

Transforming Touch

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[0:00] So tonight we're going to be in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel and we're going to be focusing on verses 40 through 45.

! And that's when Jesus comes to John to be baptized.

And following Jesus' period of temptation after the baptism, we see Mark's first direct quote from Jesus. And that's in Mark 1, verses 14 and 15.

And those verses say, Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.

Jesus then calls his first disciples, and then we find Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. And one of those healed was Simon Peter's mother-in-law.

[1:08] So we're going around and look at Mark 1, 32. It says, At evening when the sun had set, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And if you remember, the disciples liked that popularity.

They wanted Jesus to stay and capitalize on his fame. And when Jesus disappeared one morning to pray, look at what happened. Check out Mark 1, 36-38. It says, And Simon and those who were with him searched for him.

When they found him, they said to him, Everyone is looking for you. But he said to them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.

Of course, we know who set the agenda, and they did what Jesus wanted to do. And verse 39 says these words. It says, And he was preaching in their synagogue throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

So that sets the background for what we're going to study tonight. Let's go ahead and read our main text as one block first. So here are verses 40-45. It says, Now a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling down to him, and saying to him, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

[2:21] 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.

And he strictly warned him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.

However, he went out, and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places. And they came to him from every direction.

So we'll jump right into it, and the first thing we see is the leper's coming. So that's what goes into your first blank there. The leper's coming.

And we read about the leper's coming in verse 40. So again, verse 40 says, Now a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling down to him, and saying, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

[3:24] So it would be real easy to overlook just how unusual the leper's approach was. So let's spend a few minutes talking about the disease itself. This leper's disease is likely what we know today as Hansen's disease.

And we know that a microbacterium causes the disease. And what happens is the bacteria attacks the nerves in the skin, and below the skin. And what it essentially does is anesthetize the feeling. So the body and the limbs are so viciously attacked by this bacteria, that feeling disappears. And so the potential for injury is very severe. So the victim then destroys his own tissue because he has no feeling.

And there are actually stories about people who literally wore off their fingers doing simple things like tying their shoes or washing dishes, just because they didn't know how hard they were using their hands.

So you know, you would think at first that maybe not feeling something would be a good thing. But pain often is a good thing to let us know that something is going wrong. And of course, the bacteria then can also destroy the eyes, so it can cause blindness.

[4:28] It can penetrate the teeth so that the teeth fall out. And then it also gets into the internal organs. So it literally affects the entire body then of the person who has it. And in biblical times, no cure existed for that type of leprosy.

So try to put that in perspective a little bit. Think about the panic in the world today because of the Ebola virus that's going on. And then multiply that by two or three times, and you're probably getting close to how people would have viewed that leper back in Jesus' day.

And because of the severity of the disease, God was very specific about how society was to deal with suspected cases. And Leviticus 13 devotes 59 verses to how suspected lepers should be examined, and also to what confirmed lepers should do.

You probably are hoping that we'll read all 59 verses, but let's actually just read a couple to give you a flavor of what's going on here. So Leviticus 13, 45, and 46 say this. It says, Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn, and his head bare, and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, unclean, unclean.

He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore, he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. So what do you notice about how the leper should interact with society?

[5:48] He doesn't serve. That's exactly right. He doesn't interact with society. He lives alone outside the camp. And if people came near him, he had to shout unclean to warn them away.

And then from other sources, we know that even his family had to leave food for him at the designated spot, so that they wouldn't risk contact to get the disease either. So with that in mind, look at Mark 1, 40 again.

It says, Now a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling down to him, and saying to him, If you are willing, you can make me clean. So what do you see that's unusual then about how the leper came to Jesus?

It just is very calming, if nothing is possible. That's exactly right. The most unusual thing is that the leper came at all. Because we know Jesus was drawing big crowds, yet the leper disregarded the law, and he ignored what other people might think.

And he came to Jesus anyway. So verse 40 also has a second thing to notice about this passage. We see the leper's cry. Let's go ahead and read about the leper's cry.

[6:53] We've hit the verse a couple of times already, but let's look at it just one more time. It says, Now a leper came to him, imploring him, kneeling down to him, and saying to him, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

So look carefully at what the leper said there. Did he say, if you are able? Now he said, if you are willing. And that's a big difference. Because the leper recognizes Jesus' ability, the only question is whether Jesus wants to exercise his authority.

So the leper actually demonstrated a great amount of faith. Not only does he, as an untouchable, dare to approach Jesus, but his only question is not about Jesus' ability to heal.

It's about whether Jesus wishes to do so for him. And so the last phrase of the verse proves that the man believed that Jesus could heal him because the last phrase says, You can make me clean.

So without presumption, he said, if you're willing, and then without doubting Jesus' ability, he said, you can make me clean. And really he was humbly begging Jesus then to heal him. And that's why we say it's the leper's cry.

[8:00] So that brings us to the third thing to notice in these verses. And at the beginning of verse 41, we see the Lord's compassion. So check out verse 41 again, and we'll read about the Lord's compassion there.

You'll see that these headings come straight from the verses themselves because it says, Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, I am willing, be cleansed.

For now, we'll just focus on the first part of that verse. That's the part that says, Jesus moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him. So only Mark records Jesus' emotional reaction to the leper's desperate plight.

And the Greek word translated compassion there appears only once in the Synoptic Gospels. And apart from the parables, that is, it's used only in reference to Jesus.

So, actually, it does appear more than once, but every time it appears, it's used in reference to Jesus, except when Jesus himself used it in the parables. And the word literally means having deep pity.

[9:04] So for those of you filling in the blanks, having deep pity is what goes in there. And it refers to the level of pity that we can feel in our gut. So, he had so much pity for him, it really affected him physically, almost.

He just physically could feel that compassion. And how did Jesus demonstrate his compassion to the man? Touched him. He actually touched him.

And this is before he healed him. He touched him before then. And so, Jesus expressed his compassion that way by touching him. And of course, most people would have healed the man first and then touched him.

But not Jesus. Jesus knew this man hadn't felt human touch in a long time. And so, he reached out to touch him. And by touching him, Jesus also revealed his attitude toward the ceremonial law. Because by touching the leper, Jesus himself would be made ceremonially unclean. So, Jesus placed love and compassion then above ritual cleanliness and regulation.

[10:03] And the word translated, touched there, literally means that Jesus gripped and took hold of him. So, once again, the word translated, touch, literally means that Jesus gripped and took hold of him.

So, it wasn't an actual accidental touching. It was that Jesus reached out, grabbed him, and took hold of him and made sure he knew that he touched him on purpose. So, this is just one of many examples in Mark's gospel where the sick or even the dead felt Jesus' touch.

And I just wanted to show you how common that is by looking at a few other examples to illustrate just how often Jesus touched the people that he healed. So, this is all from Mark.

And in Mark 1.31, just a few verses up from where we are, we see how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. That verse says, So, he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up.

And immediately the fever left her, and she served him. And in a few chapters over, in Mark 5.41, we see Mark's account of when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

[11:11] And Mark 5.41 says this, Then he took the child by the hand and said to her, Talitha kumi, which is translated, Little girl, I say to you, arise. So, there he even touched a dead body before he healed the person.

So, that would have made him ceremonially unclean as well. Then the next chapter over, in Mark 6.5, Mark summarizes Jesus' return to his hometown of Nazareth.

And Mark 6.5 says, Now he can do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And then three more to look at.

In Mark 7.33, Mark records how Jesus healed the deaf and mute men. And Mark 7.33 says, And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.

And Jesus takes an almost identical approach with the blind man in Mark 8.23. He says, So he took the blind man by the hand and let him out of the town. And when he had spit on his eyes and put his hands on him, he asked him if he saw anything.

[12:18] And then one more, in Mark 9.27, we see these words after Jesus removed the demon from the little boy. It says, But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

So, Jesus touching somebody who was sick or even dead was not an isolated occurrence. You see, just from Mark alone, there are several examples here of how often Jesus expressed his compassion by actually reaching out and touching somebody.

Think about that for a moment, too, because could Jesus have healed the leper in tonight's passage and all these other people without touching them first? Obviously, he could have done that first, and there are some cases in the Bible where he did heal from a distance without touching the person.

But although he could have healed them without touching them, Jesus appears to have gone out of his way to touch them. And his touch shows that Jesus wasn't bound by the rabbinic regulations regarding the ritual defilement.

So, just like we talked about before, ritual uncleanness was no consequence to Jesus. Instead, he really looked at the human need. So, let's go back to tonight's text and look at verse 41 again.

[13:27] It says, Then Jesus moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, I am willing, be cleansed. So, this time we'll focus on the last part of the verse.

How did Jesus respond to the leper's statement of, if you're willing? Yeah, Jesus said, I am willing, be cleansed.

And if Don were here, he'd tell us to pay attention to the tense of the words in that sentence, in the sentence after it. Because, I am willing, is in the present tense.

So, in essence, Jesus is saying, I am always willing. So, the tense changes in the last part of the verse, though. Look at the last sentence. It says, Be cleansed.

And, be cleansed is in the error's passive tense, which means that it was a decisive act received.

So, filling in the blanks, decisive act received, goes in there.

[14:25] So, when you put the two together, Jesus is actually saying, I am always willing, and your request has been granted. Notice the willing part was continuous, but his request was already answered.

And that brings us to verse 42, where we see the Lord's cure. So, once again, we'll look in verse 42 at the Lord's cure. Because Jesus did more than just tell the man he'd been healed.

He really healed the man. Verse 42 says, As soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. So, we talked about moved by compassion earlier, but moved by compassion, then Jesus touched the untouchable, and cured the incurable.

So, Jesus' love, mercy, and power are such that his touch, instead of making Jesus unclean, actually made the leper clean instead. So, that verse is pretty straightforward, and so we'll just move right on to verses 43 and 44, because the next thing to notice is the Lord's command.

Let's go ahead and look at the Lord's command. We see that again in verses 43 and 44. And those verses say, And he strictly warned him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded as a testimony to them.

[15:56] At first glance, these verses seem strange to us, because the now formerly leprous man was just healed, but Jesus tells him to keep her the secret. So, let's talk a little bit about why that can be.

Verse 44 actually gives us one of the reasons, and Jesus said there, Show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded as a testimony to them.

So, Jesus commanded the healed leper to observe the Old Testament regulations regarding cleansed lepers, because until the required offerings had been made, the man remained ceremonially unclean, and he still wouldn't be accepted back into society.

And those requirements that what he had to do are listed in Leviticus 14, 1 through 32, and those verses document what he had to do to become ceremonially clean.

And to give you a feel for those requirements, look at, or listen to Leviticus 14, verses 1 through 9. So, this is the Lord speaking to Moses, and it says, Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing.

[17:03] He shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him. And indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedarwood, scarlet, and hyssop.

And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedarwood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and dip them, and the living bird, and the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water.

So, it's getting a little complicated here, isn't it? But as we go to verse 7, he has even more to do. It says, And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that, he shall come into the camp, and shall stay outside his tent seven days.

But on the seventh day, he shall shave off all the hair on his head, and his beard, and his eyebrows. All his hair he shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes, and wash his body in water, and he shall be clean.

[18:16] Now, there's even more to the ritual. As I said, it goes on all the way through verse 32 of that chapter. So, if you're interested, for homework, you can read about the additional offering of grains and oil and lambs that are involved.

Because the birds just started off, you also had to do grain offerings and oil and lambs to do the cleanliness ceremony as well. I wanted to read just a few verses of that, though, just to give you a feel for the fact that the ceremonial cleansing was a very elaborate process.

And one reason why it was so elaborate is that the ritual helped to show the reality of the leper's cure. Because in that society, leprosy was like being a walking corpse because there wasn't any cure.

If you had leprosy, you were as good as dead already. You might have still been living, but it was only a matter of time until you died. So the cleansing of leprosy, then, would be equivalent of raising a person from the dead.

And the religious authorities, then, would ascribe such healing to God, thus admitting that Jesus was truly God, then. Likely, though, Jesus had another reason in mind when he told the man to be quiet.

[19:24] Because in the introduction, we looked at Jesus' reaction when his disciples wanted Jesus to stay in one place and heal more people. Remember Jesus' words in Mark 1:38.

That said, But he said to them, Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth. So Jesus wanted to avoid gaining the reputation of just being a miracle worker, because this would hinder his ability to spread the gospel and fulfill his main mission.

Jesus' main purpose was to save people spiritually, and he did have compassion on the sick, but he healed those people to demonstrate that he had the power to forgive sins. So once again, he healed the people to demonstrate that he had the power to forgive sins.

And for an example of that, skip down just a few verses and look at Mark 2, verses 5 through 12. These verses are part of the episode where the men bring the paralytic to Jesus.

And they say, When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven you. And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why does this man speak blasphemies like this, who can forgive sins but God alone?

[20:39] But immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they reason thus within themselves, he said to them, Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Arise, take up your bed, and walk.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, I say to you, Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house. Immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw anything like this.

So Jesus used healings then to prove he had the power to forgive sins. And in the verses we just read, the scribes got one thing right when they asked who can forgive sins but God alone.

So if only God can forgive sins and Jesus can forgive sins, what does that prove about Jesus? Obviously that proves that Jesus is God.

And then verse 45 gives us the last section of the study. Jesus has commanded the leper to stay silent. The leper instead does just the opposite. And we can title this verse as the leper's commotion.

[21:53] So the leper's commotion. The verse says this, It says, However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the matter so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city but was outside in deserted places and they came to him from every direction.

So the leper disobeyed Jesus by proclaiming this healing to everyone and because he ignored Jesus' warning, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in the lonely places. And Jesus had to curtail his public ministry then and stay in isolated places. But even in this isolation, people found him. So of course, just what we speculated the reason might be happened once the leper told everybody, it hindered Jesus' ability to spread the good news.

And think about the change in places you have here. Where did the leper spend most of his time before he met Jesus? He spent the time by himself outside the town in deserted places and now where do we find Jesus after he healed the leper?

Jesus is outside the town in deserted places and the leper is back in town proclaiming the news to everybody else. But stop and consider something else about that because we already talked about how Jesus is God and as God, did Jesus know that the man would immediately tell others that Jesus had healed him?

[23 : 18] Jesus certainly had to know that even though he told the leper not to do it, he was immediately going to do the very thing he wasn't supposed to do. But Jesus still healed the man anyway.

So that in itself is another example of Jesus' compassion. Even though Jesus knew that the man's actions would make Jesus' life harder, Jesus still cured the leper anyway.

So we finish the verses and these verses are more than just a true story. They have a tremendous application for us as well and you may be wondering how that could be.

Perhaps you or people you know have asked God for something that you have yet to receive. But even if that is the case, you know for true believers, Jesus has already given us something infinitely better than the physical healing he gave the leper.

In addition to being a real event, the story of Jesus and the leper is a picture of our salvation. Let's spend a little bit of time talking about how the story of Jesus and the leper is a picture of our salvation.

[24 : 21] Because throughout the Bible, leprosy is used to symbolize sin. And sin, like leprosy, affects the entire person. Sin, like the leprosy in the verse of study tonight, only can be cured by God himself.

You know we're normally going through Ephesians here and some of the verses we looked at last week were Ephesians 2. So let's look at Ephesians 2, 1-5. And those say, And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which he once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

So we'll stop there for now. But God made us alive spiritually because God is rich in mercy. In the verses we studied tonight, the leper's only hope was to throw himself on the mercy of Jesus. And the leper knew only Jesus could heal him. But the leper was unsure whether Jesus wanted to heal him. And we now know more than Jesus did because the Bible is complete for us.

[25 : 48] We know that Jesus will accept everyone who comes to him for salvation. Listen to Jesus' words in John 6, verses 37 through 40 for proof of that.

John 6, 37 through 40 say, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all he has given me I shall lose nothing, but shall raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

So who does Jesus say that he's going to save? All who comes to him. He says everyone who comes to him. So he'll turn away nobody who comes to him.

And of course, Jesus said the same thing in a different way when he says that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. So we can have confidence that when we come to God for salvation, he will always be willing to save us.

[26 : 57] And eternal life is better than a physical healing any day, especially when we get on the other side of this life. And we can draw so many other parallels between the leper and our own salvation experience, but let's just draw one more tonight.

We talked in verse 45 about how Jesus healed the leper despite knowing that the leper would disobey and make Jesus' life more difficult. Think about what Jesus had to do to save us.

He voluntarily agreed to save us even though he knew that our disobedience and sin had to be atoned for with his own blood. So we certainly made Jesus' life more difficult too because of our sin.

Paul summarized it this way in Colossians 1 verses 13 and 14. He, being God, has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

And then to paraphrase what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5.21, Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us so that we could receive Jesus' righteousness. In the verses we studied tonight, we saw Jesus trade places with the leper and that's a picture of how Jesus would soon be trading places for us when He hung on the cross to pay for our sins.

[28 : 14] Joseph Hart got it correct when he wrote the words to the old hymn, Come ye sinners, poor and needy. And that hymn easily could have been written by the leper himself. It's uncanny how much it parallels the story.

So listen to the words of that hymn. It says, Come ye sinners, poor and needy, wicked and wounded, sick and sore, Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love and power.

I will arise and go to Jesus, He will embrace me in His arms, in the arms of my dear Savior, oh there are ten thousand charms. Come ye thirsty, come and welcome, God's free bounty glorify, true belief and true repentance, every grace that brings you nigh.

Come ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall, if you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all. Think about the leper in tonight's story, he knew that if he tarried till he was better, he would never come at all.

So then the hymn goes on and says, View him prostrate in the garden, on the ground your maker lies, on the bloody tree behold him, sinner, will this not suffice? Lo, the incarnate God ascended, pleads the merit of His blood, venture on Him, venture holy, let no other trust intrude.

[29 : 28] And then the last verse, Let no conscience make you linger, not of fitness fondly dream, all the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him. So listen to those last verses again, it says, Let no conscience make you linger, not of fitness fondly dream, all the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him.

So when we or others come to Jesus for salvation, we should approach Jesus with the attitude of the leper. Remember the leper told Jesus, If you're willing, you can make me clean.

And when we come to Jesus for salvation, Jesus' response will always be, I am willing, be cleansed. Thank you.