

Healing the Leper

Scripture Readings: Luke 5.12-15, Matthew 8.1-3, Mark 1.40-45

As we progress through this series we will discover some consistent characteristics of the healing ministry of Jesus which mark a work as His. We will seek to draw attention to them because we can learn from them what we might expect in our own relationship with Jesus, as we also expose to Him our need. We will also see how a miracle including one of healing often reinforced the teaching he had recently been giving. It was a living demonstration or illustration of the words that He had just spoken.

This medical miracle was recorded by all three evangelists. Therefore it has significance in the development of the ministry of Jesus. There are at least three factors here. First the Rabbis saw the event as a challenge. Second it is a demonstration to Peter, James and John of the method of Jesus in 'casting his net'. It also speaks to us in our relationship with the Lord. The story falls naturally into three parts:

The approach of the leper v12.

Luke alone tells us that the man was 'full of leprosy'. The doctor is describing the case. The word used means 'completely affected by the disease'. The NIV gives 'covered with'. Luke is telling us that the disease was advanced. The time for a cure was past. The case was humanly hopeless. Edersheim (3:15) tells us that such a man under rabbinical law was forbidden contact with all except other lepers, was not permitted in the temple nor any walled city, must dress in torn clothes like a mourner, cover his face and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' (Leviticus 13.45) He was not permitted to wash his face. A building where a leper entered was unclean even to the rafters.

He was allowed to attend a village synagogue but was isolated when entering and leaving. During the proceedings he occupied a separate room. The rabbis classified leprosy as a defilement second only to that of the dead and one of the 'fathers of uncleanness' or contagious. They had no cure, and demanded isolation to prevent its spread. No one was allowed to greet him and he had to keep a distance of four cubits from others (about two metres).

Such an one then approached Jesus and knelt before Him, Luke says 'with his face to the ground'. He would not have done this to a rabbi.

His appeal was a cry of desperation rather than a prayer.

All three gospels record it, "Lord (Sir) if you are willing, you can make me clean!" We must see this appeal as a recognition of the authority and ability of Jesus.

The acceptance of the Lord v13.

'If you will . . . I am willing' (v12&13) There is a lesson here for our own prayer life with the Lord. The prayer of faith is not one of finding a text-promise on which to hang a prayer. It is a matter of bringing a need to the Lord in a fellowship relationship with Him. We know He can, but will He? Is it God's will that this matter be done, and waiting before Him until we hear Him say, '*I am willing; be clean.*' Faith then takes over from supplication. God does what He says He will do. We must make it personal (John 15.7). This is not a prayer method. It is a relationship of fellowship. It is Christian normal living.

The method Jesus used was a loving caress. Jesus touched him! Absolutely forbidden. This was no mere tip of the finger. It is the same word as in Mark 10.13-16, when mothers brought their children to Jesus and He took them in his arms and touched them to bless them.

The appeal of the miracle v14-16.

There were many who were healed in those days. Why was this particular miracle so significant? First, this is the first recorded miracle after the calling of Peter. It is a demonstration of the words of Jesus to Peter, James and John as to how men were to be caught. 'Fear not; from henceforth you shall catch men.' Luke 5.10. It is instructive to compare v4-6 with v14&15 Second the challenge by implication v14. Complying with the rabbinical requirement entailed an explanation of the healing the leper had experienced. It becomes evident as the narrative continues that the Scribes and Pharisees saw it as a challenge to their derived authority and decided to place Jesus under surveillance. See Luke 5.21.

Third the source of the Authority and power of Jesus v15. It was not the piety or holiness of Jesus, nor the fact that He was the incarnate Word, but as a man anointed and filled by the Spirit of God he was careful to maintain that fellowship of prayer and communion with His father in Heaven. See John 8.28&29,

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