

Jesus can make you clean

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[0 : 0 0] And a leper came to him, that is Jesus. A leper came to Jesus, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, If you will, you can make me clean.

Moved with pity, Jesus 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.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his word. Let us have a moment of prayer. Make the book live to me, O Lord.

[1 : 0 5] Show me thyself within thy word. Show me myself, and show me my saviour. And make the book live to me, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. I remember a story that my best mate told me. He told me a story about this young drug addict. He was going into a Christian rehab in order to get clean from drugs.

And he went in and he managed to get off drugs. And while he was there, he had become a Christian as well. And he was doing great. He was going on as a Christian. He was going on in his recovery. And he really got on well with all the members of staff in the rehab.

And this particular day, one of the staff members was going out. And he took the young man with him. And while he was out, he called in in a friend's house. And he took the young man in with him. And the friend had a dog.

And the young man started praying for the dog. And nobody said anything. But they were all looking a wee bit bewildered. And when they left the house, the worker said to him, He says, what was all that about back there?

[2 : 0 6] He says, what? He says, praying for the dog. He says, what are you talking about? He says, Jesus prayed for animals. The worker says, what? He says, ah, I read it in the Bible. He says, Jesus prayed for the leopard. I think there's a real lesson in that in making sure we read the Bible correctly.

But Jesus didn't heal a leopard. But Jesus did cleanse a leper. And I think it's to this passage the young man was referring. And the first thing I want you to see from this passage is in verse 40.

A deadly condition. A deadly condition. Mark tells us nothing about this man. Not his name. Not where he came from. Nothing except his condition. Which was deadly.

He was a leper. This condition today is known as Hansen's disease. And it can be cured. But back in biblical times, there was no cure for it. And for that reason, leprosy was the most dreaded and feared diseases of the day.

There's three main types of leprosy. The first was these nodules or ulcers that would appear all over the body. Over the hands. Over the face. Sometimes the face would be so disfigured that the sufferer would resemble the face of a lion.

[3 : 15] These ulcers would also grow in the vocal cords. So the leper spoke with a raspy voice. The ulcers would also weep. So the body was in a living state of decomposition.

Thus a terrible smell surrounded the leper constantly. The second type attacked the nervous system. Compromising the body's ability to feel pain. It acted as a sort of an anesthetic.

Numbing the nerves in the body. Therefore the leper maybe injured a hand or a foot and be unaware that there was a problem. Infection would set into the wound. And eventually the hand or the foot might just fall off.

The third type was a combination of the first two. And after living with this horrible sickness, the sufferer died a horrible death. But friends, having leprosy was not just a sickness.

It was also a sentence. One of the worst aspects of leprosy was the social isolation that it brought. The Levitical law was very clear. And it's laws governing lepers.

[4 : 15] Moses writes in Leviticus 13, 45 and 46. The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes. And let the hair of his head hang loose. And he shall cover his upper lip.

And cry out, unclean, unclean. He shall remain unclean. As long as he has the disease, he is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

And by the time of Jesus, the rabbis had added many more restrictions to the laws governing lepers. If a leper even stuck his head inside a house, the whole house was considered unclean.

Once it was determined that the person had the disease, they were banished from the village. They were no longer allowed to have communion with other people. They had to leave their family.

They had to leave their friends. They couldn't touch their family. They could only look at them from a distance. Many families brought food and clothing for a while. But after a while, the family considered the afflicted person as dead.

[5 : 18] And they usually held a funeral service for them. It was unlawful for a leper to approach within 50 feet of a clean person. They weren't allowed to say hello to you. You weren't allowed to say hello to them.

They had to tear their garments so that people would recognize them as a leper. They had to dress as a mourner going to a funeral service. Their own. And over their upper lip, they had to wear a cloth and cry out, unclean, unclean.

The leper's cries would warn people that a leper was nearby. And oftentimes, people would pick up rocks and stones and get ready to throw them at the leper if they dared come near them. Now friends, these measures were not taken in order to be cruel, but in order to protect the people.

Because people didn't know how you contracted it. They didn't know how you passed it on. So terrible stigma surrounded leprosy. I suppose it was a wee bit like the outbreak of the AIDS virus in the 80s.

Do you remember? Folks didn't know how you caught it. Can you catch it if you shake hands with people? Sharing a cup? If you're touching them. Terrible stigma surrounded leprosy.

[6 : 24] Well, that's great, Terry. You might be saying to yourself, but what's that got to do with me? Nobody here has the deadly condition of leprosy. Well, that may be true, but the Bible says that this man is an illustration of the deadly condition that affects every one of us.

Every man, woman and child ever born is afflicted with the deadly condition of sin. You might be sitting and saying, well, what's sin? We hear that a lot, don't we, if we go to church? Well, at least I hope we do.

But what is sin? Is sin the wrong things that we do? Well, yes and no. Sin at its root is essentially this. It's a departure from God.

We say to God, God, I'm willing to take your gifts. I'm willing to take family, friends, food, fashion, finance and fitness. But God, I don't want you as Father. So we coronate ourselves.

We declare our independence of God. And we make ourselves king or queen of our own lives. We refuse God's divine lordship. And we disobey His will. Sin is essentially an attitude that's summed up in the song by Frank Sinatra, My Way.

[7 : 29] And friends, that's every one of us. From the baddest to the beautifullest person here. From the most dangerous to the most delightful. Every one of us is afflicted with the deadly condition of sin. The Bible's very clear about this.

Romans 3 and 23. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And friends, this makes us all unclean. Just like the leper. And just like the leper, Our deadly condition has deadly consequences.

Again, Romans 6 and 23. For the wages of sin is death. Physical death, yes. But also under the judgment of God and under His terrible wrath. Which will be eternal.

Most of us don't think we're affected by sin. Most of us don't think we're unclean. Because we've devised, or at least we think we have, We've devised lots of ingenious ways of covering up our sin.

Most of us use comparison. We read the newspaper or we watch the news and we say, I'm no as bad as him. Or I'm no as bad as her. We listen to the opinion of our friends who tell us, You're a good guy.

[8 : 35] Or you're a good woman. We maybe focus on our good qualities. Never on our lust or our pride. Or we use excuses. It's just the way I am. Or we use the oldest game in the world.

Older even than Monopoly. The blame game. It's my background. It's the area I was brought up in. It's my mum and dad's fault. But friends, no matter what it is we use to try and cover up our sin, The fact of the matter is this.

We've all sinned. And we fall short of the glory of God. And we face His judgment. The former minister here, Mr. Alexander, once said this, Sin is not only an offense which needs forgiving.

It is also a pollution which needs cleansing. Friend, as we sit here this afternoon, Can you see that you're not clean? Can you see that you have a deadly condition?

Well, the leper, he knew he was unclean. He didn't try to cover it up. He didn't try to kid his cell on. I'm no a leper. He wasn't in denial. He knew about the deadly condition from which he suffered.

[9 : 41] And that is why he gave a desperate cry. Verse 40. He had a deadly condition, but he gave a desperate cry. And Mark records how he came to Jesus. Verse 40.

Imploring him. Begging on his knees with his face to the ground. The leper broke all the rules in approaching Jesus. Remember? You weren't allowed to come within 50 feet of a clean person.

You weren't allowed to speak to them. But the leper wasn't interested in laws and rules and regulations. He knew about the deadly condition from which he suffered. And he came begging on his knees.

He didn't care how he looked to other people or what they thought about him. He wasn't interested in saving face. He was only interested in saving his life. It was his life he was pleading for. And he was desperate.

Friends, this is a great example of how to approach the Lord Jesus. A lot of people just walk into church and they strut in like peacocks. As if they were doing God a favour just by being here.

[10 : 38] They've got no idea of the deadly desperate condition from which they suffered. Others think to themselves, Look, I know I'm not perfect. I know I've got a few changes to make. But I'm going to get disciplined.

I'm going to buy a few self-help books. Maybe even attend a few self-help groups. But Jesus? I don't need Jesus. And I don't certainly need to come begging to him on my knees.

That's beneath my dignity. Well friend, if that's you, You not only have a problem with sin, You have a problem with pride. And you need humility more than you need anything else.

This reminds me of a story from the Old Testament. The story of a fellow called Naaman. Naaman was a very important man. He was a Syrian general. But nonetheless, he contracted leprosy. And he had a wee slave girl that worked for him.

And she was Jewish. And she told him, Master, there's a prophet up in Israel that could cleanse you. So Naaman made the journey to see the prophet Elisha. And the prophet Elisha didn't even come out to see him.

[11 : 38] The prophet Elisha just said to him, Away you go and bathe in the Jordan River seven times. And you'll be cleansed of your leprosy. And Naaman said, I'm not doing that. There's no chance I'm going to bathe in the Jordan. The Jordan River's bogging.

I've passed better rivers than I'm away here. There's nae chance I'm bathing in the Jordan. I'm not doing that. And one of his servants said to him, Master, see if the prophet had asked you today something great.

Would you have done it? You see, friends, he had leprosy. But his proud heart needed healing even more. The words that his servants spoke to him shattered his pride.

And Naaman went and he bathed in the Jordan River seven times. And he was cleansed of his leper's skin. And also his leper's heart. Friend, are you too proud? Are you broken enough to want to be healed?

Do you see your leprosy enough to want to be cleansed? Well, our leper does. He comes and he cries to Jesus. If you will, you can make me clean. Or, you can make me clean if you are willing.

[12 : 37] This shows great faith, but it also shows great doubt. And he'd obviously heard about Jesus. He'd obviously heard about Jesus teaching with authority. Casting out demons. Healing people. Changing people's lives.

Maybe he woke up that morning in a leper's colony. And he heard that Jesus was coming by. And he thought to himself, A break comes. An opportunity. Christ is coming forth. Maybe I can be free.

Jesus' ability wasn't in doubt in the leper's mind. But what was in doubt in the leper's mind is if Jesus was willing to do it. To do it for him. Was Jesus interested in him?

A leper? An outcast? Friend, maybe you're the same. Maybe you've heard how Jesus has changed the lives of other people. Maybe you've seen it before your very eyes. But you just don't know if Jesus is willing to clean you up.

To clean you up from the sins that fill you with guilt and shame. Maybe it's sexual sin for the past. Or maybe even the present. Maybe it's how you used and abused somebody in order to feed an addiction.

[13 : 41] Maybe you were a bad parent. Or maybe you were bad to your parents. Or a whole multitude of other things that you think Jesus isn't willing to clean you up from. Well friends, take heart from the words of an old hymn.

There is no secret what God can do. What he's done for others. He will do for you. And friends, take heart from our passage. Look at the example we have here. If you cry to Jesus just like the leper.

And ask him to make you clean. You will find from Jesus, just like the leper. Divine compassion. Verses 41 to 42. Deadly condition.

Desperate cry. And now thirdly. Divine compassion. Moved with pity. Jesus 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. Moved with pity. Or moved with compassion. Or what it literally means is this. Moved with anger.

[14 : 41] Now why was Jesus angry? Was he angry at the man for breaking the rules and coming within 50 feet of him and speaking to him? No. Jesus was moved with anger. At what the effects of sin had had in his creation.

Remember in Genesis God said, Let us make man in our image. Man is the crowning of God's creation. Made in God's image. But look at the pitiful sight that man has become.

And what Jesus has before him in the leper. And in us. It was A.W. Tozer who said, Man made more like God than any other creature. Has become less like God than any other creature.

But so moved is Jesus. It shows the extent of his grace and mercy. I will. Be clean. Jesus here mirrors the words of the leper. The leper said, If you will.

Jesus says, I will. You can make me clean. Jesus says, Be clean. What great joy and relief and freedom. These words of Jesus brought. Probably hardly anybody had spoken a word to the leper.

[15 : 45] Since the words of the priest pronounced them unclean. The rabbis had a saying that it was easier to raise the dead than to cleanse a leper. That God alone could cleanse leprosy.

And friends, Jesus shows that that is indeed who he is. And that he has the power to cleanse and to heal. Friend, Jesus can make you clean. We sang earlier, Be still for the power of the Lord.

It's moving in this place. He comes to cleanse and to heal. To minister his grace. No work. No work too hard for him. And faith received from him.

Be still. For the power of the Lord is moving in this place. Friend, Jesus can make you clean. There is mere grace in Jesus Christ. And there is sin in your life.

But friends, you'll never get clean coming to this service or any other service. The only way you'll get clean is in coming and throwing yourself in the mercy of Jesus. Verse 42, And immediately the leprosy left him.

[16 : 45] And he was made clean. If you read the authorised version of the Bible, you will see that the authorised version of the Bible reads 42 as this. As soon as he, that is Jesus, as soon as Jesus had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him.

I've highlighted this. Why? Well, because the authorised version is making a point, isn't it? That it was Jesus' words that cleansed the leper. It was the power of his words that had made him whole.

You know the Wesley hymn? He speaks, and listening to his voice, new life, the dead receive. It was Jesus' words that made him whole. And that's what makes verse 41 all the more amazing.

It gives us an insight into the very heart of God. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. What's amazing about that? You might be saying to yourself, what's amazing?

Jesus touched him. He was a leper and Jesus touched him. Nobody touched lepers, no even wear barge pole. The leper could have wrote the words of the song, the words of the song from nobody's child.

[17 : 49] No mother's arms to hold me, or soothe me when I cry. Sometimes it gets so lonesome, I wish that I would die. Nobody touched him. Nobody touched him. And touch is so part of what makes us human, isn't it?

It's part of our human development. It's part of our human growth. Touch. I love to give my pals cuddles. Now I know that's no very Presbyterian of me, but it's definitely very human of me.

But some of you have been deprived of touch. Maybe you're married to a cold partner, or maybe you were raised by cold parents. Well friends, I'll be at the door. And if anybody on the way out wants a hug, and I mean you as men as well, I'll be happy to oblige.

But more importantly than that, Jesus wants to touch you with his word. Nobody touched a leper, not since the day the priest pronounced him unclean had anybody touched him. Why? Well, to touch the leper who was unclean was to make you unclean.

And that's why what Jesus does is so amazing. Jesus doesn't just want to cleanse the leper. He wants to humanize him again. And what Jesus was really saying when he touched him was this, I am prepared to become by choice what you are by nature.

[19 : 07] A man under the judgment of God in order to share with you what I have, freedom and life. Jesus showers the leper with divine compassion.

And after doing so, gives him in verses 43 to 45 a direct command. A direct command. 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.

These words, See that you say nothing to anyone, they would seem to go against all that we know about evangelism. But friends, these words were only meant to be taken in the first instance. Only in the first instance wasn't the leper to say anything to anyone.

Why? Well, I think for two reasons. Firstly, Jesus wanted him to go to the priest in order to fulfill the law and to offer the sacrifice that Moses had commanded in Leviticus 14.

[20 : 20] And what was to happen was this, that the fellow was to go to the priest, the priest was to come out and examine him. And once it had been declared that he was clean, the priest would take these two birds. He would kill one of them and he would drain the blood out of it and he would catch the blood in an earthen vessel.

He would then take the other wee bird and he would dip it in the blood and he would sprinkle the blood as well seven times on the leper. And then he would let the wee other birds with the blood on it, he would just let that go free.

Now I'm not sure if any priest had ever carried out this sacrifice because there's only two accounts recorded in the whole Old Testament of anyone being cleansed of leprosy. Naaman, who we spoke about earlier, and Miriam, Moses' sister.

As I said before, it was believed that God alone could cleanse leprosy. So if he went up to the priest and the cleansing was authenticated, then the cleanser also had to be authenticated.

Now why was this important? Well, what was the Jewish establishment waiting for? They were waiting for the Messiah to come, that God alone could cleanse leprosy. So if it was said that Jesus cleansed this fellow and that God alone could cleanse leprosy, well then it would be proof to them that the kingdom of God had broken in in the person of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 39] That what they had before them in the person of Jesus Christ was God Himself. It was to be a proof to them, a testimony to them. The second reason is this.

Jesus didn't want them to do what He did in verse 45. He began to talk freely about it and to spread the news. Now who could blame Him? Instead of running about shouting unclean, unclean, He could now shout I'm clean, I'm clean.

Now it's not that Jesus didn't want me to tell people, I mean, how could He hide it? But Jesus didn't want what followed in verse 45. And as a result, Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places.

And people were coming to Him from every quarter. Well, why didn't Jesus want that? His ministry was dead successful. People were coming to Him from everywhere. Well, look to chapter 1 in verse 14.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming or preaching the gospel of God. And again to verse 38 of chapter 1.

[22 : 46] Jesus had been healing people all night, casting out demons and stuff. And the next morning, He gets up and He goes away to a solitary place to pray. And they come looking for Him. I think it's Peter that comes looking for Him. And He says, Everybody's looking for you.

And Jesus said, Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also. For that is what I came for. Jesus' priority was to preach.

His priority was to preach the gospel. If you even look to chapter 2, in verse 2, He's in Capernaum and many people were gathered there so that there was no more room, not even at the door.

And He was preaching the Word to them. That was Jesus' priority. To heal people, not physically, but spiritually. Friends, we need to grasp this.

That that was the priority of Jesus. Not to heal people physically. Now God sometimes heals physically. That's His prerogative. But He doesn't always heal physically. The most important thing that God wants to heal us is spiritually.

[23 : 49] He wants to heal our souls. It was Dick Lucas who said, Jesus came to save people, not from that which sends them to hospital, but in order to save them from that which sends them to hell.

That's Jesus' priority, to preach the good news in order that people might be healed spiritually. But look, His priority was hampered by the leper's disobedience.

No longer could He openly enter towns and go into synagogues and preach and teach. He was hampered by the leper's disobedience. And friends, this shows us that the Lord's work needs to be done in the Lord's way according to the Lord's word.

But friends, I'm sure, let me, you can identify with a leper. So soon after Jesus making you clean, you go and disobey His direct commands and because of that, you hinder His ministry.

I wonder if the leper ever came back to Jesus and asked Him to make Him clean again for His disobedience. Maybe that's you as you sit here this afternoon. Maybe the Lord cleansed you some time ago, but you've disobeyed His direct commands and you've went and you've lived your life just how you wanted to live it.

[25 : 01] You maybe think to yourselves, folks wouldn't even know I was a Christian. I've blown it. There's no way back for me now. There's no way I could dare ask Jesus to clean me up again for the way I've disobeyed Him and let Him down.

Friend, well friend, what you need to hear this afternoon is this. He is willing. He is willing to make you clean. And friends, I don't know about you, but that's certainly a word for me.

I don't know what sort of a week you've had, but I blow it every day, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. He is willing to make us clean.

Well, all of this just leaves us with a question, doesn't it? How is it that Jesus can make us clean? Well, fifthly, finally, and quickly, a dying Christ.

A dying Christ. How does Jesus make us clean? He does it by trading places. Can you see it in the passage? Look to verse 40. Remember the leper?

[25 : 59] He was an outcast. He was to live outside the camp as Leviticus 13 had commanded. But look to verse 45. Jesus has traded places with him.

Jesus is now out in desolate places. He is now outside the camp. And friends, this is a pointer to Jesus' saving work. The writer to Hebrews writes, Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify, in order to make clean the people through his own blood.

And friends, all through Mark's gospel, Jesus comes into contact with people who were unclean. The leper, the demon-possessed, Gentiles, dead people, the women who were subject to bleeding.

These people were all unclean according to the law. And according to the law, if anybody came into contact with them, they would become unclean. But when Jesus comes into contact with them, Jesus doesn't become unclean.

They become clean. It's as if Jesus absorbs their unclean condition. And friends, when we begin to think like this, then the words of the prophet Isaiah begin to make sense.

[27 : 08] Surely, he took up our afflictions and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Friends, these verses speak of the Lord Jesus Christ and his role as the suffering servant of God who would become a saving substitute.

But where does all this take place? Where will this happen? Well, friends, it happens on the cross. That's what Jesus was accomplishing on the cross. My good friend Ewan McLeod once told me.

Terry, in order for something to become clean, something else has to become unclean. Now, when you wash your face in the morning with water, and I can see that some of you have done that today. When you wash your face with water, the water becomes unclean.

[28 : 15] Your face becomes clean. There's a transfer that takes place. Well, friends, very simply, that's the gospel. That's the glorious good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus, who was clean, became unclean on the cross so that people like you and me might in Him become clean. Friend, if you're here this afternoon and you would like to be clean from your deadly condition just like the leper, I've got good news for you.

Jesus can make you clean. If you come and you cry to Jesus just like the leper, you will find that just as He did with the leper, He will stretch out His hands and He will touch you with the grace of His forgiveness and He will say, I am one.

Be clean. Let us pray. To God be the glory.

Great things He has done. So loved He the world that He gave as His Son to the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

[29 : 34] Father, we thank You for a wonderful gospel such as this. In Jesus' name. Amen.