

Spiritual Lepers

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"A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said.

⁴¹Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" ⁴²Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed."

(Mark 1:40-42)

During Jesus' lifetime the most disfiguring and ghastly disease of its time was leprosy—a foul, highly-contagious, and usually fatal condition that was looked upon with terrible dread and repulsion. If anyone dared to touch a leper, he was almost sure to catch that hideous disease. Leprosy was caused by unclean habits.

The Book of Leviticus explains how they treated this disease. When someone thought they might have it they immediately went to a priest. According to Jewish law, leprosy had to be healed by God via a priest, rather than by a physician.

Unfortunately the only way to stop the spread of this disease was to isolate its victims. Leviticus 13:46 commands, **"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."** The leper could no longer associate with the pure; he was cast into permanent exile, apart from the rest of his family and community.

He lived as an outcast, disfigured by a disease running rampant through his body. He ripped his clothes to express his extreme agony and anguish. He cried out for the mercy of God while his head was bare to express intense humiliation. He covered his upper lip and cried aloud, **"Unclean! Unclean!"** so that the undefiled would stay away and not risk contamination.

I can imagine how these lepers must have felt. They were looked upon with horror, torn away from those they loved, suddenly cast out of the camp never to return. People fled when they heard them coming, shouting, **"Unclean! Unclean!"** Can you imagine the desperate state of hopelessness that consumed a newly-diagnosed leper, knowing he had no future other than more torment, further disfigurement and certain death?

In Scripture, leprosy symbolizes sin, which infects the human spirit and spreads through our souls to defile the very fiber of our lives. Even today we have many spiritual lepers who have isolated themselves from the church because they are unclean. They are defiled by sin yet they feel abandoned and forsaken, with no one but themselves to blame. They want to be healed, and they are ready to repent. But the question they're asking is this: is there a cure?

We do not have to look any further than the life of Jesus for the answer. As the man with leprosy fell at the beautiful feet of our precious Master, and begged for mercy and healing, his face was probably severely disfigured and frightening, while the smell of rotting flesh filled the air and repulsed those nearby. Yet, Jesus' gentle face shined with compassion and empathy, when He reached out and touched him—an unthinkable act! Why risk associating with this unclean man, let alone touching his extremely contagious skin? Yet *He did!* Moved with deep compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him, and he was instantly made whole, ready to be restored to those he so desperately loved and missed!

Perhaps you feel much like that unclean leper. Because of disobedience you have become a spiritual leper and others are repulsed by the smell of your carnal flesh. You feel ugly inside, and are sick at heart that you no longer have a niche in the family of God. You are an outcast and live outside the camp. You are a defeated warrior lying curled up and overwhelmed on the battlefield.

If that describes you, I'm calling you out of your isolation; you're not to dwell alone another day! I see your pain and how your soul has become vexed because of the poor choices you've made. You contaminated your soul with the filth of this world and now you feel you can never be accepted again. And though you've asked God to forgive you, you believe you are too far gone to ever be forgiven, too lost to be found, and so you cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" You expect others to run away in disgust, because you're a spiritual leper.

But wait... I can see the scarred hand of our Precious Lord tenderly reaching out to you. I see the tears of compassion as He weeps for you. His teardrops fall gently upon your head as you lower your eyes in shame, afraid to even meet His gaze. The foul smell of your past still lingers upon you when He lifts your chin, and with eyes full of love He looks deep into your soul and says these amazing words... "Because you have repented and come back to Me, I have made you clean! I have made all things new. You are no longer a leper or an outcast ... instead you are my **child!**"