

Luke 5:12-16

It is not by coincidence that the very next passage that Luke gives us follows the calling of the 1st disciples. The scripture is about a man healed of the most devastating disease of the time but the message to those 1st disciples, is, this is what it means to be a disciple, this is what it means to love me, and to love others, irrespective of who they are, or how they might present themselves...

There's no question of the Lord's power and authority to heal and deliver, but the message from the scripture today has two parts:

1. **how the man brings himself before the Lord, and therefore how we bring ourselves to him.**
 - a. Desperate, in reverence, in humility
2. **We'll also notice how Jesus ministers to the man, and therefore how we minister to others.**
 - a. Compassion, grace and healing

And to conclude we'll see in v. 16 how all of these come together **in prayer**...these are the lessons he gave his disciples and us today.

As I read this passage and I attempt to explain what the passage says, I would you ask to consider this morning: What is it *in the way* the man who brings himself to Jesus, throwing himself on the ground desperate for the Lord's touch, can teach us about ourselves, today...? *Who is today's equivalent* of this unclean, untouchable man where the Lord says to us, to follow me, do what I do? Who are the people in our community, cast out, diseased, ostracised, stigmatized...where the Lord says, you love them?

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

This miracle record of Jesus we have in the word of God is essential to Christianity. Why? These are evidences of his supernatural, divine nature. If he is not supernatural and/or divine, the Christian faith becomes inexplicable and we may as well bin our bibles. But Jesus is true, his miracles did happen and he is still the same miracle working true Jesus, today.¹

¹ Heb. 13:8

How did the man bring himself before the Lord, and therefore how do we bring ourselves to him?

Desperate

¹² While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.

Luke doesn't tell us what town it is. That's immaterial to how the man brings himself before Jesus. Because Luke strategically places this single account – of all he could have chosen – to teach Theophilus some important lessons...remember Luke has just told us *"they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him"* (v.11)

The man comes along, *covered* with leprosy, that is his body will have been completely ravaged by the disease. Now to understand something of the *desperation* and the *courage* of this man to come to Jesus in this way we have to appreciate the enormity of this disease at the time.

Do remember the point of the passage is *how the man* brings himself to Jesus and *how Jesus responds*, irrespective of what this is...

What is Leprosy?

Leprosy in Scripture is a general term for various skin diseases. The more serious leprosy was what we know today as Hansen's Disease. These skin diseases were repulsive and resulted in physical, social, and psychological isolation and sometimes death for those who suffered from such diseases.²

Those with the disease were required to live outside the city³ (Lev. 13:46), banished, outcast, they were to keep about 2 meters of distance between themselves and others, including family members and according to what we read in Lev. (13:45) had to wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover their face and when approaching others cry out "unclean, unclean".⁴

Historians tells us one rabbi said he wouldn't even eat an egg after he took the shell off of it, if it was bought on a street where a leper had passed by, fearful of its infection.⁵

Can only imagine the anguish....

Dr Paul Brand is known for his pioneering surgical work with those suffering from Hansen's disease, he also wrote a series of books connecting the Christian faith and medicine. He writes, "In the villages of Africa and Asia a person with leprosy has been known to reach directly into a charcoal fire to retrieve a dropped potato. Others would extinguish a burning wick with their bare hands."⁶

² Liefeld, W. L. (1984). [Luke](#). In F. E. Gaebeline (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 878). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

³ Note that in relation to v.16 and Mark 1:45

⁴ Leprosy was known as the walking death

⁵ [A Lesson from a Leper \(gtv.org\)](#)

⁶ [A Lesson from a Leper \(gtv.org\)](#)

What was the problem? They couldn't feel pain.

Pain, Brand believed, was not antithetical to life, but a requisite for it. He says "God designed the human body so that it is able to survive, *because of pain*,"⁷

Leprosy was considered the worst disease in biblical times.^{8 9} Such a threat to society, God had it in the law to preserve his people (Lev. 13 & 14). Lev. 13:46 *As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.* So there's a lot of law and history that precedes this encounter with Jesus.

So here is this man, he would have been crying out "*unclean, unclean*", I expect people would be gapping it, giving themselves distance out of fear of catching the disease ...and then he sees Jesus. The man could have been stoned for violating his quarantine, for him that could have been a relief, right. But he's not looking at what's going on around him, about what others think, forget the embarrassment and shame, any pride is long gone, he's concerned only about getting to the Lord.

Can we see in the text the man's *desperation*?! Desperate for hope, hope that he knows, is only possible through Jesus, and nothings getting in the way of this man being cleansed, if, Jesus is willing.

I see the same *desperation* in the woman with the 12-year long bleeding issue (Luke 8:43-48).

Some of you will remember a song we used to sing called The Air I Breathe. The point of the song being, that our desperation for God matches our reliance on air that we breathe¹⁰

I think there is an irresistible analogy here, because everything's a teaching moment with Jesus. Yes this is a man with disease desperate for the Lord, *but the man graphically illustrates how we must come to Christ*, with our own "disease", the greatest of which is our sin...¹¹

Why? It is not physical disease that causes us to fall short of the glory of God, it is sin, and all have sinned and fallen short of his glory (Rom. 3:23). Inevitably it is sin we need forgiveness for, cleansing from, and salvation for. Desperate...¹²

In Reverence

(v. 12b) *When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him,*

⁷ Noted Surgeon and Author Paul Brand Dies at Age 8... | Christianity Today

⁸ What is the disease today that would be just as ravaging?⁸ Heart disease (15.5% of deaths), followed by Stroke (11.1%) [The Top 10 Deadliest Diseases in the World \(healthline.com\)](#) Reviewed 2019; [Top 10 Worst Diseases in The World \(infotainworld.com\)](#) Source = [Cardiovascular diseases \(CVDs\) \(who.int\)](#)

⁹ Recall when David wanted to curse Joab's family...2 Sam. 3:29 *May his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy...*

¹⁰ This is the air I breathe, Your holy presence living in me, This is my daily bread, This is my daily bread, Your very word spoken to me, And I I'm desperate for you, And I I'm lost without you

¹¹ This is the message Jesus will have wanted the newly minted disciples to catch, this is what following me means...

¹² Many synonyms of desperate are negative, however it also means **yearning, hungry, longing**

How does the man bring himself before the Lord? Prostrate, with all his open wounds, in the dirt, his face to the ground, begging the Lord.

One of the greatest illustrations of reverence... Rev. 7:11-12 *All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"*¹³

So the man is not only *desperate* he knows he's in the presence of the Lord and what he can do...*reverence*...

Again I think this man illustrates in his attitude and posture how we must come to Christ...

Wounds, not obvious, more hidden, but wounds nonetheless that we perhaps must bring before God with our face to the ground, desperate...Notice what he says...

In Humility

(v.12c) *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

Notice two things:

*If you are willing...*The man's expectation wasn't that Jesus would cleanse him, it was Jesus could, "if" he was willing. I.e. 'If this is something you're willing to do Lord'

And right here we have a critical example for a correct theology for healing. *And that is, **God is obliged to do nothing we want him to do, but will do everything he wills to do.***

2ndly, you can make me clean... Leprosy in its time was seen as reflecting the presence of sin, so reaching out to sinners is pictured here. He didn't ask for healing, he was asking to be physically and spiritually clean...*right with God*

Physical disease is one thing; spiritual disease is another. Sin. Jesus healed physical disease, but his greater mission was to cleanse from sin and this he did, how? By his death on a cross. This is the most serious deadly of all. Because it is sin that our entire eternity rests on. This is the disease that we must bring to Jesus, desperate, in humility and in reverence. *"Lord, if you're willing you can make me clean"*

¹³ Also: Isa. 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

He had a dreaded disease. Our 'disease' doesn't need to be so obvious for his example to teach us something of how we are to come to Christ, I believe this is why Luke includes such accounts.

Yes of course Jesus has the power to heal, but healing here is a means to a greater end. Humility asks "if you're willing, not, I want. Humility depends and relies and trusts God's will.

Isa. 66:2b *"These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.*

how does Jesus minister to the man, and therefore how do we minister to others?

In Compassion

¹³ *Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.*

Mark 1:41 (AMP) *"Moved with compassion [for his suffering], Jesus reached out with His hand and touched him"*

The man is covered with leprosy, and because Luke says he's "covered" means that he's had this a long time and the disease is very advanced. It's probably been a very long time since anyone's been this close to him¹⁴, and very naturally, Jesus does something no else would dare do and reaches out to touch the man.

Leprosy then, reflected the presence of sin, and is one reason why the man in our story today is asking to be clean. Clean of sin, clean of any physical disease. So as the man approached Jesus yelling "unclean, unclean" was Jesus was doing it all wrong? Surely the right way was to yell out from a safe distance "be healed". But Jesus fits in no box, he is non-conformist. Jesus, shattered all the political correctness of the day and *"reached out and touched the man"*

(v.13b) *"I am willing"* Jesus said. I've pondered these 3 words and realised what Jesus was doing was offering the man reassurance that not only *could* he make the man clean, he *will* make the man clean.

We don't know if this was a hand on the shoulder, or a full embrace, either way Jesus was demonstrating something powerful through not being afraid and not denying the man his love, care and ministry...

Matt. 9:36 *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

¹⁴ (cf. Lev. 14:46; cf. *Mishnah, Nega'im* 3:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:6 – 12),

Matt. 14:14 *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Ps. 103:13 *As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;*

Compassion = to be moved in our inward parts: our hearts, lungs, kidneys...¹⁵

I've always believed that scripture shows us that God has a particular predisposition to the hurt, broken, poor and outcast and Jesus' ministry to the man in this story is no exception.

One of the most significant lessons from the cleansing of the leper story is that anyone can experience God's compassion and healing grace. And the church is called¹⁶ by such examples to reach out to those particularly on the fringes of society, but all people who need healing, cleansing and salvation. No person is beyond the reach of God's compassion and grace.

Leprosy then reflected the presence of sin, so reaching out to the sinful is pictured here. So I ask what is the closest equivalent of this man, today? Heart disease, cancer, AIDS? In the context of compassion, we must be mindful that sin is sin. I know we can tend to rank sin, we think of some sins as more serious than others, often as if our sin, is somehow less 'serious'? ***Is it??***

Jesus came to save people from sin, any sin, no matter how serious. So the ministry of compassion he reveals here should be matched by our compassion and grace to others. There is a world of people 'out there' dying in their sin, dying without knowing Christ as their Saviour. Luke puts this story here to show us the compassion of Christ is radical, necessary, uncomplicated, and unconditional.

Although we cannot change everything in the world, our task as the church is to bring God's presence and love and when we stretch out the hand of compassion, grace and healing, we stretch out the hand of the body of Christ.

When journalist Malcolm Muggeridge observed first-hand the poverty of Calcutta, he returned to England to write about it, in fact indignantly. He says of his experience there that Mother Teresa did not accomplish much statistically by rescuing stragglers from a sump of human need. "But then (he says) Christianity is not a statistical view of life."¹⁷

Let's remember he is the Lord who leaves the 99 to rescue the one. This is the Lord who said act justly, love mercy and walk humbly¹⁸

¹⁵ Strong's Greek: 4697. σπλαγχνίζομαι (splanchnizomai) -- to be moved in the inward parts, i.e. to feel compassion (biblehub.com)

¹⁶ Remember this is the first ministry situation for the new disciples.

¹⁷ <https://bible.com/reading-plans/16081/day/4?segment=0>

¹⁸ Micah 6:8

Need a reason to show the compassion of Christ to others, ***what compassion did he show you and I?!***

(v. 13c) *"And immediately the leprosy left him"*

Full of leprosy, nek minute, completely and utterly free of leprosy. Completely restored. Brand new tissue. Zero sign of any disease. This is the power of Christ to heal, to cleanse and, to save.

Passages such as this do, rightly, raise questions about healing¹⁹, and perhaps the question of does/will/can God heal in the same way today we see in NT scripture. I'm very conscious of the different viewpoints around healing, today. However, let me make several observations: **God, can, heal instantaneously, like in this story, if he so chooses. he's God! So healing today is never a case of could God, it's always a case of will he, if he so chooses.**

Faith is certainly a factor (*next passage?*), but God heals because he chooses to heal for his glory. Remember faith is not to force the hand of God, faith trusts God irrespective of the outcome.²⁰ Important I say here that it *could be* there is unconfessed sin in your life, issues you are harboring, prohibiting your healing, God is attempting to get your attention...

Why in times of illness – all times actually – good practice to seek the Lord, confess our/all sin. (nb. 1 John 1:9)

Isa. 38:16-17 *You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. (what the man had in mind?)*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*²¹

Faith, is for trusting God to heal, if he so wills.

God is still God, and he is still powerful and he still can heal, even when/if he chooses to not heal in a way we might expect. The healing of Jesus, comes only by the grace and sovereign work of God.²² Why the humility of the man is an important example. *"If you're willing Lord, you can make me clean"*.

There's one further response we learn from the story, that Jesus asked of the man, but he actually failed to do in the way Jesus asked him...

¹⁹ Remember healing here was only a means to a greater end.

²⁰ Faith is certainly a factor in healing. We must have faith. But faith to believe in God. (e.g. Mark 5:34) There is an element of faith in healing but he heals because he chooses to heal for his glory.

²¹ Association between confession of sin and healing

²² Bock Darrell L. "Two Healing Miracles" In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Luke*. By Darrell L. Bock, 155-158. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996.

Worship

¹⁴ *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."*

Why would Jesus say don't tell anyone? That's a bit tough isn't it?! If one of our kids or grandkids scored 5 tries or 20 goals, you want to get that thing on FB and let everyone know right!

"Bro, you've got your hands back, how'd that happen" ... "my lips are sealed..."

One of Jesus reasons may have been, he didn't want people attracted to him just because he could heal them physically. He didn't want the main thing to be free fish, bread and healings. Wrong motivation. He would know there's people who just want to follow him only because of what they can from him: seeking the gift instead of the giver.

Another reason might be he didn't want any more attention from an already suspicious religious establishment, who were probably jealous already of Jesus growing popularity.²³

A further reason is worship. Despite this awesome news, Jesus wanted the man to give God the glory, first. How? By following Jesus' instruction and doing what the bible says to do on such occasions.

According to the law this process before the priest would take a week. Why would Jesus, given what he's just done insist on such a process? Because he wanted the priests to see first that this was a miracle and that there could be no other explanation by the end of the week that this was the work of the Messiah. And God would be worshipped.

It's like: *'everyone else will hear about me in time, but I want the acknowledgement from them'* – *"as a testimony to them"* means

¹⁵ **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.*

When we read V.15 we might think surely it's a good thing that news got around and more came to Jesus meaning more people were healed.

Not so. If we read Marks version of events (1:40-45) we find that as a result of what the man did, Jesus could no longer travel openly around Galilee.

²³ All the head honchoes turn up en masse for Jesus' next miracle

Can we see what happened in the story? The leper, unclean, an outcast, comes to Jesus to be cleansed. Jesus heals, cleanses him, gives him new life and he is restored into the community.

Then after this awesome miracle where is Jesus? Out in *"lonely places"* He's become the outcast. Jesus had traded places with the leper.²⁴ And that's precisely what he has done for you and I and for those who will bring themselves to Christ...

2 Cor. 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

For us to be made clean, Christ was made unclean for our sakes. Jesus didn't overlook uncleanness; he conquered it. And he didn't just conquer it; he traded places with it²⁵

PRAYER

Then there's one last thing, Luke gives us Jesus did. He *"...prayed"* (v.16). Quite possibly the most important point this morning. Jesus often withdrew and prayed, in other words, this is the way he dealt with the busyness, with the circumstances, everything is brought before the father. *Could we say that?*

This is a story of how Jesus heals a diseased man, but in these 5 verses Luke pours into us a number of important Christian Life principles, that ***all converge in prayer***. I take from what Luke tells us that even Jesus needed to withdraw in prayer, slow down and spend time with God, hear from God the Holy Spirit and reflect on himself, his mission and his heart

Jesus needed to take time out, he valued the importance of this time with his Father...*shouldn't we?*

Prayer helps us to see the state of our heart before God. *Desperate, in humility and in reverence* is how we bring ourselves to him...irrespective of our need. *Out of compassion and Grace* is how we minister to others...irrespective of who they are.

Prayer helps us know God's heart and know his perspective on all such matters.

"But (your name) withdrew and prayed often..."

²⁴ Early in his ministry we see a type of the salvation that was to come

²⁵ [How Jesus Traded Places With a Leper \(thegospelcoalition.org\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org)