

# Touching the Untouchable

Message 8

10.15.17

Mark -The Essential Gospel

Mark 1:40–45 (NIV)

<sup>40</sup> A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

<sup>41</sup> Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" <sup>42</sup> Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

<sup>43</sup> Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: <sup>44</sup> "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." <sup>45</sup> Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

1. We all have things in our lives that we feel are untouchable, unsuitable, or unforgivable.

A. Life is messy.

1. It is full of intense moments.

2. Missed opportunities.

3. Failures and mistakes.

4. And the culmination of decades of mistakes, failures, and sin can often lead people to believe they are beyond hope or beyond forgiveness.

B. One of the most remarkable aspects of Jesus' ministry is his love for the "messed up".

1. What scared away other people attracted Jesus.
2. He wasn't afraid to be found ministering to tax-collectors, prostitutes, or needy people.
3. In Mark 1:40-45, we see Jesus once again helping someone whose life was terribly messed up and broken.

## 2. A man with leprosy came to Jesus.

A. Leprosy is a broad term in Scripture.

1. This one English word is used to describe many types of skin diseases.
2. Just like we often use the generic word Cancer to refer to many different kinds, the word leprosy could be any number of skin diseases.
3. Regardless of the man's specific disease, one thing was common:
4. He had been separated from his community and from the Temple.

B. When God was creating Israel to be a Holy people among the nations, he gave them a set of laws.

1. Those Laws are found in everyone's favorite book, Leviticus.
2. The purpose of those laws was primarily to keep Israel holy and the tabernacle holy.
3. Anything "abnormal" would make someone "unclean" and separate that person from the community and from worship for a period of time.
4. **Leviticus 13:1-3** (NIV)

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>2</sup> "When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a shiny spot on their skin that may be a defiling skin disease, they must be brought to Aaron the priest or*

*to one of his sons who is a priest. <sup>3</sup> The priest is to examine the sore on the skin, and if the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be more than skin deep, it is a defiling skin disease. When the priest examines that person, he shall pronounce them ceremonially unclean.*

**Leviticus 13:45 (NIV)**

<sup>45</sup> “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’

C. This man had been pronounced unclean.

1. Imagine coming to your pastor and showing them a spot on your skin.

a. That spot is growing and potentially infectious.

b. Your pastor isn’t a doctor and he isn’t a miracle worker.

c. All that person can do is to declare you “unclean” or “unfit” for life at church or life in public.

d. At this declaration, you can’t go home to kiss your spouse or kids goodbye.

e. Instead you immediately have to move out of town and when you do come in town, you have to announce to everyone “I’m Unclean”. “I’m unfit”. Don’t touch me or you will become like me.

2. This was the fate of this leper.

a. No hope.

b. No future.

c. He was untouchable, unlovable, and irredeemable.

D. Perhaps this morning you can relate.

1. You don’t know how God can love you.

2. You are pretty sure that you have sinned too much and fallen too far for God or anyone else to love you again.

3. If you feel this way, or know someone who does, I want to show you what Jesus did for this man and what he has done for you.

### 3. "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

A. These are remarkable words from a desperate man.

1. This disease has taken away this man's pride, life, and future.

2. There is no treatment available.

3. If Jesus doesn't heal him, there is no hope.

B. The leper believes that Jesus can heal him.

1. He has heard the news.

2. He has maybe even seen a miracle from afar off.

3. The man truly believes that Jesus CAN heal him.

4. But will he?

C. "It is sometimes easier to believe in God's power than in his mercy."

1. I believe this sums up a lot of us.

2. We believe Jesus can heal us, but we aren't sure if he will.

3. We cannot know in this world why some people are healed and others aren't.

4. But what we can know and believe is in the mercy and love of Jesus.

5. When we pray, we are not praying to a dictator but to a loving God who loves us beyond comprehension.

6. And that love should drive us to come before Jesus with all of our care and needs and trust Him with them.

#### 4. What to do with Jesus' response?

A. The NIV says Jesus was indignant.

1. ESV says Jesus was moved with pity.
2. KJV says Jesus was moved with compassion.
3. Why would different translations translate this so differently?

B. The New Testament was written in Greek.

1. But the original writings, called autographs, are no longer with us.
  - a. What we have are very faithful and careful copies of the original Greek.
  - b. There are multiple, ancient, copies of passages like what we read today.
2. But sometimes, a word will be different from one manuscript to the other.
3. Part of the job of theologians and even pastors is to discern what is the original meaning.

C. The word that seems to be the most original is that Jesus was angry.

1. But why is Jesus angry? Who was he angry with?
2. Was he angry at the man, the prayer, or something else?

D. Earlier we find Jesus casting out demons.

1. Jesus is healing the sick and never is Jesus shown to be mad at someone for asking for healing.
2. It doesn't seem fitting that Jesus is mad at the man or the prayer that he prayed.

E. What does make sense is that Jesus is angry at the effect of sin.

1. God did not create disease.

2. God did not create us to become sick.
3. Sickness, disease, and death entered humanity when sin did.
4. So it makes sense that, in this instance, Jesus became angry not at the man but at the source of all sickness and disease, sin.
5. It doesn't make God happy to see his people sick or hurting.
  - a. It makes him sad.
  - b. It makes him angry.
  - c. And it led God to send his son to redeem us from the curse of sin and death.
  - d. And this process of redemption didn't start at the cross, but it started when Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper.

## 5. Question: Why touch when a word would do?

A. The Bible portrays God has having the power to accomplish whatever he wants just by speaking the word.

1. God spoke the universe into existence.
2. Certainly, Jesus could heal with just a word.
3. So why did Jesus touch an untouchable person?

B. Jesus wanted to show how far he would go to make people whole.

Jesus was willing to incur defilement (as they saw it), so that the defiled leper might be made clean. The whole of the gospel is here in a nutshell: Christ redeems us from the curse by becoming under a curse for our sake (Gal. 3:13).<sup>ii</sup>

1. Remember, to touch a person with a skin disease was to become like that person and to share in their curse.
2. Jesus touched the leper as a sign pointing forward to the day when Jesus was take upon himself the curse of sin and die in our place.

3. Jesus used this man's brokenness to illustrate God's power.

## 6. Jesus wasn't done with his power display.

A. After healing him, Jesus told the leper to go and show himself to the priest.

1. The story says that the leper didn't obey.
2. And this messed up some of Jesus' plans.
3. But why did Jesus make this request?

B. First, the Law was still in effect.

1. Jesus and this leper were both Jews.
2. The same law in Leviticus that made the leper unclean also said that if his condition changed he was to go show himself to the priest so the priest could declare him clean.
3. Question: Who had the power to heal? Jesus or the priest?

C. The second reason the leper was to go show the priest that he had been healed was to testify of the power of Jesus!

1. "In this story we see a definite contrast between Jesus, who can make someone clean, and the priest, who can only declare someone to be clean. Clearly Jesus is seen as superior."<sup>iii</sup>
2. Jesus could do what the priest couldn't.
  - a. Jesus could do what doctors couldn't.
  - b. Jesus could do what religion couldn't
  - c. Jesus healed the man and made him clean.
3. The leper was supposed to serve as testimony before the priests of who Jesus was.
  - a. The leper was meant to be an example of how Jesus, the Son of God, can make broken things whole, unclean things clean, and dead things alive.
  - b. Yet in his excitement, he disobeyed.

## 6. The same Jesus who was willing to reach out to a leper, is still willing to reach out to you.

A. No matter who you are or what you have done, Jesus is willing.

1. Jesus is still reaching out to the untouchable, unsuitable, and unforgivable.
2. Jesus is still reaching out to your hidden sin, public failures, and your private struggles.
3. Jesus is still here, saying "I'm willing, be clean".

B. Maybe you don't feel clean.

1. The messiness of life has become part of who you are.
2. The uncleanness follows you wherever you go.
3. Don't take the curse with you.
4. Jesus has already taken your curse upon him and paid the price.

Piano and Elders



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<sup>i</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 630.

<sup>ii</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 119.

<sup>iii</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 103.