

# Make Me Clean Lord

Galilean Ministry Part 7

Mark 1:36-45 11/18/2017

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Summary: Lepers were the extreme of ritual uncleanness (unable to approach God in the Temple) because leprosy is such a comprehensive illustration of sin. The man approached Jesus with humility, faith, submissiveness, and reverence, and Jesus had compassion and healed him by touching him (reversing the normal direction – passing cleanness by touch). This is a picture of what Jesus came to do for us spiritually, which involves Jesus trading places with the leper. The man disobeyed, hindering Jesus’ ministry by drawing the wrong people, and exemplifying those who use Jesus to get what they want but then don’t obey him.

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**Mark 1:35** Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. **36** Simon and his companions went to look for him, **37** and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” **38** Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” **39** So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

**40** A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” **41** Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” **42** Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. **43** Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **44** “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.” **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.

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## Introduction

We left off last time Jesus outside of town. He snuck out there for extended time of prayer. But all the people of Capernaum were looking for him. They wanted him to come back into town. Great thing, right? Crowds of people seeking Jesus Christ. But Jesus' response is shocking.

**Mark 1:38 Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” 39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.**

Not only does he say no, but he goes on to imply that going back into town by popular demand would violate his reason for coming into the world! He then says his reason for coming into the world is so he can go preach in all the towns of Galilee. Which is it? Does he want to reach lots of people or not? Mark seems to leave that mystery hanging, and moves on to another event. But at the end of that event we'll see why Jesus resisted the crowds in these kinds of situations, and yet still wanted to reach other crowds.

So Jesus and the disciples leave from that spot outside Capernaum and start walking. They make their way down the road until they finally arrive at the next village. The Sabbath day comes, Jesus preaches the gospel. Demons show up; he drives them out.

Then they were off to the next town. Sabbath day, preach the gospel in the synagogue, perform miracles - on to the next town. And the next and the next and the next. He just kept doing that. Preach a gospel that demanded that people repent and believe in him, and then do miracles to prove he had the authority to make those demands.

How long did all that go on before we reach verse 40? Weeks? Months? I don't know, but however long it was, at some point Jesus is in the middle of this speaking tour, and out of nowhere, something very unpleasant happens.

## The Approach of the Leper

**Mark 1:40 A man with leprosy came to him**

There was no disease at that time more feared than leprosy.<sup>1</sup> Lepers were disgusting, defiling, and contaminating. They had grotesque, oozing, bloody, open sores from head to toe. Their hair would turn yellow, and then white, and then fall out. The smell was horrible. It was considered highly contagious, and so lepers were outcasts in society. Leprosy absolutely destroy a person's life.

In Luke's account, he says this man was full of leprosy – advanced stages. There is another occasion where 10 lepers came to Jesus, but they stayed at a distance, which is what they were supposed to do. But this guy right up close to Jesus. And you can see the disciples, “Whoa, whoa!” There backing off.

**40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

So how is Jesus going to respond to this guy? One thing we learn about Jesus as we observe his life – he's really big obeying God's law. And the law was very clear about lepers – they were to live outside the camp and remain separated from the population. They were the epitome of uncleanness, and Jesus was the opposite extreme – the epitome of holiness. So how would Jesus handle the situation?

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<sup>1</sup> Modern day leprosy (Hansen's Disease) does not have the same symptoms that are described in Lv.13. However it was around in the time of Jesus, and probably would have been categorized under the broad heading of biblical leprosy. So it's possible that the man Jesus encountered here may have had Hansen's Disease or something similar.

## Uncleanness

Notice what this guy asks for. He doesn't say, "You can heal me." He says, "**You can make me clean.**" The physical ravages of leprosy were horrible, but that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was the uncleanness.

**Leviticus 13:45 "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.**

Cleanness and uncleanness were ceremonial conditions that dictated whether you could approach God in the Temple. If you were in ritually unclean condition, you could not approach. If you were in a ritually clean condition, you could approach. God made it that way to remind the people of his holiness.

## Holiness

**Exodus 33:20 no one may see me and live.**

God, in his holiness, is like the sun. And man, in his unholiness, is like a piece of paper. It's never good to fly too close to the sun, especially if you're a dry piece of kindling.

We all understand that God is utterly unapproachable by a sinful being. But why? Why is he so unapproachable and dangerous?

## God's Revulsion at Sin

If the Sun burns up some passing debris in space, it's not that the sun has anything against that piece of debris. The sun isn't angry or upset – it's just sitting there being the sun. It's nothing personal. But the reason a sinful creature would be destroyed in the presence of God is very personal.

God hates sin. You look at the things that God uses in the Bible as physical object lessons of sin, and it's always dirty, gross, disgusting things. Why? Because God is teaching us – "You know how you feel when you come in contact with something really disgusting and smelly and putrid? That's how I feel when I look at sin." Use your imagination to think of the most disgusting, gross thing you can imagine. Whatever it is you're thinking of, that's what God sees when he looks at a person with sin in his or her heart.

People talk about God's love as if he were looking down at earth and saying "Awe, look at all the little people running around. They are all so adorable!"

That's not the view from heaven. What he sees when he looks down is not adorable; it's revolting and nauseating to him. And that's why mankind cannot approach God's presence and survive.

**Habakkuk 1:3 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil**

Psalm 51 is the model prayer of repentance. It's David's prayer of repentance after he committed adultery and then covered it up with murder. And the thing that's striking about that prayer is how often he begs God to cleanse him.

**Psalm 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God ... blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ... 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.... 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God**

Over and over he begs God to wash him. All my life I've thought that was because David felt dirty. He had committed gross sin, and he felt dirty and disgusting, and so he asked God to cleanse him. But

that's not what it says. He never says the problem is with how he feels. He didn't just say, "Make me feel clean on the inside;" he said, "Wash me and make me clean."

So what does it mean that he was dirty? Obviously it's not literal dirt. It's a metaphor that describes repulsiveness in God's sight.

David was pleading for God to make him clean and acceptable in God's sight instead of filthy and disgusting in God's sight. And that's the part of his prayer that he repeats more often than anything else by far. It's a miserable feeling to feel dirty and filthy in your own sight. But it's infinitely worse when you know that you are dirty and repulsive in God's sight. But that's exactly what all sin does. It makes you so repulsive to God that if you were to enter God's presence in that state, you would die.

## The Miracle of the Temple

When God visited his people Israel, he didn't come into the camp, because no one would have survived. He came down on top of Mount Sinai, and the mountain couldn't handle it. It started on fire, plumes of smoke, and it almost shook to pieces. They put up a fence and if an animal touched the fence that guarded the perimeter of the bottom of the mountain, it would instantly die. Even Moses said, "I'm trembling with fear."

We have a hard time appreciating God's holiness, because we weren't there at Mt. Sinai. But after terrifying the people with his holiness on Sinai, God did the unimaginable. He came right into the camp of Israel, in a tent known as the Tabernacle. If you want to know what the Tabernacle was (and later the Temple), just imagine that some brilliant scientist somehow invented a structure where you could safely put the sun. So the sun could be placed right next door, and the building could somehow contain the heat and radiation and explosions and gravity all the rest, so you could safely walk down the sidewalk in front of that building and not be harmed. And if that sounds like ridiculous, silly science fiction, that's nothing compared to how unthinkable it is that you could do that with the presence of God in his awesome holiness. The Temple is the greatest, most astonishing and mind blowing miracle that had ever happened.

And to make sure that we never forget how much of a miracle that is, God gave us reminders. He set up a system of cleanness and uncleanness that governed when people could approach him in the Temple. He picked out various different physical things that make good illustrations of sin. These are not sinful or immoral things.<sup>2</sup> They were just physical realities that, in one way or another, illustrated something about sin.

You can read about them throughout the Old Testament law, but especially in Leviticus 12-14. And of all the various illustrations of sin, the one that is the most profound and detailed illustration is leprosy. With other forms of uncleanness, you might be unclean for a matter of hours, then go through a simple ceremony, and be right back to a state of cleanness. But with leprosy, you were so unclean that you had to go live in isolation outside the camp, in most cases, for the rest of your life. There are all kinds of prescribed ceremonies for making you clean again after you become unclean in various ways. But the one kind of uncleanness that had no ceremony for cleansing was leprosy. There were some rituals that could make you clean after you were cured of leprosy, but nothing could make you clean while you have the disease.

Being cured of leprosy required a miracle. In 2 Kings 5 a military commander from a neighboring gentile nation had leprosy. And he heard a rumor that there was a prophet in Israel who might be able to heal him (Elijah). So the king sends a letter to the king of Israel asking that this commander be cured.

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<sup>2</sup> It is not sinful or evil or immoral to be in an unclean state. If a woman gives birth to a baby, it puts her in a ritually unclean state for a time. Does that imply that giving birth is somehow evil or bad? No. The Bible is clear that childbirth is a blessing from God. It's a sign of God's favor. 1 Tim.2:15 says women will be saved through childbearing. The virgin Mary was rendered ritually unclean by giving birth to the Son of God! I can say with great certainty that it is not a sin to give birth to the Son of God! The angel said, "Blessed are you among women."

There is nothing evil or sinful or immoral about becoming ritually unclean, however, there was something very evil and immoral about trying to approach God's presence while being in an unclean state.

**2 Kings 5:7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he ...said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?"**

Only God can heal someone of leprosy.

You can read about the diagnosis of leprosy in Lv.13. There were other skin diseases that were similar, but they were more superficial and temporary. So if you got some bad rash or boils or open sores all over your skin, you had to go to the priest to be examined for leprosy. And you'd go through a very detailed process of diagnosis that took weeks. You might have something that seemed like leprosy, and they would quarantine you for a couple weeks and then check you again, and it was clearing up, you are okay. The diagnosis of leprosy didn't come until they were sure it was a systemic problem that was definitely more than skin deep.

## **Leprosy Illustrates Sin**

So of all the illustrations of sin – all the things that could make you ritually unclean, the most severe of all of them was leprosy. It brought the most extreme level of ceremonial uncleanness, because it was such a comprehensive illustration of sin.

It was disgusting and repulsive physically, just like sin is disgusting and repulsive spiritually. It was systemic, not just superficial or skin deep, just like sin is not just superficial but resides way down deep in the core of your being. It was physically contaminating, just like sin is spiritually contaminating. It was physically destructive, like sin destroys us spiritually. It was defiling and alienating and isolating, just like sin. It's the perfect physical illustration to teach us what sin is like spiritually. And like our sin problem, it was incurable outside of a special act of God.

We can't see sin. It resides in the heart. But we can see leprosy, and so God used that as an object lesson or parable or metaphor to show us what our sin is like.

The OT is full of physical pictures of spiritual realities. And the religious leaders that Jesus confronted were constantly majoring on the pictures while completely missing the spiritual realities. And this was a perfect example of that. When the Bible said lepers were to live outside the camp, the religious leaders took that and really ran with it. In the Talmud it says you are not allowed to come within 6 feet of a leper, and if there is a wind, 150 feet. One rabbi said, "When I see lepers I throw stones at them lest they come near me." And that wasn't a confession of sin – he was bragging about that. That's how ceremonially pure and holy he was – he would throw rocks at lepers. They used the Levitical codes as an excuse to hate lepers and treat them like garbage.

## **The Right Way to Approach God**

So back to Mark 1. The people there looked at this man and all they saw was someone who was absolutely unfit to approach God. But not only does Jesus allow this man to approach, but he responds favorably to his approach. In fact, I think his approach of Jesus is presented here as an example for all of us of exactly the right way to approach God with a request.

### **1. Reverence**

In v.40 it says this man **came to him and begged him on his knees**. In Luke 5:12 it says he also **fell with his face to the ground**. That's reverence. He had an incredibly hard life, but he wasn't mad at God. He was reverent and worshipped.

### **2. Humility**

He takes a posture of abject humility before Jesus. This man had an acute awareness of how loathsome his disease was. And so he has no concern for his own dignity – he begs Jesus on his knees.

### 3. Submission to God's Will

Then he said **If you are willing, you can make me clean.** That's submissiveness to Christ's will. He doesn't demand healing or claim it or anything like that – he acknowledges it's totally up to the will of Christ.

### 4. Faith

He doesn't know if Jesus is going to be willing or not, but if Jesus is willing, he has absolutely no doubt about Jesus' ability to heal him.

That's a perfect picture of how to approach God with a request. Come to him in reverent worship, in lowly humility, in complete submissiveness to his will, and with unquestioning faith. The Pharisees would have seen this guy as a model of someone who can't approach God, and Mark presents him as a model of exactly how to approach God. Yes, he was disqualified from physically coming into the Temple. But spiritually he was fit to approach God because he came with reverence, humility, submission, and faith.

We're going to see that again and again with Jesus, where he takes someone who looks one way on the outside, and shows us that he is the exact opposite on the inside. We'll see religious leaders who look amazing on the outside, and inside they are filthy. And we'll see people who look as bad as they can look on the outside, but on the inside are beautiful. And, of course, it's only the inside that matters.

## The Response of the Healer

So back to the story. This wasted away, decayed, rotting mass of putrid flesh – this walking corpse comes out of nowhere and approaches. Everyone there instinctively backs away in alarm, but Jesus doesn't move. This man comes within arm's reach of Jesus, then falls to his knees, and then on his face. And it turns your stomach when you hear his raspy, grating voice: "... you can make me clean." Look at Jesus' response.

## Compassion

### 41 Filled with compassion

Not revulsion. Not disgust or fear or anger.<sup>3</sup> For years everyone had looked at this man as if he were nothing more than a disease. Now for the first time someone was looking at him as a person - talking to him - loving him.

Here's a question: how did they know Jesus was filled with compassion? Evidently there was some kind of visible indication. A tear in Jesus' eye? The look on his face? Somehow it was obvious that Jesus had deep compassion for this man.

The word for compassion refers to a visceral reaction in the stomach. Have you ever seen someone who was hurt so bad that it actually caused pain in your stomach? That's what happened here with Jesus. Looking at this man's condition moved Jesus to the point where it physically hurt him. God is a God of love and filled with compassion – compassion beyond human comprehension. And you take all that love and compassion and pack it down into a human body, and it will rack that human body. What a contrast to the religious leaders of the day who prided themselves on throwing rocks at this guy.

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<sup>3</sup> A small minority of manuscripts has anger here instead of compassion. Despite the very strong manuscript evidence for the word compassion, many scholars are convinced that the original reading was anger simply because it's easy to imagine a scribe changing the word from anger to compassion, but difficult to imagine the reverse. But then they go on to talk about how well the word anger fits with the strong words used to describe Jesus sending this man away. Those words do seem to convey anger, so perhaps it's not so unthinkable that a scribe might insert the word anger here to fit what follows. It's also possible that a scribe simply made a mistake and inadvertently put the wrong word.

## Cleansing Touch

Now look what Jesus' compassion drives him to do: the unthinkable.

### **41 Jesus reached out his hand...and touched the man.**

We could add, "and the whole crowd GASPED." As a Jew, there was nothing worse in the world that you could ever touch than a leper. Even if you are a kindhearted person and you have compassion on the leper – even if it's a family member, you just don't ever touch a leper.

And Jesus didn't have to touch him to heal him. Often Jesus would heal people with a word - from a distance. But he didn't choose to do that this time. He touched him.

I doubt any of us can imagine what that was like for this man. Psychologists have studied the devastating effect it has on people when they go without any human touch. I recently heard of one man who goes to get his haircut every week just because that's the only time someone touches him. This guy may have gone years or even decades without ever being touched by anyone.

## Reversing Direction

The reason this would have been so shocking is because one of the most basic principles in the Old Testament about uncleanness is the fact that it is passed by touch.

### **Leviticus 5:2 if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean...even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean.**

If you ever touch anything unclean, the uncleanness of that thing immediately passes to you. In fact, God gave the priests a pop quiz on this question in Haggai chapter 2.

**Haggai 2:11 This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Ask the priests what the law says: 12 If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?'**

**The priests answered, "No."**

Of course not. Cleanness isn't passed on by touch.

**13 Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?"**

**"Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."**

They scored 100% on that quiz. And the point of all that is to show which direction the current travels. If one thing is clean and another thing is unclean and they touch, the cleanness isn't transferred to the unclean thing, rather the uncleanness is transferred to the clean thing.

Then God went on to give them the worst news they had ever heard.

**14 Then Haggai said, " 'So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the LORD. 'Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.**

He's saying, "Guess what Israel? You're so worried about not touching something unclean? *You are the unclean thing!* You're so worried about not becoming ritually contaminated, but spiritually you are the *source* of contamination."

Anyway, the point of all that is just to say that uncleanness is passed by touch. So as I was reading the various commentaries on this passage, they were saying Jesus was willing to become ceremonially unclean because healing human need is a priority over ceremonial procedures. And I agree with the part about priorities. But I don't agree that Jesus became ritually unclean. Jesus would have become unclean if he had touched a leper, but I don't think he touched a leper.

**41 ..."I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.**

Jesus didn't touch a leper, because the moment Jesus touched him, he wasn't a leper anymore. With every other human being on the planet, the current of uncleanness flows from the unclean to the clean. But with Jesus, the current is reversed. His cleanness flows from him into the unclean person and cleanses him.

It doesn't say the leprosy started to gradually clear up.

#### **42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.**

I don't know what that was like. I don't know if missing fingers popped out one at a time. Or he looks down at the stumps and - perfect hands. Fingernails – trimmed. Clear, smooth skin like a baby. Eyelashes are back, eyebrows are back – their normal color. Every trace of the leprosy is gone.

Now he can go inside a walled city. He can go to the market! He can be around people - he can touch them! He can give his friends hugs He could get married! Most importantly of all - He can enter the Temple and worship God! He is clean!!!

Imagine the ecstasy that coursed through his entire being at that moment! Think of him spending that night with his family – just marveling about the whole thing. When the sun came up that morning, he was a miserable being – more dead than alive. He was a hopeless mass of sores and corruption, and his very existence was a burden. Now, he's as clean as the wind driven snow.

## **Spiritual Leprosy and Healing**

Remember I told you that all of Jesus' miracles are like parables - teaching us something about his Kingdom? What is the healing of leprosy designed to teach us? It teaches us that Jesus came to make us clean before God spiritually. And we'll see that even more clearly in the very next paragraph where they bring a paralytic to Jesus and instead of healing him, Jesus forgives him. That's what Jesus came into this world to do.

We don't see ourselves as being this hideous, because we've all our lives in a leper colony. We are all born spiritual lepers.

#### **Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean**

What this man was a picture of, we are in reality. Our sin makes us utterly detestable to God and bars us from his presence. Jesus is going to explain that in a lot more detail coming up in chapter 7, where he explains that you don't become unclean spiritually from any external thing. The thing that makes you unclean spiritually is your own heart. And there is one solution, and one solution only – the cleansing touch of Jesus Christ.

## **The Command**

Well, it's a beautiful story, but it has a terrible ending.

**43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 “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.”**

There was no prescription in the law for cleansing a leper, but there were some very specific commands on the procedure of verifying whether a leper has been cleansed. Leviticus 14 lays it all out in detail. Jesus routinely stepped all over the traditions of the elders and the rules and regulations that had been developed within Judaism, but he never violated the actual law of God. The religious leaders had become so immersed in their traditions that they had lost sight of which rules were from the teachings of the rabbis about the Bible, and which were in the actual Bible. But Jesus made that distinction clear, because he constantly thumbed his nose at the traditions, but was very careful to keep the actual law of God. And so Jesus commands this guy to say nothing to anyone, and to follow what the law of God commanded him to do as a cleansed leper. So what does the guy do?



## Disobedience

### 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

He did the exact opposite of what Jesus commanded. Very sad ending to the story. I heard and read multiple commentators and preachers on this passage who said, “This is understandable. You can’t fault this guy for telling what happened to him – we would all do that.” You can’t fault him? He disobeyed a direct command from Jesus Christ! What he did was inexcusable. It’s blatant disobedience.

When Jesus commanded this guy to say nothing to anyone until he went to the priests, he didn’t say that with a wink. Those weren’t just hollow commands that Jesus didn’t really mean. He was serious. In fact, the language Jesus uses is so strong that it’s a little surprising. 43 Jesus sent him away at once. That word sent him away is *ekballo* – the same word used for casting out demons. Jesus cast this guy out.

### 43 ... with a strong warning: see that you don’t tell this to anyone.

The phrase **don’t tell this to anyone** is an emphatic negative – say absolutely nothing to anyone. The word for **strong warning** there normally refers to a rebuke. Originally it meant to snort like a horse. Later in Mark, when the disciples thought a woman wasted a bunch of money, it says **they rebuked her harshly** (Mk.14:4). That’s this same word.

This is all terminology that’s normally used in a context of hostility or anger. Was Jesus hostile or angry with this man? I don’t think so, but the use of this language lets us know that Jesus wasn’t messing around when he told this guy to keep it quiet. He was very serious and urgent about it.

Jesus wants him to do it, he says, **as a testimony to them**. Here we see the beginnings of an “us and them” kind of situation between Jesus and the religious leaders. That’s going to unfold a lot more in the next chapter. But if this man would have obeyed and gone to the priest, that priest would have done the extensive examination required in Leviticus 14, and officially pronounced this man clean. Then there would be official, priestly verification of this miracle that would’ve been undeniable. That would’ve been a great thing, but it didn’t happen.

The man disobeys. This is a very disappointing, and yet common reality that we see when people encounter Jesus. This man was right on the money in the way he approached Jesus when he wanted Jesus to do something for him. He had the reverence and humility and submissiveness and faith – everything he says is right out of the textbook. This guy knew the right way to ask for something from Jesus. But once he got what he wanted, what happened to all the humility and faith and reverence and submissiveness? It’s gone. He got what he wanted, he’s not interested in obeying Jesus now. He’s on his way.

That’s not understandable, that’s not justifiable - it’s despicable. Jesus just gave this man his life back. The least he could do is obey a very simple command. So often you see people who have all the right religious answers, but when it comes time to actually obey God’s Word, you find it was all skin deep.

I think you start to get an idea here why Jesus turned away from certain crowds. He did want to publish his gospel far and wide. He did want to reach as many as possible. But he was not interested in catering to people who just wanted to use him to get physical benefits, but were not interested in repenting and following him. Jesus doesn’t want to be the one who provides you with what you want; he wants to be what you want. He’s not interested in being used by you to get something else. It’s fine to ask him for things if that’s part of your pursuit of drawing near to him. But he will not be used by people who are not drawing near to him.

## Consequences

So what happens? This man’s disobedience has some dire consequences for Jesus.

### 45 ...As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.

Why can’t Jesus enter a town openly? Because of crowds? Didn’t he say his whole reason for coming into the world was so that he could preach the gospel in all the various towns? So if he enters a

town and there's a big crowd that automatically gathers, how is that not a good thing? It's not a good thing because it's the wrong crowd. It's a crowd of thrill seekers who are interested in Jesus miracles but not in his message. And those people clog up the process so much that the people who are open to the gospel can't even get to Jesus.

It's kind of like what I experienced when I was a teenager trying to find a good youth group. Every youth ministry was all about attracting unbelieving students for "outreach." So they would have fun events and celebrity speakers and free food and everything they could do to bring in the a huge crowd of teens. But they weren't teens who were open to the gospel. And the result was you would go to use group, and the culture there would be just like a public school. If you were interested in learning from God's Word you were an oddball.

Now there are whole churches that follow that same model. The seeker movement. But Jesus' model was to send those kind of people away, and devote his attention to the much smaller crowd who had ears to hear the gospel.

So this guy goes out and gives his testimony, but not in connection with the gospel, and the result is throngs of the wrong kinds of people crowd out the kind of ministry Jesus came to do. So because of this man's disobedience, Jesus entire ministry is curtailed. You have to wonder about those towns that Jesus could no longer enter openly. If I hadn't been for this guy's disobedience, those towns would've gotten a visit from the Lord Jesus Christ. But now that couldn't happen. How tragic for those cities.

## **Trading Places**

And look at the impact it had on Jesus himself.

### **45 ...Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.**

Isn't that striking? At the beginning of the story, Jesus is in all these population centers, and this poor leper is living in seclusion outside of society. Now the leper is going around talking to everyone, and Jesus is out there in seclusion. Jesus traded places with this man.

Is it easy for Jesus to heal a spiritual leper? Yes. Yes, it's easy, but it's not cheap. It costs him. What happened here is a profound illustration of how Jesus would cleanse spiritual lepers like us. He is able to cleanse us, but to do that, it meant trading places with us. And so at the end of the book we see Jesus hanging on a cross suffering the punishment that we deserve for our spiritual leprosy. And that is the act that enabled the most inconceivable of all miracles – the ability for unholy creatures to approach a holy God and not be consumed.

## **Impossible to Keep Quiet**

So Jesus could no longer enter towns openly, but stayed out in secluded areas.

### **45 ...Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.**

That's another evidence of the greatness of Jesus' miracles. Jesus did not shout in the streets or try to publicize himself, and yet there was no preventing the word from getting out. If someone runs for President of the United States, they have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars campaigning and promoting themselves just to get name recognition. Imagine someone running for president who didn't spend one penny and refused to do any campaigning and strictly forbade all his volunteers from talking to people about him. And yet he was such an amazing candidate that word got out and he ends up winning the election in a landslide. That would require quite the candidate. Imagine a man who rejected the crowds and forbade people to tell of his miracles, and yet his miracles were so awesome that 2000 years later millions of people worship him.

## Conclusion

Some of us have done some really horrible sins. We've got some deep, deep stains on our soul. Some of you have had sick, disgusting things done to you. And you feel dirty because of it – even though you didn't do anything wrong. Or in some cases, maybe horrible things were done to you, but you also did some things that were wrong, and you have never really figured out where the line is between the two, so you don't know what to confess and what not to, and so there's just this cloud of confused, generalized sense of dirtiness. Or maybe it's the most disgusting filthiness of all – that of self-righteous pride. Whatever variety of uncleanness you might have, no matter how deep it runs, Jesus can make you clean with a single touch.

**1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

In David's prayer or repentance in Psalm 51 where he keeps on asking for cleansing, I especially love verse 7.

**Psalm 51:7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

We often offer the request: "Cleanse me! Wash me!" But do we also affirm the rest? Do you really believe that once God cleanses you, you are clean? You are whiter than snow? You are completely pure and pleasing in God's sight!

Come to God like this leper did – with deep reverence, profound humility, total submissiveness, and unwavering faith. Ask for cleansing, and he will make you whiter than snow. Then express your gratitude in joyful obedience to his commands. And you will be able to boldly draw near to the presence of God and he will take delight in your coming.