

Luke 5:12-16

"The Disease of Our Sin"

July 7, 2024

1. Intro

- a. So, I don't know if there has ever been a survey done among churchgoers asking them what their least favorite chapters in the Bible are...
 - i. But I would bet that a strong case could be made for the 13th and 14th chapters of Leviticus to top that list
 1. These two chapters are all about the Levitical laws regarding "leprosy"
 - a. Now, chapter 15 is all about bodily discharges, so THANK THE LORD, we aren't talking about THAT this morning
 2. But chapter 13 is pretty rough in and of itself
 - a. I'm a firm believer in the power of verse-by-verse preaching, but thankfully we are studying the book of Luke... not the book of Leviticus
 - i. So I will let you study the details of chapter 13 and 14 for yourself
 - ii. But in the times of Moses, and even on through to the days of Jesus, leprosy was a very real, and a very DANGEROUS reality
 1. We see from Leviticus 13 and 14 that this was a skin disease that had varying degrees of seriousness
 - a. It was possible to have just a moderate case of leprosy, where your skin would have mild lesions that would eventually heal on their own
 - i. In these cases, those who were infected would go before the priest, and if they were pronounced "clean" by the priest, then the worst that person would experience would be that they would have to have all their hair shaved off, and they would have to remain separated from the people for a week or so
 - b. But the REAL tragedy was when someone was infected throughout their entire body with leprosy
 - i. Again, I'll spare you the details...
 1. But basically, when this happens, the person's skin begins to deteriorate
 - a. The nerve endings in the skin begin to fail, so the person no longer feels pain in his or her extremities
 - i. As a result, they can be injured without even knowing it, and infection can set in, without them even being aware
 2. As the skin begins to decay, the damage to the body goes deeper and deeper, eventually resulting in a gruesome and agonizing death
 - iii. Sadly, the trauma from this disease wasn't just physical, however
 1. In Leviticus 13 and 14, we're faced with the staggering reality that God prescribes NO cure for leprosy
 - a. There are certain ceremonies and practices the person must perform in order to be pronounced clean from this disease
 - i. But nowhere in the Law of Moses do we find ANY hint that this is a disease that can be cured

- ii. And so, for those diagnosed with a leprous disease that cannot be made clean, the only course left for them is given in Leviticus 13:45-46
 - 1. ⁴⁵*The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'* ⁴⁶*He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.*

iii. Can you imagine the EMOTIONAL turmoil that would accompany the PHYSICAL torture of this disease

- 1. Not only is your body literally falling apart...
 - a. But now you are condemned to live a life OUTSIDE of the camp of God's people, and you are to continually cry out to anyone who comes near, "UNCLEAN! UNCLEAN!!"

iv. There was no ceremony the priest could perform to make you whole

- 1. There was no treatment the physicians could give to bring you healing
 - a. Even today, with all of our scientific advancements, according to one of the foremost drug development scientists of our day, Dr. Gangadhar Sunkara, he says, "It is a very complex disease, and much about leprosy remains a gripping puzzle..."
 - i. Statistics tell us that up to 3 MILLION people worldwide still live with leprosy, and on average, 200,000 new cases are detected every year

v. What we are left with as we read these passages of Scripture, and as we read the statistics even today, is this:

- 1. Those who become infected with leprosy... back in Ancient Israel, and even still today... are solely at the mercy of God for their healing
 - a. And this is what we encounter as we look at our passage for this morning...

2. Luke 5:12-16

a. ¹²*While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."* ¹³*And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean."* ¹⁴*And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them."* ¹⁵*But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.* ¹⁶*But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*

i. As we take this passage and break it down, we find three main points about Jesus...

- 1. The compassion of Jesus
- 2. The deity of Jesus
- 3. The humanity of Jesus

b. So first, the COMPASSION of Jesus

i. One of the things that we didn't discuss in our brief overview of the disease of leprosy is that it is a highly contagious disease

1. In the article that I quoted a few moments ago from Dr. Sunkara, it states that even today doctors are not able to exactly pinpoint how leprosy is transmitted

- a. Some doctors believe it is through a person's spit or mucous
- b. Some believe it is simply transferred through physical touch

i. There is a lot of debate about whether it originates from nine-banded armadillos, or from red squirrels, or if it comes from the soil of certain parts of the world

- c. Regardless of where or how it is transmitted, however, again it is agreed that leprosy is a very highly contagious disease
 - i. Because the symptoms can often take as long as two years to manifest themselves, it is possible that an infected person could transmit the disease to multiple other people before it is even detected
 - 1. It's not hard then, to understand why the law prescribed by the Lord required the people with leprosy to shout out "Unclean! Unclean!" before anyone came near
- ii. But pay attention to the details that Luke, the physician, gives us in this passage
 - 1. In verse 12, Luke says that this man was FULL of leprosy
 - a. This word for "full" is typically used in the New Testament as a very positive thing
 - i. After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, he was FULL of the Holy Spirit
 - ii. The baskets that the disciples collected after Jesus fed the five thousand were FULL of leftovers
 - iii. Stephen, the first martyr of the church, was said to be FULL of faith and the Spirit
 - 1. In almost every instance in the Scriptures, this word for "full" painted a picture of completeness, and wholeness in Christ
 - b. But in this instance, "full" couldn't have been any worse
 - i. For this man was infected through and through with this awful disease
 - 1. He had no hope that it might run its course, and that he might eventually be declared "clean" by the priest
 - 2. This diagnosis that Dr. Luke gives of "full of leprosy" is nothing short of a death sentence
 - a. And this man would have been condemned to spending the rest of his life in shame and isolation, crying out "Unclean! Unclean!" to any who came near
 - c. But what does Luke say about this encounter?
 - i. In verse 12, the man falls on his face and he begged Jesus, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."
 - 1. Friends, this was an incredible statement of faith by this leprous man
 - a. We've already established that, even now, in all the technological and scientific advancements of the 21st Century, leprosy still presents a "gripping puzzle" to the scientists of our day
 - b. How much less could the physician in the FIRST century bring healing to this awful disease?
 - 2. Yet this man says, "Lord, if YOU will, YOU can make me clean..."
 - d. And in verse 13, Luke writes that Jesus stretched out his hand, and he TOUCHED the man, saying, "I will... be clean"
 - i. If you think back a few weeks ago to our study on the healing ministry of Jesus, you'll remember that Jesus didn't have to be near someone in order to heal them
 - 1. In Luke 17, he healed ten lepers from across the street

2. In Luke 7, he healed the Centurion's servant from down the road
 3. And in John 4, Jesus heals the official's son from nearly 25 miles away
- e. Yet in THIS passage, Jesus TOUCHED the man with the highly contagious skin disease
- i. WHY would he do such a thing, if we've already seen from the Scriptures that physical touch wasn't necessary???
1. Well, Mark gives us the answer in his Gospel
 - a. In Mark 1:40-41, we read these words...
 - i. ⁴⁰And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." ⁴¹MOVED WITH PITY, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."
- f. Why did Jesus touch this man, when physical touch wasn't needed for the man's healing?
- i. Because Jesus was moved with pity
 1. This word used for "moved with pity" is a long Greek word that I won't even attempt to pronounce
 - a. But it literally means "to yearn from the deepest part of your bowels"
 - b. This is a word filled with emotion and empathy and longing
 - ii. Jesus didn't NEED to touch the man to heal his PHYSICAL disease
 1. But Jesus knew that there was much more to this man's condition than just the affliction seen on the outside
 - a. Only Jesus knew how long this man had been afflicted with this disease
 - b. Only Jesus knew how long this man had been isolated away from his family, condemned to live outside the camp
 - c. Only Jesus knew the emotional trauma this man had lived with all this time, as anytime someone came near him, he had to cry out about himself, "Unclean! Unclean!"
 - iii. Jesus, the Son of God, KNEW all that this man had endured
 1. He was overwhelmed with pity for this man
 - a. So he touched the one who no one else would EVER dare to touch
- g. This was the compassion of the One who had come, according to Isaiah, to "take our illnesses and bear our diseases."
- c. But in this moment of incredible compassion, we also come face-to-face with the DEITY of Jesus
- i. We see it first in the faith-filled exclamation of the leper...
 1. "LORD, if YOU will, YOU can make me clean"
 - a. This word for "Lord" is the same title that we saw last week, as Peter had begun to realize that Jesus was TRULY Lord, the Sovereign King over ALL things
 - i. We don't know the backstory of this leper

1. Maybe he had heard of the miracles Jesus had been performing in Cana and Jerusalem and Capernaum
2. In Matthew's account of this incident, it happens DIRECTLY after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount...
 - a. So maybe this leper had been standing off at a distance, hearing these amazing teachings, given by a man who taught with unprecedented authority
 - b. Whatever the case was, this leper ascribes to Jesus the title of Sovereign Lord, and he says to him, "Only YOU can do what all the priests and all the physicians are incapable of... Only YOU can heal me – if it is your will"
- ii. And Jesus, affirming the TRUTH of this man's words, says to him, "I will... BE CLEAN."
 1. And Luke writes that IMMEDIATELY the leprosy left him
 - a. Friends, this is an absolutely mind-blowing miracle!!
 - i. IMMEDIATELY, all of the boils and lesions that COVERED this man's body... DISAPPEARED
 - ii. IMMEDIATELY, all of the deep tissue damage, and all of the damage done to this man's organs... ALL OF IT... was restored
 - iii. IMMEDIATELY, every single nerve ending all across the man's skin came alive, and he could FEEL once again
 - b. All of this happened IMMEDIATELY
 - i. This disease that even still today is only seen as treatable, but not curable... it was completely eradicated by the touch and the words, AND THE WILL of Jesus Christ our Lord
 1. This was indeed the Word made flesh
 2. This was indeed the glory of the only Son who had come from the Father
 3. This was indeed the one of whom Jeremiah wrote of in the passage we heard at the beginning of the service...
 - a. *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for YOU are my praise!*
2. Here was the Son of God, doing ONLY what the Son of God could have done
 - a. He healed the man of his leprosy, and it was gone IMMEDIATELY
 - i. And so, in accordance with the Levitical laws given in Leviticus 14, Jesus charged the man to tell no one what had just happened, but to...
 1. "Go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them."
 - a. If the priest in that day was still following the law of Moses, he would kill a bird over a bowl of water
 - b. He would then take a live bird, along with a piece of cedar, some scarlet yarn, and hyssop, and dip them all in the water and the blood of the first bird
 - c. Then the priest would sprinkle the man with that blood and water seven times, the man would be pronounced clean, and the live bird would be let go
 - d. The man would then shave off all his hair, wash all his clothing, take a bath, and he would be clean

- e. And, after seven days, this man could return home to his family and his friends... whole and healed and CLEAN before the Lord
- 3. At least, that's what should have happened
 - a. But Mark tells us that this man DID NOT do as Jesus commanded, but instead went out and began to talk freely about what had happened
 - i. And as a result of this man's disobedience, Mark tells us that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but had to spend most of his time out in "desolate places"
 - b. There is an important lesson for us in these events, isn't there?
 - i. It's hard to fault the man for doing what he did
 - 1. He was genuinely excited about what Jesus had just done for him, and he wanted EVERYONE to know about it
 - 2. But we must never forget, friends, that the commands of the Scriptures stand in authority over the emotions of our heart
 - a. There may be times when we want to go out and say and do all sorts of things "in the name of Jesus..."
 - i. But if these things are not in accordance with God's Word, then we may find ourselves actually HINDERING the spread of the Gospel, rather than helping it
 - ii. God has been EXCEEDINGLY gracious to us in giving us an entire Book that reveals to us HIS heart for how this world should operate
 - 1. May we learn from the error of the leper that there are consequences for when we think we have come up with BETTER ways to do things than what God tells us to do
 - 4. So we see in this passage the COMPASSION of Jesus, as he reaches out and touches this man with the leprous skin disease
 - 5. We see in this passage the DEITY of Jesus, as he does what no mere man could ever do, by healing this man IMMEDIATELY and COMPLETELY of his awful disease
- d. And as this passage closes, we also get a beautiful glimpse of the HUMANITY of Jesus
 - i. In verse 15, we read about the report about Jesus spreading abroad, and great crowds coming to him to hear his teaching and to be healed of their infirmities
 - 1. But then in verse 16, we read this small detail that is unique to Luke's Gospel alone...
 - a. ¹⁶*But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*
 - i. Have you ever asked the question, "WHY would Jesus need to pray?"
 - 1. We get some specific reasons throughout the Gospels for Jesus' prayers...
 - a. As we'll see in a few weeks, in Luke 6 Jesus went to the mountain to pray, and then the following day he chose the twelve disciples, whom he would name as Apostles
 - i. So, presumably, Jesus had spent the night before praying alone for wisdom from his Father, and maybe for strength and courage for the Twelve
 - b. In John 17, in the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prays that the glory given to him by the Father, would now be given to his disciples

- a. If Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, full of the Holy Spirit, had to withdraw OFTEN to desolate places to pray...
 - i. How much more so do WE need to go and do the same?
 - iv. In the chaos and craziness of the world in which WE live, how much more so do we need to REMOVE OURSELVES from the chaos, and spend time in quiet prayer and solitude before our Father?
 - 1. Martin Luther once famously said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours of my day in prayer."
 - a. Would we not say the exact opposite of OUR lives?
 - i. "Three hours in prayer?! I have so much to do today that I'll be lucky to get three MINUTES of prayer!"
 - 2. I know... the common objection to these kinds of things is, "Well I have the freedom to pray ANYTIME of the day... I can pray while I'm driving to work... I can pray while I'm folding laundry... I can pray before meals..."
 - a. Those things are all certainly TRUE
 - i. But is THAT what Jesus was modeling for us in this passage?
 - ii. NO! Jesus VERY INTENTIONALLY removed himself from ALL distractions, in order that his Father might have his full and undivided attention
- v. And this is how he commands us to pray as well
3. Again, think back to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount... in Matthew 6:5-6, Jesus says,
 - a. ⁵And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
4. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we MUST follow the example of our Lord
 - a. We must make it a practice to withdraw from the to-do lists
 - b. We must make it a practice to step away from our phones and our laptops and our TV's
 - c. We must make it a practice to find a place where we can kneel before our Father who is in secret, and spend time before His throne of grace
- e. Jesus did this regularly, even though he was without sin
 - i. WE must do so regularly, for our flesh is FULL of sin
 - 1. And this is what makes this passage so incredibly relevant to us today
3. For every single one of us is infected with a SPIRITUAL leprosy, and this leprosy is called SIN
 - a. Like the physical disease of leprosy, our sin causes the flesh of who we were meant to be to become dead and full of decay
 - i. Our spiritual nerves have become so deadened to sin that we do not even realize when pieces of our humanity have become rotten and putrid
 - b. Like the physical disease of leprosy, no scientist or doctor will ever be able to pinpoint where the disease of sin comes from

- i. For this disease does not reside in a certain gene or chromosome
 - 1. It permeates through every aspect of who we are
- ii. It did not start through the transmission from bacteria in the soil, or from red squirrels in the UK, or from nine-banded armadillos in Africa
 - 1. Our sin started in the Garden, when Adam and Eve rejected God's authority over their lives, and sought to usurp the throne for themselves
- c. And like the physical disease of leprosy, there is no human cure for the disease of our sin
 - i. Sure, society will continue to strive to treat the SYMPTOMS of our disease...
 - 1. Governments will try to mandate laws and regulations to curb our immorality
 - 2. Politicians will come up with all kinds of programs to try to force mankind to be generous and kind
 - 3. Doctors and scientists will churn out drug after drug to try to dull and control the desires of our hearts
 - a. But all of these are simply addressing the symptoms of our disease
 - i. They are TREATMENTS, but they are not the CURE
- d. For, like the physical disease of leprosy, our ONLY hope to be FULLY cured comes from God Himself
 - i. He ALONE can heal us from our sin
 - ii. He ALONE can say the word, our hearts will be made new
 - iii. He ALONE can restore our souls...
 - 1. If HE wills, HE can make us clean
 - a. And so, God, full of kindness and compassion and pity, stretched out His hand and touched mankind
 - b. Because He so loved the world, He gave to us His one and only Son, that whoever believes IN HIM should not perish, but have eternal life
 - c. According to the counsel of HIS OWN WILL, we who have put our hope in Christ have been made whole, to the praise of HIS glory
 - i. Christ, the one so full of compassion that "he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
 - ii. Christ, the Sinless One, God made flesh, who would live his life perfect in every way, yet who would take OUR sin upon his shoulders, that we might be clothed in HIS righteousness
 - iii. Christ, the Son of Mary, who clothed himself in our human nature, that he might become for us the NEW Adam
 - 1. That from him, those of us who were born into the corrupted nature of the first Adam, FULL of the leprosy of our sin, might be healed and made new... IMMEDIATELY
 - 2. Only a compassionate God would come up with such an unbelievable plan of healing and restoration
 - 3. Only one who was both truly God AND truly man could accomplish such an unimaginable renewal of our sinful state
 - a. Friends, NONE OF US have any hope whatsoever of being healed from the disease of our sin... that is, APART FROM CHRIST
 - i. This was the life-transforming revelation of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:24-25
 - 1. As Paul was lamenting how the old man of his flesh was still consumed with the leprosy of his own sin, even though IN HIS

HEART he delighted in the law of God, Paul wrote these words...

a. ²⁴*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

iv. My friends, until Christ returns, and we discard these earthly tents that we reside in, our flesh will constantly wage war against our heart

1. And so the only question that TRULY matters is...

a. Has your HEART been made new?

i. Have you found the healing that ONLY comes through surrendering your life to Jesus Christ?

ii. Like Jeremiah, have you found the fountain of living water, the One to whom you can say,

1. "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise."?

b. Turn to the Compassionate One

c. Surrender to the One who was both fully God, and fully man

d. Give your life to the ONLY one who is able to heal the disease of your sin

i. Fall on your face before him, and say to him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

1. And the incredible promise of the Scriptures is that when we come to Christ with such a broken and contrite spirit, his response to us – EVERY TIME – is, "I will... be clean!"

4. Celebration of the Lord's Supper