



Mark 1:40-45 NIV

Healing and Compassion

Leprosy! In Biblical times one of the worst diseases. For a Jew, it was the ultimate in uncleanness.

Here was a man who had leprosy. It's a horrible disease. And as leprosy advances a leper becomes utterly repulsive --- both to himself and to others. The society in which Jesus lived went to great lengths to separate the clean from the unclean. In Leviticus, we find that leprosy is the most serious of all forms of uncleanness. Leprosy required the person to live outside the camp, to be utterly cut off from the congregation of Israel. Lepers had to live in exile from the mainstream of society; excluded from the sacrifices, religious festivals and worship services. In many ways, lepers were not only separated from God's people; they were separated from God. The leper's life was one of isolation and loneliness: Without love; without hope; Forever!

And so, the leper comes to him, and our lesson story begins.

Notice that Jesus doesn't come to the leper --- the leper comes to Jesus. It's also significant what the leper says to Jesus. He doesn't say, "Heal my disease." He says, "Make me clean." He's saying, "I want to worship God!" "I want to be a part of God's people!" "I want to sit in the synagogue and sing with the others!" "I want to touch people!" "If you are willing, you can make me clean." His words tell us three things about this leper.

First of all, he knows he can't heal himself or make himself clean. Secondly, there is a faith in Christ's power. Thirdly, there is a submission to God's will. ***"Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed."*** (Mark 1:41)

Jesus granted the leper's request right then and there. We read Jesus was "moved with compassion". What that means is that Jesus hurt when people around him hurt. The fact that Jesus cared about people while he was on this earth gives us the assurance that he cares about us right now. But there's something else in this story that I want you to notice: "Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him."

And what was the result of Jesus' touch? **Verse 42: *"Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed."***

Jesus healed the disease and he cleansed the leper. He healed him --- that's physical. And he was cleansed --- that's spiritual. This man wanted to worship God; he wanted to be a part of God's people; he wanted to be able to touch others; and he wanted to have a close relationship with the people of God, and Jesus made all that possible.

Come away from this lesson with an appreciation for the compassion Jesus showed and a commitment to be a person of compassion as we deal with the lepers all around us, because, in our contemporary society, we also have our "unclean" people. If you talk with someone who has cancer, AIDS, or maybe, those in a nursing home, you will likely find that these are people who feel like that leper Jesus met --- very alone and very forgotten by

the mainstream of society. It's not just the physical suffering, it's the isolation, the loneliness, the feeling that nobody wants to be around them. When's the last time you made the effort to reach out and touch someone like that?

As the body of Christ, as the family of God, we need to be a people of compassion...but much more than that these folks just need to know that someone cares.