

He is Willing!

Call to Worship: Isaiah 55:1-7

Hymn #22 (supp)- *How Great Thou Art*

1st Scripture: Luke 15

Hymn #402 - *Amazing Grace (Stanzas 1&5)*

2nd Scripture: Matthew 8:1-4

Hymn #34 (supp) - *As the Deer*

Hymn #178- *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*

Introduction:

The Lord Jesus had just come down from the mountain, where He had given that most famous sermon, called the "Sermon on the Mount," beginning with the glorious beatitudes. And by the time you come through that powerful sermon, you are beginning to question whether anyone could ever attain to such a righteousness described therein; a necessary inward righteousness, evidencing that one is a true child of God. For there we learn, that our God is after a religion of the heart and not a religion made up of mere outward show and appearance, which the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day had. One must have a righteousness that "exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees," if they were to enter the kingdom of heaven (vs. 20).

For, it is within this famous sermon that we learn that murder begins *not* with the act itself, but with hatred in the heart. And adultery begins with a mere look, as one would simply lust after another person in the hidden place of the heart. Moving on, you find our Lord concerned with motives, saying that all Christian services and giving are not to be done in such a way as to be seen, but privately unto the Lord, and the true child of God must learn to love *not* only those who treat them well, but enemies and those who hate and spitefully use them and persecute them. For, there are many, who when standing before the judgment seat of Christ, will be rejected and considered unknown by Him, because they have failed to exercise such unnatural fruits.

The way of the Christian is a narrow way, beginning through a narrow gate, which few find. For broad is the gate and thoroughly populated is the way, which leads to destruction, and

there are many, even among professing Christians, who enter it. By the time you come to the end of this Sermon on the Mount, friends, if we are honest with ourselves and our fallen humanity, we must firmly state, that these teachings call us to be everything that we are *not*.

My natural sense; the natural direction of my deceptive heart tells me things like, "You can look, but you cannot touch, regarding adultery." And, "I ought to be able to hate those who hate and mistreat me, and to avenge myself upon those who have hurt me in some way. I only love those who love me and do good to me. I treasure the things in this world and am unwilling to sacrifice them for the sake of following Christ. What's the use of doing good deeds in such a way as to avoid the praise of others?" "I want a religion that rests on a mere profession and a prayer, without requiring any sincere and sacrificial commitment from me...etc." The Sermon on the Mount is convicting, isn't it? It gets right to the heart; it does not sugar coat anything; it tells it like it is, and one would have to do all kinds of exegetical back flips to make it say something different than what it truly says. In one sentence, this sermon tells me that my entire life has to be turned upside down; I have to be changed from the inside out; my values, my ideals, my goals, my desires...all have to be redirected and changed, if I am ever to become what Christ here states is necessary for those who wish to enter the Kingdom of God. In short, I may as well go back in the womb of my mother and start over somehow, because I need to be reborn. I need to be born again, and that, with a divine infusion of spiritual life that I just do not naturally have, nor could I have, even if I came out of my mother's womb anew, having these principles taught to me from birth. I am so naturally wired against these teachings, that I need a new will with new desires and new motives...I need a new heart.

By the time you come to our main text here in chapter eight, you are so sobered by the teachings of Christ, that you might begin to believe that there is no mercy to be shown anyone. Everyone is hopelessly going to hell at this point, so why continue on with Matthew's account of the Gospel? But then we read these words that speak of what happens when our Lord comes down from the mountain, and the whole package comes together. In our Lord's dealings with a helpless, desperate leper, we find the very gateway that leads us into the type of lifestyle described in the Sermon on the Mount. We find hope, because we are compelled to look *outside* of ourselves for everything spoken of in the previous few chapters. Indeed, such fruits described, must come out of us; we cannot write off the Sermon on the Mount, and assume that Jesus is

simply driving us to the place that we would say, "Well, we cannot do such things, but Christ did them for us, and that is what matters." No, while we do look outside of ourselves for the grace to work into and progress in such a righteousness as the one described by our Lord on the mountain, indeed, these works; these changes must actually come out of *us*. In fact, they evidence the reality that grace has met us in Christ. But the good news is that chapter 8 (and the rest of Scripture for that matter) shows us how such unnatural realities can and do take place. The God who speaks worlds into existence; the God who raises the dead, is also in the business of creating new hearts in sinners and justifying them by His free grace in Christ! And while our God utterly hates hypocrisy, He is more than willing to give us that which we can never possibly obtain, in and of ourselves. However, it is only when we begin to see ourselves *spiritually* as this leper understood himself *physically*, that we will find ourselves accessing the power and grace of God that could bring about such a miraculous inward change.

I. The Lepers Plight (Read vs. 1-2)

One of the most debilitatingly painful and shameful diseases is the disease of leprosy. So utterly gross and shameful is this disease that unlike every other illness and disease in Scripture, far more often than not, one who overcame leprosy was said to be "cleansed" rather than "healed." While leprosy is hardly something you will ever hear of in our country, it is still presently found in several other countries throughout the world, especially where conditions are very unsanitary. And especially in its more advanced stages, leprosy can be easily identified on those who are missing or have very deformed body parts. Hands and feet are missing digits and look somewhat nobbish. Open or raw sores and beneath the skin infections are also present on many suffering with leprosy. Leprosy is a flesh eating disease that gradually destroys a person. Again, depending upon what stage you are in, the disease is very uncomfortable, painful and debilitating. It is also incurable. What I mean by this is not that no one has ever been cured of the disease, but rather, there is no direct remedy for it. Leprosy must go away on its own...or better yet, an act of God must cure it.

Though, in most cases, a simple touch would probably not immediately spread the disease, it is contagious, which is why you will hear of leper colonies, where those who have the

disease would live together, outside of society, where they cannot spread the illness. To be a leper in the Old Testament community of Israel, meant that you were unclean. And therefore, one having leprosy had to live outside of the city; outside of the fellowship of God's people, among other unclean lepers. In fact, if you were a leper, and someone was anywhere even remotely near you, you had to cover your face and yell aloud, "Unclean! Unclean!", as a means of warning them to stay away. Needless to say, the disease was debilitating and shameful, unlike any other disease.

Perhaps the best way to describe the condition of a leper is "desperate." A leper was a hopeless outcast with a gradual death sentence within him, and the only hope that he had was that just maybe someday, God would intercede and remove his shame and defilement by cleansing him of the disease. To imagine for a moment that there was anyone who could relieve him of his condition; anyone who could ease the pain; anyone who could take away his shame and bring him back into life in the fellowship and society of God's people...was a dream beyond all dreams for the leper. And so, to hear of this Jesus, who has been both able and willing to heal people, even with such incurable diseases...instilled great hope in the leper of our text, especially as he realized that he had the chance to access Him!

Needless to say, when Jesus came down from that mountain and the leper saw Him among the multitudes, he came to Jesus with both a thoroughly humble and desperate spirit. There was nothing casual or lax about his entrance, was there? We are told that the leper came and worshiped him; more than likely, he fell down before Jesus, prostrate with his face to the ground as a desperate beggar. And then, with a statement of faith and humility, lacking any inkling of presumption, he calls out, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean!" Not, "Lord, make me clean...I deserve it. Look what I have suffered, Lord!" Not, "Lord, people say you are able to clean me; if that is the case, please do so." No, "Lord, if You are willing; if You so desire, I know that you have the power to cleanse me of this dreadful disease." Humility, desperation, faith...all packaged into one desperate plea! And how does our Lord respond? How does the One who just unbudgingly preached the words of the Sermon on the Mount, respond to this desperate leper's request?

II. He is Willing! (Read vs. 3)

"I am willing; be cleansed." This is our Lord's response to the one who comes to Him in humble desperation; to the one who recognizes the gravity of his depraved condition, Christ's ability to change that condition, and his desperate need for Christ to personally change his condition. And friends, what this leper realized and understood about his physical leprosy and his desperate need of Christ, gets to the very heart of the Gospel, and to the very access point of every grace and power that are necessary to begin to obey the teachings that Christ brought forth in the Sermon on the Mount. You see, the very downfall of the Pharisees and the scribes, who were very outwardly religious, but whose righteousness was infinitely inadequate to bring them to God, was that they were proud and self-righteous. They did not understand the nature of their leprous, soul eating condition, and so, their entire system of religion was a grossly, contaminated shell; indeed, it looked so clean and pure on the outside, but on the inside it was utterly defiled and corrupt. They had not the humility or the desperation, that would bring them to Christ with this leper to be cleansed. No, they in fact, despised the leper, rather than identified with him. And that was their utter downfall.

And friends, this is where our text finds its most pronounced relevance for every single person in this room. You might say, "Well, great, Jesus healed a leper. He was such a good Man to do that," and then be tempted to move on and miss the whole message here. Indeed, as was the case with all of our Lord's miracles, this miraculous cleansing attested to our Lord's Messianic office and authority, but there is so much more to be seen here. You see, the outward, physical disease of leprosy is meant to give us a picture of the inward, spiritual reality of the natural condition of man. What this man was *outwardly*, we are all naturally *inwardly*.

1) Even as leprosy eats away at the flesh and gradually destroys the body, sin eats away at the soul and gradually destroys it. Sin is like an infectious disease of the soul. It is there in seed form, right from the time you are conceived, and it only grows worse and worse as you age and begin to think and practice the very things that God hates. You disobey your parents, you lie, you cheat, you hate, you steal, you lust, you fight, you grow proud, you covet, and you dishonor God in all manner of inward and outward ways. Sin is a disease of the soul that destroys a person right up until the time you die, and then, if left as is, it bans you forever from the good presence of God, and carries you to hell, where you experience nothing but divine

wrath forever and ever and ever. It is that serious. You look at the leper and shriek in disgust; you pity him, but do you fail to see that what he is *outwardly*, you are *inwardly*, in the sight of God?

2) The leper is barred from the fellowship of God's people. He is ceremonially unclean unless a divine intervention takes place and brings about his cleansing of the disease. And likewise, sin keeps us from the true fellowship that exists among the people of God, unless we are cleansed of our sins, by divine intervention. And even as most; the great majority of lepers die as lepers, most; the great majority of sinners die in their sins.

3) Leprosy humbles a person and makes him desperate. The condition is obvious and those who have it are shamed and full of desperation, wishing to be healed, so they could live normal lives. Sadly, because sin is a spiritual disease of the soul, most hardly recognize it or they deny that it even exists. They hide from it and cling to a form of religion or self-righteousness, as if to deny their condition. But some; indeed few, but some, come to understand the utter defilement of their sin nature; they are compelled to face who they really are, and how terribly wicked they are in the sight of God. And this brings them to their knees in utter desperation. They realize that they have grossly offended their God. They understand that they bear His judgment and are on their way to hell. They realize that there is nothing (no good deed or work or religious practice) that they could do to change what they are and what they have done. And so, they are desperate. They are desperate for a salvation that could come from somewhere else, outside of themselves. They are desperate for mercy and grace and help from the divine. And then, like the leper in our text, they learn of a Christ; they learn of the Son of God, who has come into the world for the very purpose of taking away the sins of the world. They find hope for cleansing and salvation in the Christ who took the sins of the world upon His own back, nailed them to the cross in His own body, and buried them in His own tomb, only to rise again (without the sin) unto the justification of His people.

And coming to this realization, the repentant sinner falls on His knees in prayer, before this Christ, pleading, "God be merciful to me the sinner!" "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!" "I cannot be what God rightly expects of me, but you can justify me; you can utterly remove my mess and make me what I ought to be...if You are willing!"

And they come to experience the gracious response, given to the leper, "I am willing, be cleansed!" You see, friends, Christ is always willing; we are never ever deserving, but He is always willing, to the humble, desperate sinner, who comes to Him for grace. The question remains then...have you ever come to Christ in such a broken and humble state? Have you ever come to him, laying aside your own righteousness, laying aside all of the religious traditions and practices that you have ignorantly trusted in, laying aside every other hope and trust, only to fall before Him in desperation, willing to turn away from your sins now, to follow Him, pleading for His saving mercy? If not, won't you do that this morning? Won't you join us fellow beggars here; come as you are, seek Christ with all of your heart; plead for His mercy, and you will find Him more than willing! "No one comes to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, but whoever comes to Me, I will by no means cast out." So come! Come to Christ my friends!

[I want to quickly dispel the whole notion of a desperate God pleading for sinners to come, and convert that to desperate sinners pleading with a gracious God to forgive--God does not need us; God does not need you! You need Him. You would be the privileged one in every case]!

[The struggling Christian still finds the same gracious Christ today as well!]

AMEN!!!

The Lord's Supper