



- Read Luke 5:12-16, Pray
- **City Slickers Clip**

Allow me to begin the message this morning by asking you: How many of us can identify with this video clip? How many of us can remember when we hungered for a sense of wholeness that seemed constantly to elude our grasp? How many of us still, even at this very moment, hunger deeply for physical strength... emotional peace... spiritual wholeness? Let me ask you, can there really be any hope for people like us who live in such broken, unclean, and desperate world? Can we really ever become whole? Sometimes, I think we feel helpless to stand against the tides of sin and shame that flood our spirits, and our hearts feel bereft of the promises of life and hope. Yet, the answer to all of our emptiness rings forth in one magnificent truth: We can be made spiritually whole in a moment if we will, by faith...

-- Turn to Jesus in our uncleanness.

In our passage this morning, we find Jesus deeply involved in His Galilean ministry. And this incident, which we introduced last week and will more closely examine this morning, sees Jesus stringing yet another glorious pearl, so to speak, on the divine string of spiritual redemption as it is revealed in the book of Luke.

Please look with me at the first part of verse 12. It says, *“While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.”* In his commentary of the Gospel of Luke, William Hendricksen writes the following regarding the disease of leprosy:

“The disease, which we today call leprosy, generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original color. It gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly. In fact, the affliction is called leprosy because it makes the skin scaly—the Greek word “lepos,” meaning scale. As the sickness progresses the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers, due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch with deep furrows between the swellings so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers drop off or are absorbed. Toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes

drop off. By this time one can see that the person in this pitiable condition is a leper.”

There is some disagreement among those in the medical field as to whether or not the leprosy referred to in the Bible was actually contagious. Some people look at the Old Testament Law regarding leprosy, in Leviticus 13, and reason that it must be contagious, since lepers were supposed to be placed outside of the camp and isolated from the people once the priest declared them to be leprous. However, in reality, Leviticus 13 doesn't actually discuss with whether or not leprosy was contagious. Rather, it asserts that leprosy rendered the afflicted person ceremonially unclean, and, thus, the leper was shut off from religious and social contact with his own people.

Why, then, does the Old Testament Law contain these provisions about leprosy? Well, the reason is the same here as it is with every other aspect of the ceremonial Law—the physical descriptions, ramifications, and remedies within the Law were given to Israel and recorded for us in order to point ahead to more important and profound spiritual realities. You see, in the Scriptures, we discover that God frequently uses mankind's physical ailments as a means to illustrate our deeper spiritual problems. For instance, those who are physically blind are often used as symbols of the spiritual blindness of an individual, or a nation, or a particular church.

Take, for example, John 9:39. After giving sight to a man born blind, Jesus told the man, *“I have come to judge the world. I have come to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”* Here, Jesus heals a man of His physical blindness to reveal His greater purpose to heal sinners of their much more troublesome spiritual blindness. Similarly, we see the same pattern at work with the dumb, with the deaf, and with the lame. Each of these physical ailments is likewise used by God in Scripture as a type of walking billboard that illustrates deeper spiritual realities. God's Word applies their physical conditions to our own inward spiritual conditions to draw attention to our inward need for redemption and healing.

In our culture, however, we really don't want to see all that, do we? Rather, we do what we can to hide away those who are stricken by disease...the homeless...etc. We don't really want to be reminded by these walking witnesses that everyone in our neighborhoods isn't healthy and fit. However, if we would allow ourselves to look at, or even visit, third world countries, we would not only see such a few isolated walking billboards of sickness and physical ailments, but we are also very likely to see throngs of people lying in the streets, suffering from

all kinds of diseases, malnutrition, homelessness, etc. Whereas we often feel quite uncomfortable about the homeless in our own country, a visitor from one of these other countries would generally feel quite at home among our homeless.

With that in mind, listen to the words written by the Apostle John in Revelation 3:14-17: *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”* And later on in the fifth chapter of Luke, Luke quotes Jesus himself as saying, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

What does this all mean for our understanding of our passage today? Well, here is the main point: In the Old Testament, leprosy was viewed as God's judgment for sin and a symbol of the stark consequences of sinfulness. It was seen as a physical representation of the pollution, separation, and decay wrought by human sinfulness. In short, leprosy was an outward sign of the painful, untimely, and uncomely death that sin produces in people's lives. Furthermore, when a leper was cured, his healing was seen as a symbol of his resurrection from the dead and his reinstatement into the land of the living.

The Bible also presents leprosy as a sign of God's power. In Numbers 12, Moses plainly portrays God's power to afflict a person with leprosy as well as His power to cure it when his sister Miriam is stricken with leprosy as a consequence for speaking against him with pride in her heart. Similarly, in 2 Chronicles 29, we read about the account of King Uzziah, who was stricken with leprosy as a consequence for his rebellion against God. In both cases, leprosy is presented as a judgment of God. In the first case, Miriam was cured by God because of Moses' prayers on her behalf. King Uzziah, on the other hand, went to his grave as a leper. Now, take careful note that this understanding in no way implies that everyone with leprosy today is being specifically punished by God. However, these passages do powerfully imply that there are significant spiritual connotations inherent in the biblical presentation of leprosy, as well as every other malady of humanity.

Now, before we return to our verses this morning, I want to make just a few more points about the ceremonial stipulations regarding lepers in Jesus' day. According to Leviticus 13, once a person had developed a swelling, a rash, or a

bright spot on his skin that might become an infectious skin disease, he had to be brought before the priest to be examined. If the priest declared the person to have contracted leprosy his clothes were to be torn and burned his head was to be uncovered. He was, at that time, declared to be ceremonially unclean and was asked to move outside the camp. Furthermore, whenever anyone approached lepers or their dwelling places, lepers were required to cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” so that all who heard or saw them could both pray for them as well as avoid all contact with them. From these descriptions, we can see that, in ancient Israel, lepers served as sober symbols of the spiritually dead.

With all this background information in mind, I hope we can now see this leper’s encounter with Jesus in Luke chapter 5 in the fullness of the perspective from which it is offered. This leper who approached Jesus was more than just a man with a disease; he stood as a constant reminder to everyone of how God views mankind. Apart from Christ, we are dead in our transgressions and sins. We are perpetrators of sin and casualties of its terrible consequences. We are torn by sin from the presence of God who is Himself the author and keeper of life. We are eaten away at our souls and crumbling in our spirits. We are unclean, incomplete, and unwholesome.

But we are not only cut off from God; our sin has a way of isolating us from family and friends as well. In reality, like the leper, we find ourselves alone and lonely, living outside the camp of fellowship. We sense death in our spirit, and we feel like we will never be whole again. In Psalm 32, David describes his living death outside of the camp, after he sought to conceal his sins of adultery and murder from the people of Israel. In verses three and four, he confesses, “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*”

So in our passage this morning, we have this man—and all that his leprous condition represents—coming to Jesus. And let us carefully notice how it is that he comes. Please look with me in the second part of verse twelve, where Luke writes, “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.’” At the very beginning of verse twelve, we read that our Lord was “in one of the towns” of Galilee when His path crossed that of this leper. Yet, this leper—who should have been living outside the camp—heard that Jesus was in town, and he boldly entered the city looking for Him. Surely, this man knew that the Pharisees freely threw stones at improperly roaming lepers. Surely, he knew that his actions were in violation of the Mosaic

Law. Nevertheless, he was willing to face human wrath if there was even the most remote possibility that he could be healed by this rabbi named Jesus.

As he approached the Lord, he was fully aware of his own uncleanness and unwholesomeness. Thus, helpless, he fell to the ground at the feet of the Savior and cried, “Lord if you are willing you can make me clean.” In essence, he seems to be saying, “Lord, I have heard of your teaching and healing ministry, for Your fame has spread like wildfire in these hills. People say that you have cast out demons that you have cured many diseases. No one has told me that you cured people with leprosy, but based on what people are saying about you— that you are the Messiah of Israel—I believe that, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” He comes to Jesus with humility and reverence. He comes to Jesus with contrition and faith. He comes to Jesus to be saved, and He finds Jesus to be a Savior who is willing and able to save. This man comes to Jesus with a living death that no medicine could check or stay, and, in a moment, he is made well. One small touch from the hand of the Son of God and the cure is effected. In verse 13, we read these glorious words of redemption: *“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy left him.”*

And in this divine appointment we see a living picture of a magnificent truth: Jesus Christ has unique power to heal our hearts and souls. What are you and I but spiritual lepers?