

March 19, 2023

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Pastor Matt Duerr

“All This Took Place-For the Untouchables”

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, we are now in our fourth week of “All This Took Place,” our sermon series that is focusing on what all took place and why, leading up to Jesus going to the cross.

In our first week, we saw Saint Matthew recording that it all took place to fulfill prophecy. In our second week, we looked at that Hall of Fame of Faith, and we saw that all this took place by faith. And it also was for the Jewish people, as we saw Jairus coming to Jesus for his daughter, his only daughter, who was sick to the point of death. And when he got the news that she had actually died, Jesus said to him, “do not fear, only believe.”

Last week, we saw that all this took place for them; and who was them? You, me, the Gentiles, and the beautiful feet of those who brought the good news to us like those who brought the good news to that Roman centurion.

Today we looked at all this took place for the untouchables who are the untouchables? Well, let me first go back to the Truth Project, which we did years ago here at Zion. And Del Tackett, the presenter of that truth project talked about the pernicious lie. The pernicious lie is this: it's all about you, babe. It's a focus on self and it is a focus that plagued the Pharisees the Sadducees the Scribes, the Jewish religious leaders. It's a focus on, as we heard last week, “a great zeal to pursue righteousness our way, doing it through our works, works righteousness.

There might not be any Pharisees today, but then I have to also ask; or are there? Welcome to the prosperity gospel or prosperity theology crowd. This teaching of today goes something like this: God helps those who help themselves and the righteous who have earned their

righteousness through their righteous living are blessed. However the flip side to that is, if you're not blessed you're not righteous. You're part of the wicked. And that's why you are cursed, why you are sick, why you have chronic illness, or maybe in debt, or there's a death in the family. The real problem is that you're missing the mark and you're not living up to the standards God has set for you.

The Pharisees had a special way to deal with this kind of stuff the people that were seen as being very unrighteous because of the situations they found themselves in. Their basic way was, 'stay away, you are unclean.' 'Stay away, it's what God wants so that your uncleanness does not come to us; so you don't in any way influence us. Stay away because we are going to enhance God's judgment and really make you feel your unrighteousness. Stay away, we're going to make your failures obvious. Stay away because this is part of our way of controlling the flock. Stay away because we control the flock by using you as an example and saying to the flock. Oh you don't want to be like so and so; you better make sure that (you know how it goes) you put a healthy check in the offering plate.'

Into that mess, enter Jesus. And our gospel this morning from Luke chapter 5 beginning at verse 12, the setting is very unique. It's very early in Christ's ministry. In verses one through 11 of chapter five; He calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John. And this is the scenario where He then tells Peter, and Andrew, James, John, to go back out go back out and drop the nets again after they had fished all night. Which was of course a test of faith. And they did it because Jesus said to do it, and they got this great catch of fish. When they came ashore, Peter came to the Lord and he fell down and he said, "depart from me for I am a sinful man, oh Lord." And Jesus's response is to not be afraid. I will make you fishers of men. Ironically, I want you what to consider what happens next. The very next sentence, there came a man, full of leprosy. Full-there was no hiding it. He was leprous everywhere and he probably had open sores all over. He was not far from an excruciatingly painful death.

Now in that setting, the question could be asked, why does he have leprosy? Well those of the prosperity theology crowd, the ones who focus on earning righteousness, having that zeal for being righteous, and

earning your way to heaven, would look at that man and say obviously you are a terrible sinner. In fact, we're going to make a rule for you. You need to announce that you have it whenever you see anybody coming your direction. You must yell out "unclean, unclean," and then you must scurry away like a rat hiding in the dark. Get away, or why leprosy? Because we live in a sin marred world, and the effects of sin truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive. It gets everybody. But basically the response that that man would have experienced was one of shunning, shaming and berating. How dare you? How dare you, what? Well the very next lines sum it up. First, there came a man full of leprosy, how dare you come towards us clean people? But more than that, instead of calling out and saying, "unclean, unclean," so people could get away, he spoke. What he said was this. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged Him.

Now you've ever been to a football game, a baseball game, a basketball game, many times during intermissions or breaks between quarters and stuff; you'll hear coming over the loudspeaker. "Are you ready for this?" And then some music playing, getting you all ready for something amazing. We're at that point in the sermon. Are you ready for this?

Here's this leper who has approached Jesus, fallen on his face, begging Him, and he makes the following statement: "Lord if you will, you can make me clean." Wow, what a statement! What a loaded statement. How did he know that this Jesus could do what he just said Jesus could do? In fact, calling him Lord instead of teacher. Master, not teacher. Well he knew because obviously he had put prophecy together and he realized, this Jesus fits prophecy. Obviously he must know that God has mercy on the untouchables. And how would he know that? Because he must have known his Bible.

He must have known about Rahab, who later in the book of Hebrews, was part of the Hall of Fame of Faith. The prostitute, the untouchable who was saved by faith when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. He probably remembered the account of Miriam who was healed of her seven day affliction of leprosy because she, along with her brother Aaron, had challenged their brother Moses. So, God struck

her with leprosy but after seven days healed her, an untouchable. But maybe more important to this man, was Naaman the leprous, Syrian commander of the army whose servant, an Israelite girl, captured when they overtook Israel told him” “oh that my master would go to Israel and see the prophet, Elisha. He will heal you.” And Naaman then went to Elisha told him go dip yourself in the Jordan river seven times and he thought... the Jordan river, that's like the Mokelumne river in California this time of year. There's hardly any water, it's full of algae, it's not very good. But his servant said what do you have to lose? So, he went dipped himself in the water seven times and he came up clean. The untouchable, the Syrian, is made whole. What was his response? He came back to Elisha wanting to pay Elisha. Elisha said, ‘I'm not taking your money, I didn't do it. God did it.’ So, he asked for permission to take dirt back in an ox cart so that when he gets back to Syria he can worship, he can pray to the God of Israel and not do it on Syrian soil but do it on Israelite soil. It was a tremendous act!

And yet we have to ask, how would the leper know? How would he remember that God is a God of the untouchables? How would he remember Rahab? How would he remember Miriam and her seven day leprosy? How would he remember Naaman, the leprous Syrian commander of the army? Unless he knew the Bible, oh the joy of Bible study. But I would imagine he was not a part of any Bible study, but there were (going back to last week) some very beautiful feet that had shared the good news with that leper.

And like commercials today, “But wait there's more!” In the very next sentence, “and Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him saying, “I will, be clean.” Jesus is very succinct. He had listened to this man and the man had said; ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ What's phenomenal here is that Jesus touched him; the power of touch on the untouchable. Luke the writer of this gospel is a physician, is a doctor and he focuses on this in his gospel and includes it in almost every single healing. Jesus touched the untouchables. He was breaking every religious, CDC, and state of California smart guideline there is.

But it's a huge message to that leper and it's a huge message to all the untouchables of this world. God is bigger than our medical and governmental rules. He cares enough to personally come and touch the individual and bring healing. In fact, ultimately, He cares so much that He lets us touch Him, strike Him, spit on Him, whip Him and nail Him to a cross.

Why would He be such a God that would let us touch Him? The untouchable touching God, who really is the untouchable, we have no business touching Him. Why? So that we might enjoy a close, touching relationship with Him for all eternity. And let's be honest, that is very good news for a bunch of untouchable people marked by sin like you and me. That is our God. All this took place for us untouchables.

In our Saviors' Name, Amen.