

**“Cleansing the Foulest”**  
**(Luke 5:12-16)**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

**Proposition:**

**Introduction:**

*<sup>12</sup>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." <sup>13</sup>Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

In this story, Jesus came across a man that was covered with leprosy or more literally, full of leprosy.

Let me give you a little bit of background on the disease of Leprosy:

Today we know of leprosy as a disease which kills the nerves where you can't feel anything. We associate it with people that have been disfigured on their limbs and on their faces. However in the bible it was a bit more general as it included all sorts of skin diseases.

Yet there was more to this disease than just the physical ailments and difficulties a person had to go through. There were societal pains that lepers were subject to that were probably more painful.

In Leviticus chapters 13 and 14, the Law of Moses goes into great detail about how this disease is to be dealt with. How to recognize the disease. How to quarantine the disease. How to ceremonially cleanse the disease. But you can scour these two chapters and you'll never find any mention of how to treat the disease or how to remedy the disease.

This disease in Jewish law required the leper to be exiled from the community and placed in isolation. In order to protect the rest of the community from infection, the infected had to be removed.

*So here comes these men wearing white coveralls and coverings over their shoes and over their heads and masks, and they would come and put yellow tape around your home and put a huge sticker on all the doors of your home that said, Quarantined. They would then take you to an isolation wing of the hospital where you would be monitored. Your family and friends wouldn't be permitted to visit you, until they knew what it was you had and how dangerous it was.*

We don't know how long the person in this story had leprosy, but since the moment it was discovered, this person was removed from the rest of society. Food would have been left for him every day by his family. And if anyone would venture near him he would have to shout at the top of his lungs, "Unclean, Unclean!" That was his moral obligation. Not only because he was ritually unclean, but also because he was physically unclean and he may transmit the disease to others. You can imagine how lonely, how neglected, and hopeless he must have felt.

As if things couldn't get worse, it was thought, though it wasn't always the case, that God gave leprosy as a judgment toward people. So the leper was not only seen as a diseased person, but also as one who had been judged by God. Sometimes we hear things like that don't we? You perhaps have heard your people talk about how blessed that person is because he has wealth and health. And when we see a person who's really going through terrible times, we might think, "Oh that man must have done something really, really bad, in order for that to have happened to him." But that's not always the case. Look at Job.

There's more to leprosy. To heal leprosy was considered as difficult as raising someone from the dead. It'd be like today's cancer. You can deal with it, but you can't really heal it.

That's not it. Clothing would have to be destroyed. Your house would have to be destroyed for fear of contamination.

And then for Jews the healing of leprosy would show that the Messiah had come. Because it was viewed as something only God could do.

There were only a couple of instances in the bible where leprosy was healed in the OT. One of them was Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Here was this commander of the army of Aram and he had leprosy. He wanted to go to Israel to try and be cured. And so he meets up with Elisha and he tells him to go "Jump in a lake", or a river, the dirty Jordan, seven times. And he refuses at first, but then later goes and does it and becomes healed.

Does leprosy remind you of a disease we have today? AIDS. But worse than AIDS. Can you tell if someone has AIDS, not really. But leprosy, it's on the skin and you could tell immediately.

But this man came to him and begged him on his knees. He broke basically every rule. He entered society. He came into contact with people. He was desperate. He had probably heard of this Jesus. He should have shouted "unclean, unclean, but instead he says "make me clean."

We all have a sickness like the leper. Often times you can't see it from the outside. A microscope won't find it. No amount of laboratory testing will discover it. This disease we have is called sin. It's a killer. And there's only one way to deal with it. The same way the leper dealt with his ailment. We have to fall at the feet of Jesus and repeat those same words. "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

And we must have the same attitude, the same desperation, the same humility as the leper. Many of us may think that we are not that sick. That sin is not that big of a problem. That I'm not that bad. I don't do the really bad things. I pray once in a while, I go to church. Those are all band-aid solutions. What every needs is the cure. And the only cure is Jesus Christ. You have to realize like the leper that healing is completely up to Jesus. If Jesus is willing. The attitude of the beggar, is always, "if you are willing". The beggar doesn't present his own terms or his own conditions. It's always, if you are willing.

So here is this incredible faith. Approaching Jesus in humility in brokenness and asking, if you are willing, is a sign of faith. Not a name it claim it pseudo faith. That is the faith we need to receive Christ's healing in our lives as well.

---

Leprosy was one of those things where it was common knowledge that only a miracle, only an act of God could cure the person. There was no cure, only treatment. In the OT, all the people who were cured of leprosy were cured by God himself. Moses, Miriam, Naaman.

So when Jesus comes and heals this man, it is saying nothing less than, "God has come." "In the person of Jesus, God has come." "The Messiah is here." "God's kingdom has been inaugurated." This miracle was a huge testament of the presence of God and his mighty power.

Back to the miracle. How does Jesus heal the leper? With words and with touch. Words is obvious. That's how God acts. He created, he dictates, he decrees, he covenants, he promises, he writes. We see over and over in the bible, "Thus says the Lord." God's words are incredibly powerful. But what you don't see in the OT is God's touch. There was no touch because Christ had not yet come.

In the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we have the mighty power of the Words of God, but also the incredible power of touch.

How powerful is touch? The presence or absence of touch communicates so much says Gary Chapman, author of the "**Five Love Languages**". It can communicate acceptance, rejection, love and hate. Touch is incredibly powerful. Here's what Chapman also says.

"Whatever there is of me resides in my body. To touch my body is to touch me. To withdraw from my body is to distance yourself from me emotionally." (107)

I believe that is what Jesus did when he touched the leper. God knows how long it's been since the leper was last touched. And Jesus could have just as easily healed with words alone, but he chose to touch the man.

I believe Jesus wants to touch every single person here today. He wants to heal us from our greatest problems, the problem, the disease of sin. As we witness baptism, as we take communion, Let's remember the powerful touch of Jesus.