indication of punishment for the cleansed leper's disobedience, and presumably, he eventually made it to the temple.