

October 25, 2020

“Cleansed from a Leprous Heart”

Matthew 8:1-4

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In Matthew 8, we read about Jesus healing a man with advanced leprosy. In biblical times leprosy was a debilitating, deadly disease. It was commonly thought that God would strike a person with leprosy as punishment for sin in his or her life. But that wasn't true; leprosy wasn't a punishment for sin, but it was a picture of sin. There are several parallels between leprosy and our sin nature. And the cure that the man in this account received for his leprosy is the same cure that we need for our sinfulness – a miracle from God. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus offers us that miraculous cure for our terminal illness (our leprosy). We can be cleansed from the disease that's killing us and be made brand new creatures in Christ!

### Historical Background

1. Leprosy
  - a. Leprosy was one of the most debilitating and ultimately one of the deadliest diseases in biblical times.
  - b. The first record of someone in the Bible having leprosy was Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron (circa 1450 B.C.).
    - i. God struck Miriam with leprosy because of her display of disrespect for Moses, God's chosen leader of the people of Israel.<sup>1</sup>
    - ii. Moses interceded on Miriam's behalf and God healed her.
  - c. In the Old Testament, we also read about Naaman, who was a famous Syrian general.<sup>2</sup>
  - d. In the New Testament, we read about a man known as Simon the leper, one of whom many Bible scholars believe had been healed by Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 12:1-15

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 5:1-27

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 26:6

- e. Leprosy is now called Hansen's disease.<sup>4</sup>
- f. Leprosy is transmitted by direct person-to-person contact over a prolonged period of time.
- g. Leprosy was thought to be highly contagious in Jesus' day.
- h. Leprosy can be dormant in the body for as many as four to eight years.
- i. Leprosy first shows itself as a rash or sore on the skin, and it then attacks the central nervous system, which is outside the brain on the spinal cord.
- j. Leprosy reveals itself most visibly on the face, hands, feet, eyes, and ears.
- k. Leprosy causes disfigurement to the skin and bones, in addition to causing a person's hands to become claw-like.
- l. Leprosy causes loss of feeling and muscle paralysis, which means that the disease was a very debilitating and disfiguring malady.
- m. Leprosy also brought about mental and emotional suffering, in addition to the effects of social stigma, rejection, and isolation.
- n. People with leprosy had to announce the fact that they had the disease by shouting, 'Unclean! Unclean!'
- o. Leprosy had no effective treatment until 1981, when a combination of antibiotics and therapeutics were developed, which means that leprosy had been an incurable disease for about four thousand years.
- p. The World Health Organization estimates that there are more than two hundred thousand cases of leprosy (Hansen's disease) worldwide, with most cases being reported in Africa and Asia.
  - i. There are approximately sixty-five hundred cases in the United States.
- q. There was a common misunderstanding about those who contracted leprosy: that it was a judgment from God meted out due to sin in the person's life.
- r. Leprosy was not a judgment for sin; however, leprosy is a picture of sin.
- s. In the Bible, every time leprosy is said to have been cured, it's mentioned in the sense of being cleansed, not cured.

### Leprosy As A Picture Of Our Sin Nature

- 2. Leprosy as a disease is acquired, but leprosy as a picture of sin is inherent.
  - a. **Psalm 51:5** - *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."*
  - b. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, sin entered the human race.
  - c. Sin is an inherited spiritual trait that is genetically passed on from generation to generation.
  - d. **1 Corinthians 15:22** - *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html>

3. It is progressive

- a. Pastor Gary said, "Temptation itself is not sin. ... Temptation is not sin itself, but it's the entry point; because if we give in to temptation, now it's sin. And once we give in to temptation, if we don't repent of that sin, then it leads to death. ... What we end up seeing is that it's not only progressive in terms of how it leads to sin, but the very sin itself is progressive. What I mean is, if you don't deal with sin in its infancy, you will end up realizing that what once brought thrill [will] no longer bring thrill. So, you will have to step up the sin game to find the same kind of dark adventure in ways that it used to bring pleasure but now it doesn't. There is [an] insatiable element to our sin nature and we need to understand this. Even as Christians, if you've accepted Christ as your Savior, your spirit has been redeemed and you've been regenerated, but your flesh is still at war with your spirit because there still is a carnal side to every single one of us, where our flesh desires things that are contrary to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> ... Your spirit has been regenerated, so you want to please God, but your flesh is not."
- b. **Hebrews 4:15** - *"For we do not have a High Priest [Jesus] who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*
- c. **James 1:14-15** - *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

4. It is desensitizing

- a. Pastor Gary said, "If sin goes unaddressed, you start to become numb about things. What once brought you under conviction [of sin], no longer does. What you once felt guilty about, you no longer [feel guilty about]."
- b. **1 Timothy 4:2** - *"... having their own conscience seared with a hot iron..."*

5. It is isolating

- a. Pastor Gary said, "People with leprosy ended up living in leper colonies. ... Sin does the same thing to us. We become isolated from the people we love, and we start running with the people who are doing what we are doing and who are living like we are living. We end up joining their 'colony,' so to speak. Our community becomes those who share our sinful lifestyle. Sin has a natural way of isolating us. It causes us to cluster. ... We end up being separated from God."
- b. **Isaiah 59:2** - *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."*

6. It is incurable and fatal without God

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<sup>5</sup> **Romans 7:15-20**

- a. Pastor Gary said, “God knew, when he gave instructions for Moses, <sup>6</sup>that no one would ever be healed apart from a miracle from God because there was no cure for leprosy. ... We are all dying of the same incurable disease; it’s called sin. And if God hadn’t intervened, we would all die of this incurable disease. Like leprosy, there is something that is killing us. We are dying a slow, painful, certain death, and the only sin cure is a miracle from God. Mankind cannot fix himself. None of us can fix our condition, only God can. ... That miracle for our leprous heart... was his son, [Jesus]. There is no other remedy apart from God. ... Jesus came to die for our sins that we might have life through faith in his name.”
  - b. **1 John 1:9** – *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.”* (Emphasis added)
    - i. The Greek word for cleanse in **Matthew 8:3** is katharizo.
    - ii. The same Greek word is also used in **1 John 1:9**. <sup>7</sup>
7. Jesus is always willing to make us clean.
- a. **Matthew 8:1-3a** – *“When [Jesus] had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ ”*
  - b. Pastor Gary said, “Are you willing to humble yourself and come to him and ask to be cleansed?”
8. God’s cleansing work is immediate.
- a. **Matthew 8:3b** – *“Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”*
  - b. Pastor Gary said, “Wouldn’t you have loved to be standing there [to] watch this [man]? However distorted his body had become because of leprosy, suddenly everything [was] restored to normal. ... Isn’t [this] beautiful the way it paints a picture for us that immediately when we confess our sins and come into relationship with Christ and ask him to save us and forgive us our sins, God doesn’t [take even a second to think about this]? ... Immediately, in response to our humility, [Jesus] will make us clean.”
9. God’s grace becomes our testimony.
- a. **Matthew 8:4** – *“And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ ”*
  - b. Pastor Gary said, “When God forgives our sin and he does his cleansing work in our lives and brings us into relationship with him, then it will be a testimony to others of God’s amazing grace!”

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<sup>6</sup> **Leviticus 14:1-5**

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2511&t=NKJV>

## Discussion Questions

1. Read [Matthew 8:1-4](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of leprosy as a disease. (See #1 above)
3. Read and discuss [Psalm 51:5](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:22](#). (See #2 above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the progressive nature of sin. (See #3 above)
5. Read and discuss [Hebrews 4:15](#) and [James 1:14-15](#).
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the desensitizing nature of sin. (See #4 above)
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the isolating nature of sin. (See #5 above)
8. Read and discuss [1 John 1:9](#).
9. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about the incurable nature of sin. (See #6 above)
10. Allow the people in your group to share their experience about the time when they came to fully understand their sin problem and realize that Jesus was the answer.
11. Spend time talking about the good news that Jesus is willing to forgive and cleanse, and his cleansing is immediate and complete. (See #7 and #8 above)
12. How has the Lord used and how is the Lord using your testimony of thanksgiving and praise for his miracle work of salvation and cleansing?
13. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)