

Made Clean

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[0 : 0 0] to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it. So that's why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word, because we believe that God has something to say to everyone.

He has something to say to those who've been Christians their whole lives. He has something to say to those who have been Christians only for a short amount of time. And he has something to say to those who would not consider themselves Christians, who have doubts or questions or objections to Christianity.

So that's why we open up God's word. We do it every Sunday. We're continuing this morning our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus in his life and his death and his resurrection.

And we're asking two questions as we go along together. We're asking the question of who is Jesus and the question of how do we respond to him? Who is Jesus and how do we respond to him?

[1 : 1 1] Those are the very questions the Gospel of Mark itself asks us. So we're not doing anything that's foreign to the book, except this morning I'm gonna reverse those questions. So we're gonna ask first, how do we respond to Jesus?

And second, who is he? I invite you to turn with me. We're in Mark chapter one. We're nearing the end of chapter one. We're in the very last section, verses 40 through 45. And as we come to this passage, there's sort of a challenge here.

One of my challenges as a preacher and one of your challenges as a reader is what do we do with all these miracle stories in the Gospels?

Why do we have so many of them? Why do we need all of them? Couldn't Mark? Mark certainly could have told us fewer or more miracles or less or more miracles, right? And didn't we just see a miracle?

We just saw Simon's mother-in-law being almost raised from the dead. She had a fever, right? In Mark chapter one, verses 29 through 31. So my thought this morning is that I'll just recycle that sermon.

[2 : 1 5] I'm just gonna tell you all the same points from Mark chapter one, verses 29 through 31. You know, Jesus is king. He's restoring the world. He's bringing the future into the present. And then, you know, we've already learned everything we need to know, right?

It's just repeating the same thing over and over. Of course, I joke. Why does Mark do that to us? What is it that we have to gain from so many different miracle stories coming to us over and over?

By the way, this is not the last one. It's with that question that we're gonna read now. And so I invite you to turn in your Bible or in your worship guide or on your phone with me, Mark chapter one, starting at verse 40.

And as we turn, remember that this is God's word. God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 40. And a leper came to him, imploring him and kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean.

[3 : 16] Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean.

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once and 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 proof to them.

But he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our father in heaven, and we thank you again for your word that you give us in it everything we need, that you don't give us too many miracle stories and you don't give us too few, but you give us everything that we need to know you, to grow in you, to love you and to serve you.

We ask that you would do that this morning, that you would show us our need to be touched by you, to be made clean, and you'd show us how you meet us at that point of need.

[4 : 29] And we thank you that we can come to you freely and ask these things because we ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Okay, I asked you all kind of a sassy question, which is why I can't just preach the same sermon I preached a few weeks ago in Jesus Healing because we have another healing right in front of us.

And thankfully, Mark doesn't leave us to wonder. He answers that question right away. Very first noun that we have in verse 14, very first noun of this story clues us in.

We are dealing with a leper and a leper came to him. Now, this is a concept we are not as familiar with in the modern day, but as we saw in our Old Testament reading this morning, this was a really big deal.

If you're a leper, you are someone who's outcast. You're someone who's in desperate need. You are practically exiled from the community. Remember, I told you to focus on verses 44 and 45.

In that Leviticus 13 reading, we saw that someone would live outside of the community. They'd have to declare to everyone how unclean they were. And so it was considered by many people that leprosy was actually a fate worse than death.

[5 : 41] It would be better to die than to have to live cut off from everyone, to live looking disfigured and deformed in this way. A leper, scholars tell us, can encompass a wide variety of skin diseases.

What we do know is it would make you look terrible. You would be compared at times to looking like a corpse. These people would be especially white and pale. And so it can be, you can imagine, right, how terrible that is.

Of course, people even today spend all sorts of money caring for their skin and this desire to look healthy and young and beautiful. The person with leprosy has given up on that a long time ago, right?

There is no hope for them to escape this fate. On top of that, scholars tell us it was considered contagious. So if you were a leper, not only did you look terrible, but no one would want to have anything to do with you.

There's a reason you're told to live outside of the community. You're cut off from friendships and relationships. Of course, you all can think just how crazy maybe you began to feel during COVID, quarantined for a few days or isolated for a few weeks.

[6 : 46] Imagine being cut off from people for the rest of your life. That's the fate that is facing this person. And to add insult to injury, to make it even more of a hopeless situation, this was considered something that was incurable.

And so this was in many ways the worst of the worst place to be in the ancient world. You were someone who was cast out from society. Now this is hard for us as modern people to wrap our heads around.

If you all were here a few weeks ago, you remember Jason Tippet, a pastor in Buena Vista, Colorado, came and preached. Jason says he thinks that the best way for us to understand leprosy today, the closest analogy would be that of a sex offender.

Those are our modern day lepers. They're people who are separated out from society, right? They have to keep their distance from other people. Everywhere they go, they often have to declare their status. Now I'm not saying that's a bad thing.

What I am saying is that's our idea in society of understanding what it is like to carry this type of shame, this type of permanent being cut off from a community, this sort of isolation.

[7 : 54] And so Mark here is drawing us into the story from the very beginning. There's an acceleration, an intensification of what's going on here. This is not a garden variety healing. This is not a garden variety exorcism.

This is different in kind from Simon's mother-in-law being cured of her fever. This is an entirely different situation. This is someone with an extremely high level of hopelessness and despair, an incredibly low quality of life.

And so we can understand why this man does what he does. Remember, I've told you before, when we read the gospels, we are looking to characters as models.

This man models for us how it is that we are meant to respond to Jesus. Verse 40, we see how desperate he is.

He comes to Jesus. Jesus isn't seeking him out. Of course, he comes knowing people aren't going to want to see him or be around him. Not only does he come, he's imploring Jesus and kneeling before him.

[8 : 57] In other words, this man is so desperate, he doesn't care what people think of him. He doesn't care how they look at him. He is going to do anything to have a chance at Jesus and his healing.

He is that desperate. He has given up long ago on looking good, feeling good, pretending to have everything together. Everyone knows that his life is a mess.

He knows it as well. So he models for us something simple. How do we respond to Jesus? We respond to Jesus by coming to him.

We come to him with our need. Remember last week we talked about prayer. This is the appropriate posture for prayer. People who are desperate, who know that they have no other hope.

You remember the illustration from last week about Tim and Kathy Keller who prayed because they realized otherwise they would not make it. This man runs to Jesus because he knows otherwise he is not going to make it.

[10 : 04] This man knows his need. It's that desperate need that drives him to Jesus. He is no longer able to entertain the idea of maybe trying to be self-sufficient enough that he doesn't need to admit anything to anyone.

Remember leprosy was something that was incurable. He could not escape from it. And so the point is this.

Yes, Jesus takes the initiative, right? Yes, Jesus seeks us out. If he didn't, he wouldn't be there ministering in and near Capernaum. Yes, Jesus is the one who initiates his grace towards us.

And those who truly know how desperate and needy they are run to Jesus. They come to Jesus. They are seeking him out and imploring him.

Remember what we talked about in Mark chapter one, verses one through eight, when we began the very beginning of this gospel. Need is the price of admission. Jesus comes, he's told us, Mark chapter two, verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

[11 : 12] I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. How do we respond to Jesus? We run to him with our need.

Brothers and sisters, do you know how needy you are? Do you know how needy you are? Leprosy is meant to be a picture for us of what our spiritual condition is.

It's obvious for this man, right? Not always as obvious for us. It's easier for us to hide how dark our hearts are, than it is for this man to hide his leprosy.

And yet he is a picture for us of what is true for all of us. We are in our sin, the walking dead. When and to the extent that we know that we will be like him, we will run after Jesus.

We will come to him. We will be the ones imploring him and kneeling to him, saying, if you will, you can make it clean. Sometimes when I pray at the beginning of a sermon or I pray our prayer of invocation, I'll say something like this, that God would make Jesus more beautiful to us.

[12 : 26] Do you want Jesus to look more beautiful to you? Do you wonder from time to time maybe why Jesus is not as beautiful to you as you think you would like him to be or he should be?

One of the great spiritual secrets is this. The more we understand our need, the more beautiful Jesus will be to us. The way that Jesus grows beautiful to us is that we grow in understanding and knowing how terrible our position is, how much we need him, the fact that we have no hope outside of him and his mercy.

That is how Jesus becomes beautiful to us. Brothers and sisters, I promise you that this leper saw Jesus as incredibly beautiful. Even though in his appearance, Isaiah tells us, there's nothing that would draw us to Jesus.

He didn't look beautiful in his face or his body or his figure. And yet his beauty came in his ability to meet this man's need. Jesus is beautiful to the needy.

Jesus is beautiful to those who know that they cannot save themselves. Jesus is beautiful to those who know they are lepers. Jesus is beautiful to those who are willing to acknowledge they can't save themselves.

[13 : 48] believing we can save ourselves is as silly as a leper believing he can make himself clean. How do we respond to Jesus?

We come to him, we run to him with our need. We know how desperate and how needy we are. I've told you all before, one of my passions as your pastor is not just that I would tell you things from the Bible and you would learn things about the Bible, but you would actually learn how to read the Bible.

One of the things that we see in the Gospel of Mark is we have these sets of characters that serve as models for us. The disciples are mostly a negative model for us. In fact, one of my seminary professors put it this way, the disciples only get one thing right.

The only thing the disciples get right is that they keep following Jesus. Now, that's a pretty big important thing to get right, right? They make it because of that.

They make it because they keep following Jesus. We have this other set of characters, this group of people who are in desperate need of Jesus healing. They, in a sense, understand things spiritually that the disciples do not.

[15 : 01] While the disciples are confused, they're obsessed with power and position and honor, these people know that all they need is to be healed. They have given up a long time ago on being important or significant or wealthy or powerful.

They just want to be clean. They just want to be healthy again. And so they're their model for us, that we would be not like the disciples stumbling along, being rebuked by Jesus for having little faith, but we instead would be like this leper, people who know how much we need Jesus and his grace, and we come to him asking for it because we have no other hope.

People always want to know why they suffer in this life. Why is this the brokenness that you have? Why is this the thing in your life that doesn't work? They often come to pastors and they ask them, why?

Why is this happening? Why is this the thing that's going on in my life? Why is this the thing that's broken? Guys, I don't know. I don't know why God has chosen your particular suffering for you.

I can't answer that question for you. I don't know why God has allowed certain things into your life. God has not revealed that to me. I don't expect him to reveal that to me.

[16 : 26] Often all we can do, often all I can do is sit with you and be with you and remind you of God's faithfulness over time. God can use your suffering to draw you closer to him.

God can use your suffering to show you your need. God can use your suffering to grow you spiritually. I don't know why he allows the things that he allows to happen.

I do know he uses it for good. I do know one of the ways he uses it for good, that we would be like this man, that we can come with our need, imploring him and kneeling before him. Now when I say that, when I say that God uses suffering, uses it in our lives, often people mishear that.

What I'm not saying, I'm not saying that suffering is okay. I'm not saying it's a great thing that this man had leprosy. I'm not saying that we dismiss it. I'm not saying that we don't cry and lament and grieve.

Forbidding those things is called stoicism. It's not called Christianity. It's the opposite of what the Bible actually shows us. Sometimes people will say things like, well, God's sovereign.

[17 : 42] And that's true, right? People will use that though as a throwaway line. What they really mean is, I would like to avoid facing real pain and doubt. And so I'm just gonna shove this in the corner.

That's not what God's sovereignty is for, right? It's a lot more comfortable to be numb sometimes. And then we wonder why we're not growing spiritually, right?

Well, if you're numb, if you just say God's sovereign, and you shove things in the corner, you're not gonna come to him with your need. Of course you're not growing spiritually. Of course he's not becoming more beautiful to you.

It's a lot easier, right? It's a lot easier to avoid the risk of coming to God with our hurts and needs. It's a lot safer. It's more comfortable to shut down our hearts because then we don't have to risk being disappointed again.

It's a lot easier just to ignore and avoid God. And yet Psalm 13, right? The whole Bible shows us a different model. In Psalm 13, the psalmist is crying out, asking God how long he's gonna forget him.

[18 : 47] It's at the end of the psalm that he confesses God's sovereignty. It's after he's lamented. It's as he's grieving that he confesses that God's the one who's in control.

I mean, imagine for a second that this leper is sitting in his leper colony and he's just reading, you know, theology books. Someone at the church just dumped a box of books by his tent and drove away so they wouldn't have to be infected.

So he's reading, you know, some heavy theology and he gets to the section on God's sovereign. He says, oh, I'm a leper, but God's sovereign. Okay, I don't have to worry about this anymore. I'm just gonna stay here.

No, he sees, he knows God's sovereignty. That's why he runs to God. That's why he comes and he has this confidence. Verse 40, if you will, you can, right?

If you will, you can. He knows how powerful God is. He knows God's sovereignty. That's why he comes to him. That's what drives him to God. That's what gives him this confidence, this willingness to look like an idiot in front of everyone else because he knows that it's worth it.

[19 : 54] Brothers and sisters, God's sovereignty is meant to drive us to ask him for things. God's sovereignty is meant to drive us. It's what gives us enough confidence to finally make it safe, to lay our hearts and our needs out before him.

That is what gives us the power and the platform. That is the only thing that makes it safe. That's how we're able to do what we talked about last week, to come before God in prayer.

Are you ready to come and ask God for healing?

Some of you have quietly resigned to the status quo because it's much safer and it's much easier than trusting and crying out.

You don't have to risk being disappointed. You don't have to risk being embarrassed. What if I pray about this and things don't turn out well? What if I share my need with someone and it gets messy?

[21 : 04] You don't have to risk admitting what's actually going on in your lives. It's risky. It's risky to tell God what we need and ask him to intervene. It's risky to be lepers out in the open.

It's risky to come into the town where God is. I knew a young woman a long time ago in a different life and she was desperate to be married.

She told me she didn't pray about it for a long time because she was afraid of what would happen if God didn't answer. It's risky. It's risky to tell God what we want and need and ask him to intervene.

It's risky to admit that things in your marriage are not okay. I might feel like admitting that you're a leper. It's risky to finally begin to talk about your heartbreak from your divorce.

Seems scary, right? It's risky to ask the question of why your friendships only last a year or two and why you always self-sabotage. It's risky to ask the question of why you're always the one who ends your dating relationships.

[22 : 21] It's risky to finally admit that things are more important to you than people. It's risky to admit that everything you do has an angle to it.

It's risky to admit that you're in over your ears in credit card debt and your purchases never accomplished what you hoped they would. That's the other thing this leper shows us.

There's a sense in which sins that people can see, struggles that people can see, there's a grace to it. There's a grace to things being visible, right?

If you're rich, if you're healthy, things look good on the inside, it's easy to hide. It's easy to believe you're powerful. There's a reason Jesus tells us in Mark chapter 10, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

Long time ago, summer of 2009, I was on this mission trip to Ireland and one of the things they had us do was door-to-door evangelism. Whatever you think about that, just put it aside for a minute, okay?

[23 : 29] Go with me. We experienced and it was already known that rich neighborhoods are not very interested. They're more likely to close the door on you, and they're more likely not to answer.

Poor neighborhoods are much more interested. They're much more likely to open the door. They're much more likely to talk to you. Why? They're not under the illusion that they're powerful.

They're not under the illusion that they have the world figured out and they can fix it. They know their need. They know the situation that they're in. So there's a grace.

There's a grace that comes and your problems are something everyone can see. There's a grace for this leper. He can't hide the fact that he has leprosy. There's things that are easy to hide and things that are difficult to hide.

You could have \$200,000 in credit card debt. I would have no idea, right? No one knows that that's your struggle. If you struggle with your weight, yeah, people might know that, right? Is one better than the other?

[24 : 28] Not necessarily. One worse than the other? I don't know. It's easy when our struggles can be hidden to avoid Jesus. The leper knows something different. And that's what helps the leper just want to be healed.

That's what helps him know his need. That's what helps him avoid the trap of the disciples who want power and significance and fame. And so how do we respond to Jesus?

We come to him with our need. We come to him with our need no matter how risky it is and how threatening it is. We come to him with our need because we have no other hope outside of God's mercy.

And we come to him with our need because of who Jesus is. Remember, we have two questions. How do we respond to Jesus? Who is he? We have a wonderful picture, a beautiful picture of what Jesus is here in this passage.

It's short and it's simple. Jesus touches the untouchable. Remember, I told you it was thought that leprosy was contagious. What does Jesus do in verse 41?

[25 : 32] moved with pity. He stretched out his hand and touched him. Jesus heals different people in different ways throughout the Gospels. That's part of the reason we have different miracles.

He heals them in different ways depending on the situation. Here, he touches someone who's not supposed to be touched. Jesus isn't afraid of the fact that this man is unclean.

He's not intimidated or overwhelmed or ashamed of him. He's not embarrassed by his need. Jesus doesn't feel awkward about the fact that this man is standing before him.

Jesus doesn't feel awkward about you and your need. Jesus isn't embarrassed by you. There's nothing here that's so gross and repulsive that Jesus won't touch it.

Jesus touches this man who has this gross and disfiguring skin disease. Remember we read in Leviticus 13 about the little boils and the liquid coming out.

[26 : 34] This is gross. Jesus touches this man. Jesus is willing to do that. And so we see here just in a simple form the message of the Gospel.

We're not all physical lepers but we are as one person has put it all spiritual lepers. We are all the walking dead. we all have no hope outside of Jesus and his touch.

And we all have the opportunity the invitation to come like this man before Jesus verse 40 to come to him to implore him and to kneel to him to say if you will you can make me clean.

Of course we can have more confidence in this man because we know this story. we don't need to say if you will. We know that Jesus offers it. He offers it for everyone who comes to him in repentance and faith.

Jesus is the one who touches the untouchable. There is nothing so gross and repulsive that Jesus won't touch it. There's nothing so far gone he's not powerful enough to heal it.

[27 : 44] And we have to know our need. We have to admit our need. In another gospel in the gospel of Luke we're told a story a story about two people.

One person who knows his need and one who doesn't. Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. They both go to pray in the temple. Jesus tells it to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

The Pharisee stands by himself and he prays like this God I thank you that I am not like other men extortioners unjust adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week.

I give tithes of all that I get. Tax collector responds differently. He stands far off. He doesn't lift his eyes up to heaven but he beats his breast saying God be merciful to me a sinner.

He knows he's a leper. And Jesus says this I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

[28 : 55] Brothers and sisters do you know your need? Jesus has come to touch it he has come to heal it. We just have to admit it and say God be merciful to me a sinner.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven we praise you and thank you for your grace that there is nothing so gross that you won't touch it and that you come to us the untouchable and you touch us.

We ask that you would remind us of that this morning that you would drive that grace deep into our hearts that we would know it and believe it more and more that we would have greater confidence and faith in you that we would have the courage to admit our need and the joy that comes from seeing you meet it.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus who comes to us no matter how bad things are and offers and is able to heal us. We ask these things in his name.

Amen.