

1. **Audacity displayed: Who was the more audacious? The man forbidden to come near or the man forbidden to touch?**

1:40-41a

40 Now a leper I think it would be good for me to read a description of what leprosy is. This is written by a man named Kuizenga in 1927:

The disease which we today call leprosy generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original color. It gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly. As the sickness progresses the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch with deep furrows between the swelling, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers drop off or are absorbed. Toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By the time one can see the person in this pitiful condition is a leper, by the touch of a finger one can feel it. One can even smell it, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease-producing agent frequently also attacks the larynx, the leper's voice acquires a grating quality. His throat becomes hoarse and you can now not only see, feel, and smell the leper, but you can hear his rasping voice. And if you stay with him for some time you can even imagine a peculiar taste in your mouth, probably due to the odor.

came to Him,

*Leviticus 13:38 If a man also or a woman have in the skin of their flesh bright spots, even white bright spots; 39 then the priest shall look: ...44 He is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head. 45 And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and **shall cry, "Unclean, unclean."** 46 All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; **without the camp** shall his habitation be.*

Leviticus 5:3 Or if he touch the uncleanness of man, whatsoever uncleanness it be that a man shall be defiled withal, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty.

Know right off the bat, that Jesus was doing something that appeared to be wrong. Leprosy had a way of making people ceremonially and physically unclean.

We see from this passage the audacity of Jesus in touching a leper—knowing that it was permissible because of the soon to be “clean bill of health” is a distant first, but a first to a respectable “second” to the leper’s desperation: “If I die for my transgression in my misery, fine, but if I’m healed, there’s no transgression at all.”¹

imploing Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” I don’t have to have a grasp on “why?” to have a grasp on “who?”

- a. Matthew 13:35 records Jesus saying that He was revealing to the disciples that were “hidden from the foundation of the world.” These were hidden since Genesis 1:1. If the Lord owns the world then the mysteries that were hatched before the world was even created belong to Him. And there are things in here this morning that I don’t understand. There are mysteries that don’t always get revealed to the

¹ This is as mysterious as Jacob in Genesis 32 where it may have been deemed in appropriate to wrestle with an angel of the Lord or to disobey the angel of the Lord or to demand blessing from the angel of the Lord, but he was going to die at the hands of his brother anyway...so “if I die in my loneliness and hopelessness, let’s get on with it...but I might actually be blessed by taking this chance.”

Esther (“if I perish, I perish”) is another good example of desperation as seen in 2 Kings 7 with the four lepers.

general population. And then there are mysteries that get revealed to but a few. And you're going to have to, and I'm going to have to struggle with God over them.

- b. The tsunamis will not all make sense. The volcanoes will not all make sense. God's scheming in who sits in the White House or in the Senate or in the House, will not all make sense. Actions taken by our employers and by our spouses and by our children and by our parents won't always make sense to us. They'll be mysterious and we'll wonder, "How can God allow certain things to happen?" And God says, "They're My mysteries. And I'll let you know when I feel like it." We're going to have to allow Him to hold the mysteries until He decides to let us know what they are. Deuteronomy 29:29 says the mysteries belong to the Lord. Even, the mysteries of leprosy.
- c. And yet, I am very much concerned that I have friends in this room who feel as disgusting as this man or as disgusted on behalf of this man at a Jesus Who is "willing to heal" and, in fact, doesn't heal everybody...or perhaps more profound, why a God of love would allow leprosy to begin with. Philosophically, we could do an entire series on the problem of evil, but it doesn't change that He is the One that heals. And each instance of healing, physically or spiritually, is an exceptional act of Christ and is so unrequired that it is absurdly gracious and greatly audacious.

2. Compassion portrayed

1:41b-42

Then Jesus, moved with compassion, Today, I may not be able to heal a leper, but I can be moved with compassion. **stretched out His hand and touched him,** we can't imagine this, can we? As soon as somebody gets the bug, "Oh man!" and we're swabbing everything down. We keep the family home from church in case somebody at church gets sick or is sick or was sick! If we have one person in the house who is sick...we do something we haven't done all week: We all stay home from the day's activities! Granny is sick and we keep mama home to wipe her left nostril and dad stays home to wipe the right nostril, and Johnny and Stella and Bertha and Bert and Gerta and Ethel all stay home to make sure mama and dad don't need help fluffing granny's pillow. With all of our selfishness going around, it's no wonder we: 1. Don't have compassion; 2. Don't have the courage to touch a sick person. Spurgeon's autobiography relays his time of ministry in London during a cholera outbreak:

"I recollect, when first I came to London, how anxiously people listened to the gospel, for the cholera was raging terribly. There was little scoffing then. All day, and sometimes all night long, I went about from house to house, and saw men and women dying, and, oh, how glad they were to see my face! When many were afraid to enter their houses lest they should catch the deadly disease, we who had no fear about such things found ourselves most gladly listened to when we spoke of Christ and of things Divine. And now, again, is the minister's time; and now is the time for all of you who love souls. You may see men more alarmed than they are already; and if they should be, mind that you avail yourselves of the opportunity of doing them good..."²

stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." And the reason? Because Our Lord is compassionate.

3. Irony conveyed...

1:43-45

43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, Now, understand that this was going to be unusual. The last time this happened was 600 years ago...and it was under the ministry of Elisha—a protégé of Elijah's. So, remember, the last time a Rabbi

² C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1834-1854*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati; Chicago; St. Louis: Curts & Jennings, 1898), 371-372.

or prophet is recorded in Scripture as saying “follow me” was when Elijah the prophet called “Elisha” the prophet and Elisha then burned his plows (see notes on verses 15-20). Now, the last time we have seen anybody healed of leprosy was when Elisha was found “performing this miracle” earlier in his ministry. Clearly, then, you can see that Jesus is once again being compared to Elijah.

This man was delayed in his obedience, but for what reason? Perhaps the answer to this is the reason for the parenthetical material to begin with.³ 2 Kings 7:1-10 finds four lepers who are put in a situation where they placed in a situation of desperation and see death in lawfulness or in seeking the help of those who could kill them and then find it as a sort of crime to keep the news of their fortune to themselves. With all this attention on Elijah and Elisha, I am almost certain Mark wants you to think of that story when you see this one. Lepers who happen upon good fortune can’t keep good news a secret and they find such good fortune when they become desperate enough to touch a clean man and become, themselves, helped. Let it be said that you don’t have to be cleansed long to know what it is to be clean. So, tell somebody.

as a testimony to them.” Imagine the **testimony** these priests would have beheld when they had not seen a “leper” made clean until this very man walked in among them. Oh, the testimony, portrayed before the priests...how powerful it would have been. Jesus did more than a gaping Moses (who saw his leprous sister in Numbers 12) and a distancing Elisha (2 Kings 5)—He sent a healed Hebrew back to the temple. This is your Jesus and mine: surprising the unimpressed and touching the untouchable. I think that if being cleaned makes me this passionate towards Him, then may I be shown the ways I am yet the leper.

Consider the reality that this man had to take a trip to Jerusalem just to be a testimony to Jesus. Consider the trip. What jovialness he would have felt. This makes the command of verses 43 and 44 so very comical. Certainly Jesus knew what would take place, but to tell a man that has been an outcast for years to simply and secretly take a trip from Galilee to Jerusalem without telling anybody what happened to him is, well, rather strange. The change in condition for this man furthermore makes verse 45 rather expected.

Now, consider how strange it is to think that you will go throughout your life, freed from sin and being freed from sin; free from fear of death and free from fear of life; sins died for; a sinner paid for; and you travel through years and hours and you find other things to talk about on your way? Imagine talking more to your neighbors about your favorite ball team or favorite driver or favorite politician more than your Jesus Who touched you when nobody else would and loved you when nobody else could! Preposterous!

³ From Matthew 8:1, it becomes pretty obvious that this episode is recorded out of order from true chronology (More notes in my commentary on Matthew 8:1-4 in the commentary on Matthew.). When you put verse 39’s record before 2:1, it becomes pretty clear that this episode is something that Mark wanted conveyed, but that order wasn’t as important to Mark as the theme of “immediacy” (used for the 8th and 9th times in these 43 verses; verses 42 and 43).