

CHRIST HAS POWER AND COMPASSION

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. 14 Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” 15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

A man with leprosy came to Jesus. To clean in the Bible in the sense of “ceremonially clean” didn’t really have anything to do with soap and water or deodorant or even a comb or a brush, but rather that a person was whole, not bleeding, not wounded. A person with a bleeding wound could not come to make a sacrifice or give an offering in the temple; they could not participate in the ceremonies, therefore they were called ceremonially unclean. In the case of leprosy, which is any of a number of skin diseases, God was especially specific and clean in the Law of Moses: Lepers were forbidden from approaching the Lord in his temple.

Being unclean would keep you from worshiping at the temple, and so it would also keep you from making a sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. Third, it would keep you from having contact with your family, and in fact, it would keep you from living near any people apart from other lepers.

This man showed right away that he had faith in Jesus. “If you are willing,” he said, “You can make me clean.” What does it mean to “be willing”? This is the heart of the doctrine of God’s Will. The holy Will of God is God’s desire and purpose for his creation. He acts within and for the sake of his creation, especially man, the crown of creation, for our good and for the good and the advancement of his Church.

So consider what this leper was saying when he asked, “If you are willing,” that is, “If it is your holy will.” On the one hand, he was asking that Jesus would heal him, but only if Jesus was willing. If the Lord was not willing, that is, if this healing was not part of God’s holy will, this leper was saying that he would happily remain suffering in his agonizing leprosy

for the rest of his life, up to the point of his excruciating death, because it was the will of God.

It never even occurred to this man that Jesus might not be able to cure. He knew that Jesus had the power. Therefore he doesn't say, "If you can," but only, "If you are willing."

These are the very same words used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed that the Father might take his cup of suffering away from him. Jesus left it up to the holy will of God that Father by saying, "Yet not my will, but your will be done." This is precisely what this leper was saying.

We must say the same thing when we pray: Not that God conforms to our will, but that he would do and accomplish everything in his will. This might mean that, like Jesus, we would be subject to God saying "No" to our request.

This was not the answer that Jesus gave to this man with leprosy. He said, "I am willing," or more doctrinally accurate: "It is my holy will that you would be cleansed of your leprosy." Jesus also touched the man, not because his touch is required for the miracle. Jesus touched the man simply to demonstrate that from that moment, the man was no longer a leper. He was healed. If leprosy or a man with leprosy cannot come into contact with God, then for God to touch the man must mean that his leprosy is gone.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus showed this many times, touching people who were blind, deaf, mute, crippled, bleeding, demon-possessed, and covered in leprosy, to show that they were healed and clean.

And the cleansing of his man didn't depend on his faith, but on the power and the will of Jesus. In fact, in the chapter before this, Jesus healed a man who was possessed by a demon. There was a man who was not exhibiting his faith, but was healed only by the power of God, which truly is how we are all healed and cleansed of our sins.

In this miracle, consider how leprosy separated this man from God, from true worship, and even came between him and the forgiveness of his sins. This particular man understood his true relationship with God, and was not terrified about his sins because clearly he put his trust in Jesus as Lord, but that wasn't understood by everyone.

This Gospel account is not an allegory, but understand the similarity between this man's leprosy and our sinfulness. Our sins separate us from God. Our sins make us unclean, unworthy of approaching God. And only in Christ is there cleansing from our sins.

After Jesus healed the man, he told him to show himself to the priests. The priests had no jurisdiction over leprosy. They couldn't heal it. They could only examine the man and declare that yes, indeed, he was clean; he was healed. The role of the Old Testament priesthood was to be a type of Christ, not to do the work of Christ. Only Jesus could and can truly heal us of our sins. His sacrifice is the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus asks the man not to tell anyone about this, but only to go and show himself to the priests. The miracles of Jesus caused jealousy among the leaders of the Jews, especially the priests and the teachers. Rather than stir them up, Jesus wanted the man to quietly go and do what was required by the law of Moses for a cleansed leper, which was to show himself to the priests and make the appropriate offering to God.

But Luke says, "Yet, news about him spread all the more." The "Yet" tells us that despite Jesus' mandate and despite the leper's obedience, news spread. People who knew the man, talked about the man. And the crowds came looking for Jesus, to hear him, and to be healed.

So this Gospel account, and Luther says, "is the beginning, middle and end of everything good and of all salvation." How is this? Because it shows that Jesus Christ is all goodness, all love, and all grace. This can be said about no one else. If it included anyone else, it would no longer be the Gospel. For the Gospel builds up our faith and confidence alone upon the Rock of Jesus Christ.

So this Gospel text also teaches us the difference between being saved by faith and the false doctrine of salvation by works or self-worthiness. The leper was willing to remain in his terrible leprosy if that had been the will of Christ, but the will of Christ is to be compassionate, and in his compassion, he saved the man. The man did not save himself. There was nothing in the man that was good or worthy; he was covered in leprosy the way the you and I are covered by our sins. But Jesus spoke, Jesus willed, and the man was healed. So also Jesus spoke: "It is finished," and we are healed.

This Gospel lesson also teaches us to be content with our place in life. If God wills that I be who I am, and that I have the struggles I have, then in must be according to his plan and to this will that I endure these things, for his glory. So praise be to God for giving us the blessings he gives, but also the trials he gives. The trials and tests he gives to you and me he gives because he loves us. And we thank him, we keep praying to him, and keep saying: Not my will, but your will be done. And the peace of God (etc.). Amen.