

A Life Long Refuge for the Unclean

Christ our Refuge

Hebrews 6:18-20

For centuries an archaic Old Testament system of justice laid in the dust of the past.

Then Jesus stepped onto the planet. The One who was promised arrived, and the True Refuge that these temporal, insufficient refuges has heralded was visible and available.

In the Old Testament a fearful fleeing Jew would be directed towards the nearest of the six cities of refuge. As the city was pointed at, a name would be spoken to that one seeking protection. All the cities afforded equal protection—just the names differed.

In looking over the meaning of the names of these cities of refuge, we see a distinct characteristic of Christ in each one. When taken as a whole, they illustrate the sufficiency of Christ as a Refuge to meet all of our need, and the need of all. To see the adequacy of Jesus Christ to meet our every need, consider the names of the cities.

Over the next month we are going to stop and visit Christ in each of these ways the Old Testament has promised Him as our perfect refuge. As we do so we find that is how the New Testament presents Him.

Here is the pathway of the next six messages we will share from God's Word:

- Today we will see that Christ is our 'holy place' and our 'righteousness'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel unclean, defiled or guilty;
- Tonight we will learn that Christ is our safe and strong 'shoulder'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel weary, exhausted or stressed;
- Next time we will see that Christ is our 'fellowship'. He is the only Refuge for the lonely who feel left out, left behind, homeless and forsaken;
- Christ is our 'stronghold' or 'fortress'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel helpless, fearful, and powerless;
- Christ is 'exalted' and He is in the 'heights'. He is the only Refuge for us when our hearts darken and we feel hopeless;
- Christ is 'separated' and holy, made higher than the Heavens. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we struggle, and feel so weak when we are tempted.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

*Hebrews 6: 18b ... we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

Today if in your sin you are fleeing—flee to Jesus, the safest and nearest refuge for the unclean.

If you fear your past, hate your sin, long to have some deep dark stain removed, some painful memory healed, some horrible guilt forever banished—Jesus has His gates open wide. His Door is unlocked and He stands with open arms to believers and unbelievers alike this very moment.

The Wonderful Benefits of Staying in the Safest Spot in the Universe is finding Christ as our Lifelong Refuge

KEDESH means a "holy place" or "righteousness," and this is our first need. When we come to Christ, He gives us His righteousness and forgives all our sins (2 Cor 5:21, Col. 2:13).

So Jesus is the **refuge for the unclean**. There is no sin He can't forgive; there is no stain He can't remove; there is no failure He can't forget. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

Mark 1:40-45 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." 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 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." 45 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.

Pray

This is Christ's first meeting with an individual in Mark's Gospel. All other events have been with groups. This meeting is captured because it is the most beautiful reminder of how Jesus cleanses us completely as individuals. This morning we see Jesus as the perfect refuge for this unclean leper.

Physically, leprosy is awful. Leprosy was the scourge of the ancient world. Nothing evoked more fear, more dread, or more revulsion than the sight of these walking dead. That is what a leper was called, a walking dead man. The smell of his decaying flesh would announce his coming long before the tattered scraps of his clothing would be seen, or his raspy "Unclean! Unclean!" announcement he was required to declare, could be heard. The stumbling shuffle of toeless feet, the wandering of sightless eyes and the

moan of a cheek less mouth, all pointed to Leprosy, this unseen attacker that slowly destroyed human bodies, and made the individual an untouchable to society.¹

Spiritually, leprosy is a vivid and graphic picture of the horrible power of sin. Sin is ugly, loathsome, incurable, and contaminating; it separates men from God and makes them outcasts. The instructions given to the priests in Leviticus 13 help us understand the nature of sin:

1. Sin is inside us, deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere "surface" measures (see Jer. 6:14);
2. sin also spreads just like leprosy (Lev. 13:8);
3. sin always defiles (Lev. 13:45–46). People with leprosy were looked on as "dead" (Num. 12:12).
4. Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46) so lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell;
5. And just as leprous garments are fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52, 57), so those who die clothed in sin will burn forever. How important it is for lost sinners to trust Jesus Christ and get rid of their "leprosy"!2

The steps in the leper's cleansing and restoration (in Leviticus 14) picture to us what Jesus Christ has done for sinners. Please turn there with me.

THE PRIEST HAD TO SEEK OUT THE LEPER (v. 3). *Jesus seeks the Lost.*

Leviticus 14:3 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,

Of course, the leper was barred from coming into the camp, so the priest had to go "outside the camp" to him. What a picture of Christ who came to us and died "outside the camp" that we might be saved (Heb. 13:10–13). We did not seek Him; He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). In the case of the Jewish leper, the priest went out to investigate and determine if indeed the victim was healed; but Jesus comes to us that He might heal us of the sickness of sin.

THE LEPER NEEDED A SUBSTITUTE TO TAKE AWAY HIS UNCLEANNES (vv. 4–7a). *Jesus died for sinners.*

Leviticus 14:4-7a then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. 5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy,

¹ Drawn from the Mark series message 17 preached on 00611AM.
2Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

This ceremony is a beautiful picture of the work of Christ. The priest took one of the birds and placed it in an earthen vessel (clay jar), and then he killed it. Christ willingly left heaven and took upon Himself a body, put Himself, as it were, in an earthen vessel, that He might die for us. The priest then took the living bird, dipped it in the blood of the dead bird, and set it free. Here is a vivid illustration of Christ's resurrection. Christ died for our sins and was raised again, and He took the blood (spiritually speaking) back to heaven that we might be cleansed from sin. The priest finally sprinkled some of the blood on the leper, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22, NKJV).

THE LEPER HAD TO BELIEVE THE WORD (vv. 7b). *Jesus asks us to come.*

Leviticus 14:7b and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

After years of exclusion and separation because of his uncleanness, the priest told the leper he was clean. Even if he didn't feel clean, he had to respond by faith. How did the victim know he was clean? The priest told him so! How do believers today know that God has saved us? He tells us so in His Word! No matter how the leper felt or what he looked like, God said he was clean, and that settled it. Listen to Christ's words, let them sink into your soul:

- Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."
- Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."
- John 8:11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."
- John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

THE LEPER HAD TO RESPOND WITH OBEDIENCE (v. 8-9). *Jesus cleanses completely.*

Leviticus 14:8-9 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. 9 But on the seventh day he shall shave all the hair off 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.

This washing is a picture of the believer cleansing himself from filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). After we have been saved, it is our responsibility to keep our lives blameless and holy for His sake. Perhaps Paul had Leviticus 14 in mind when he compared the new life in Christ to a change of clothes (Col. 3:1-14).

THE LEPER IS GIVEN CONSECRATION TO NEWNESS OF LIFE (vv. 10, 14–17).
Jesus offers us a new beginning once and for all and every new day!

Leviticus 14:10, 14-17 “And **on the eighth day** he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. 14 The priest shall take some of **the blood** of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of **the right ear** [a picture of hearing God's Word] of him who is to be cleansed, on **the thumb of his right hand** [a picture of doing God's Work], and on the **big toe of his right foot** [a picture of walking God's Way]. 15 And the priest shall take **some of the log of oil**, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand [note that the oil (emblem of the Holy Spirit) comes after the blood (emblem of salvation)]. 16 Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord. 17 And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering.

It's now the eighth day since the priest first visited the leper, and eight is the number of the new beginning. This is a touching part of the ritual. The priest took the blood and applied it to the right ear, the right thumb, and the right great toe of the man, symbolizing that his whole body had now been purchased and belonged to God. He was to listen to God's Word, work for God's glory, and walk in God's ways. Then the priest put the oil on the blood, symbolizing the power of the Spirit of God for the doing of God's will.

The blood could not be put on the oil; the oil had to be put on the blood. For where the blood has been applied, the Spirit of God can work. The rest of the oil was poured on the man's head, and thus, he was anointed for his new life. If you will read Lev. 8:22–24, you will see that a similar ceremony was performed for the consecration of the priests. In other words, God treated the leper as he would a priest.

Back to Mark one, and note the incredible details of Christ's cleansing of this man.

The lepers, or the walking dead were so feared that they were driven to live outside of civilization. No family would be allowed to stay in touch with their loved one once that oozing, green sore was detected. With pitiful wails like a funeral, the dirge of the farewell to the precious husband, father, son, daughter, mother, grandfather, or grand mother would swell from the tear filled faces of the ones never to see their loved one again. Off went the walking dead leper to the dark, pain-filled world of exclusion, hatred, bitterness, and loneliness. Marked for life as a communicable bearer of the most dreaded, incurable blights ever known. Doomed to be treated like an enemy for the rest of your life. Welcome to the Leper's World, the World of the Walking dead.

But then came Jesus. Mark used his favorite word in our passage we will read this morning. When the untouchable is touched by Jesus, note (v. 42), "*Immediately* the leprosy left him and he was cured."

Coming by Seeking

"The sinner is in a plight more miserable than the leper; let him imitate his example and go to Jesus, "beseeching him and kneeling down to him." Let him exercise what little faith he has, even though it should go no further than "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; and there need be no doubt as to the result of the application.

Jesus heals all who come, and casts out none.

Jesus touched the leper. This unclean person had broken through the regulations of the ceremonial law and pressed into the house, but Jesus so far from chiding him broke through the law himself in order to meet him. He made an interchange with the leper, for while he cleansed him, he contracted by that touch a Levitical defilement. Even so Jesus Christ was made sin for us, although in himself he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That hand which multiplied the loaves, which saved sinking Peter, which upholds afflicted saints, which crowns believers, that same hand will touch every seeking sinner, and in a moment make him clean. The love of Jesus is the source of salvation. He loves, he looks, he touches us, WE LIVE." 3

This man knew that Jesus was *able* to heal him, but he was not sure the Master was *willing* to heal him. Lost sinners today have the same unnecessary concern, for God has made it abundantly clear that He is not willing that sinners perish (2 Peter 3:9) and that He is willing that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Anyone who has never trusted the Savior is spiritually in worse shape than this man was physically.

When Jesus touched the leper, He contracted the leper's defilement; *but He also conveyed His health!* Is this not what He did for us on the cross when He was made sin for us? (2 Cor. 5:21) The leper did not question His *ability* to heal; he only wondered if He were willing. Certainly God is willing to save! He is "God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

With that touch Jesus answered for all time the doubts of those who wonder if God really cares. Jesus not only met the physical need. He understood the loneliness this man must have experienced, and with His touch dealt directly with that inner pain. If you've ever been lonely, ever felt rejected or unloved, you know what that touch must have meant. Jesus' touch was not needed to heal the leprosy, but it was necessary to meet this man's deep, inner need for love. Jesus touched him. As He yearns to touch all.

3Spurgeon, Charles H., *Morning and Evening*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

The reason we are studying this passage today is to see what Jesus Christ can do for you, for anyone in an instant, in a split second of belief. The healing of Christ in salvation from sin is *instantaneous* and *complete* ("the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin)."

Imagine⁴ what happened to that leper who was touched by Jesus. His feet—*toeless*, *ulcerated stubs*—were suddenly whole, bursting his shrunken sandals.

The knobs on his hands grew fingers before his very eyes. Back came his hair, eyebrows, eyelashes. Under his hair were ears and before him a nose! His skin was supple and soft.

Can you hear a thundering roar from the multitude?

Can you hear the man crying *not*, "Unclean! Unclean!," but, "*I'm clean! I'm clean!*"

Shackled by a heavy burden, neath a load of guilt and shame,
Then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same.
He touched me, Oh He touched me, and Oh the joy that floods my souls,
Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole!

Today if in your sin you are fleeing—flee to Jesus, the safest and nearest refuge for the unclean.

To rest any troubled minds who may fear that they have somehow committed this sin which can never be forgiven – on the basis of Christ's words in Mark 3.28. Rest your finger there on those words, allow your eyes to follow along – hear the voice of Jesus speaking. Let Him assure you this morning!

- The unpardonable sin is not taking God the Father, God the Son or even God the Holy Spirit's Name is vain. **"Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven..."**
- The unpardonable sin is not any form of sexual sin – no matter how vile – not adultery, not perversion. **"Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven..."**
- The unpardonable sin is not any form of murder, even the most heinous forms. **"Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven..."**

Jesus always offered only one way out of sin. Sorrowful admission of guilt, and humble requests for mercy. Confession and Forgiveness. Belief and repentance.

If you realize that the leprosy of sin has infected your person, then you have no doubt that you are a sinner.

⁴ Drawn from Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

If you believe that, there is no reason why you should not go immediately to Him. He has compassion, He will actually *touch* the leprosy of your sin, and you will be immediately healed!

Have you humbled yourself to say, "I know You are willing, make me clean"? If not yet, then why not this morning, why not do it now?

If you fear your past, hate your sin, long to have some deep dark stain removed, some painful memory healed, some horrible guilt forever banished—Jesus has His gates open wide. His Door is unlocked and He stands with open arms to believers and unbelievers alike this very moment.

There is a relevant application to all this. We will never affect others as Christ did unless there is contact and identification. We have to be willing to take the hand of those whom we would help.

Sometimes a touch, caring involvement, will do a thousand times more than our theology. This is what all churches need to do. We are great in theory. We are careful about our doctrine.

But we need to lay our hand on some rotting flesh in our neighborhood, in the executive towers where we work, in the city slums. We cannot expect this to be only the job of missionaries because a church which does not regularly place its hand on the rotting humanity around it will not be sending missionaries to do so either.