

Coming to Jesus

Luke 5:12-16

1. Introduction.

- a. Short review of why Luke is writing his Gospel. (See first sermon in the Luke series. It will be helpful for understanding Acts as well).
 - i. He writes as a formidable historian for the purpose of giving a reliable record of historical events.
 - ii. It is unembellished and free of personal commentary – something important for objective history.
- b. It is important to remember that the Gospels are first, and foremost, concerned with revealing the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - i. They are not primarily about us.
 - ii. There are applications and implications for us, but we must read them with a view toward what God is revealing about His Son. This is divine biography.

2. Jesus heals a leper (12-16).

- a. A word about leprosy.
 - i. Comes from the Gk. *lepras* (scale/scaly).
 - 1. It is a general term for skin disease.
 - 2. In the Hebrew OT, it carries the same idea.
 - ii. There is not much ancient study on the pathology of the disease. In fact, the term leprosy (i.e., scaly) was given because it simply described the symptom.
 - 1. Medical historians understand the disease to be very old (c.f., ancient bacilli on ancient Egyptians mummies).
 - a. They have concluded the ancient disease to be a close relative to the modern-day Hansen's disease.

- b. It is so ancient; it even goes back to the days of Elisha.
2. Lev. 13-14 are devoted to dealing with the disease within the nation of Israel (i.e., diagnoses, prescription, purification, sacrifice, etc.).
- a. Attached to the disease were psychological and sociological stigma.
 - i. Lepers were cut off from the nation in every aspect (e.g., family, blessings, sacrificial system, etc.). This was devastating. They were considered utterly defiled.
 - ii. There was immense shame that came with the disease as well. This was a big deal in an honor/shame culture. There was zero sympathy. In fact, most thought the disease to be the result of personal (or generational) sin.
 - iii. Lev. 13:45-46 outlines the shame attached to the disease.
 - b. Perhaps the most difficult part was the physical component.
 - i. In ancient times, it was thought the disease began on the surface of the skin and moved internally to the organs, killing its victim. However, we know the opposite is true.
 - ii. Relatively recent medical research has discovered the bacterium to be an anesthetic disease that attacks the nerves. It makes a person go completely numb, eliminating any kind of warning system to the body. The result is self-destruction.
 - c. For more info: see the tremendously helpful work of Dr. Paul Brand. <https://www.leprosymission.org.uk/about-us-and-leprosy/what-is-leprosy/>
 - i. Thanks to the work of Dr. Brand, and others, the disease is virtually entirely curable.

- ii. But the point to understand is that this is an internal disease that results in self-destruction. In many cases, it lead to death.
 - iii. This is a nearly perfect description of sin. In fact, it becomes a physical account, illustrating a spiritual reality.
 - 1. When it came to leprosy, what cut a person off from God and his blessings, was not the degree of leprosy, but the fact it was present at all.
 - 2. In a similar manner, it is not the degree of sin (or the way sin manifests itself) that is the issue before God. Rather, it is that we have sin at all.
 - 3. In order to understand this account rightly, we must understand that this is all about Jesus and His work of forgiving sin. This is the dominant theme throughout the rest of the healing section. His miracles are intimately attached to sin-forgiveness (c.f., 5:23-24).
 - 4. So the disease and subsequent miracle is not the point of the passage. Rather, it is an account of what Jesus does for desperate sinners.
- b. The leper comes to Jesus (12).
 - i. It is important to see the qualifier of Luke—the leper is “full (πλήρης)” of leprosy. This shows the utter hopelessness of this man.
 - 1. This is akin to modern day cancer. It is essentially incurable.
 - 2. It was not a matter of *if* this man would die, but *when* he would die. His body was completely riddled. It was an advanced form, and progressive stage, of leprosy. Hope was gone.
 - ii. Note how the leper comes to Jesus:
 - 1. Desperately.
 - a. This was not merely inappropriate, but forbidden, both legally and socially.
 - b. The leper throws off the law and social shame by coming to Jesus in utter desperation. Again, it was forbidden for a

leper to come near a person without the disease. Yet he comes.

2. Worshipfully.

- a. He falls on his face—a phrase used exclusively for worship in the NT.
- b. He also addresses Jesus with the term, “Lord.” The term is a word for respect. It could simply mean, “sir.” However, that would not fit the context. The leper prostrates himself. This was a symbol of worship.

3. Hastily.

- a. This is instructive for us. You don’t hear, or come to see Who Jesus is, but then worry about it later. We must come to Jesus immediately and with urgency.
- b. Tomorrow is not promised, yet we foolishly assume it is.

4. Humility.

- a. He does not presume upon the authority of Jesus by making a demand. Rather, he comes in humility – *“If you are willing...”*
- b. Forgiveness is not something owed to us. Rather, it is pure grace. If it is owed to us, it ceases to be grace. God is not obligated to forgive anyone. Rather, He promises to forgive, and He is always faithful to His promises. So He is obligated to His promise, not obligated to the sinner.
- c. Aware of his wretchedness, the leper knows healing is not owed to Him. He understands Jesus can do it, but he does not demand.

5. Believing.

- a. He understands Jesus possesses the ability. He knows what He can do.
- b. In some way, the leper has seen the result of Jesus’ previous work, so he comes in faith.

- iii. This is very instructive for us. This is a picture of how the sinner must come to Jesus.
 - c. Jesus' Response (13).
 - i. *"I am willing; be cleansed."*
 - 1. There is no sinner past grace. This was a vile man in the eyes of the law. If anyone was beyond help, it was him. Yet, not only is Jesus willing, but He is able. What good news!
 - 2. The only condition is that we must come as the leper came. And as you do, there always remains a sacrifice for your sin.
 - ii. Jesus touches the man, and declares him clean.
 - 1. At this point, some wonder how Jesus could fulfill the Law, if He just seemingly broke it (c.f., Lev. 13 and 14).
 - 2. It is Jesus' Word that makes the man clean. So the touch simply confirms the purification of this man. In the moment Jesus touches Him, Jesus is no longer touching a defiled man, but a clean man.
 - 3. This also shows the compassion of Jesus. He enters our circumstance. Touch will become an important theme in Jesus' ministry; and I hope to develop that as we go along in the Gospel.
 - b. Jesus instructs the man to tell no one (14).
 - i. This is a strange command on the surface, but it serves several important points regarding the person of Jesus.
 - 1. It shows Jesus has not come to abolish (or usurp) the Law, but to fulfill it. He calls the man to faithful obedience under Mosaic Law. He is to be examined by the priest, and offer the Levitical sacrifices.
 - 2. It shows Jesus' command was credible at a legal level.
 - a. If the man were to just pronounce his healing, the people would question this. Now they may see a physical difference in the man, but that would carry little weight in

the Jewish mind. It needed to be legally verified by the priest.

b. Therefore, if the man were to receive a clean bill of health from the priest, Jesus' miracle would now have legal witness.

3. Jesus can do what the Law cannot. The law can only examine to find what is there. Jesus already knows what is there, and yet, is able to purify.

ii. All of this points to that great, purifying work of the cross.

c. Jesus slips away (15-16).

i. Why does Jesus slip away from the opportunity to heal?

1. He has not come for temporary healing.

2. He has come for eternal rescue.

3. Everything He did was always on the path to the cross.

ii. Additionally, Jesus often prayed in secret before He knew that He was about to encounter a difficult situation—especially with the Pharisees. We will see Jesus' first encounter with them in the next passage.

3. Conclusion.

a. There is hope for the sinner. That is all we really need to understand.

b. There is only one means of purification, and it is through the cross-work of Jesus Christ alone.

c. He tells us to come with the fullness of our sin.

d. He is able and willing to purify even the vilest wretch among us.

e. So may we come, and just as this leper came.

Small Group Questions:

1. How must a person come to Jesus?
2. In what ways do you presume upon the grace of God?
3. How can you use this story of the leper in your personal evangelism?