

# JESUS' POWER OVER LEPROSY AND ITS IMPACT: CLEANSING THE MOST UNCLEAN MARK 01:40–45

## *Introduction*

Leprosy was the most feared disease of the ancient world. The leper was considered the most unclean, revolting and hideous person imaginable. Leprosy itself was thought to be the result of terrible sin and actually became the most dramatic type of sin in the minds of people. There was no known cure for leprosy; only God was considered powerful enough to cure the disease. Therefore, in cleansing the leper, Jesus was demonstrating His Messiahship. He was demonstrating that He had the power to cleanse the most unclean, no matter how terrible their uncleanness. (See *Leprosy, Jesus Christ, and Suffering and Healing*, Mt. 8:1-4.)

- I. He was the great hope of the most unclean (v. 40).
- II. He was moved with compassion for the most unclean (vv. 41-42).
- III. He warned the most unclean to go — sin no more (v. 43).
- IV. He demanded that the most unclean witness to His Messiahship (v. 44).
- V. He made a great impact (v. 45).

## MATHEW 08:01–04 LEPROSY

William Barclay points out that leprosy was the most terrible disease in the day of Jesus, greatly feared. It was disfiguring and sometimes fatal. In the Bible leprosy is a type of sin (*The Gospel of Mathew*, Vol. 1, p. 300).

1. The leper himself was considered *utterly unclean* — physically and spiritually. He could not approach within six feet of any person including family members. “The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’” (Lev. 13:45).
2. He was judged *dead* — the living dead. He had to wear a black garment so he could be recognized as being among the *dead*.
3. He was banished as an outcast, totally ostracised from society — earthly and heavenly. “As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp” (Lev. 13:46). He could not live within the walls of any city; his dwelling had to be outside the city gates.
4. He was thought to be polluted, incurable by any human means whatsoever. He could be cured by God and His power alone. Note how Jesus proved His Messiahship and deity by healing the leper.

Imagine the anguish and heartbreak of the leper, being completely cut off from family and friends and society. Imagine the emotional and mental pain. There are other recorded instances of lepers being healed (see Mt. 10:8: 11:5; Mk. 1:40: Lk. 7:22; 17:12; and perhaps Mt. 26:6; see Mk. 14:3). □

### MATHEW 08:01–04 JESUS CHRIST

This is the first healing miracle performed by Jesus in Mathew. Christ proved two things when He healed the leper.

1. Jesus proved Himself to be God, to possess the power of God. The people knew no one could cure a leper but God (2 Kng. 5:7).
2. Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He not only pronounced the leper cured, as the priests did; He *cleansed* the leper. He took the man's leprosy (sin) away; He cleansed the man thoroughly and completely. □

### MATHEW 08:01–04 SUFFERING AND HEALING

This leper was healed. In looking at miraculous healings, the question is often asked, why are all faithful believers not healed when they are sick and ask for healing? Some walk ever so faithfully before God, and they believe that God does heal; and they have as much faith, if not more faith, than some who are healed. Why then are they not also healed?

The reason is God. When God looks at our requests, He considers at least four things.

1. God's glory. Would granting the request bring the greatest glory to God's name?
2. Our good, not only physical, but spiritual. What particular spiritual grace or quality do we need to learn: endurance, self — control, trust, dependence?
  - a. Spiritually, within ourselves: will granting our request strengthen us more spiritually? Which way will our faith and trust in God grow more?
  - b. Spiritually, without ourselves: how does God now want to use us — as a constant prayer warrior? As an unbelievable testimony to His empowering spiritual strength, no matter the physical condition? Consider something else: What do the people need for whom God wants to use us? What is the best way for God to reach them — by demonstrating His strength in and through our trial? No matter what some may claim, the power of God is often more forcibly seen by manifesting itself through infirmities and weaknesses.

*2 Cor 12:8-9 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

3. God's wisdom. He knows what is needed by whom; when it is needed; for whom it is needed; where it is needed; how it is needed; why it is needed.
4. God's mercy. He wills above all else for men to know His mercy. He does whatever is needed to demonstrate His mercy to men. Sometimes walking through the trials of life reveals His mercy more; sometimes removing the trials reveals His mercy more. He chooses the best way for both the sufferer and those who surround him. □

### **I. Mark 01:40 Seeking Jesus: Great Hope for the Leper**

Jesus was the great hope of the most unclean. What happened was dramatic. The man was *covered with leprosy* (*pleres lepras*) (Lk. 5:12). Apparently His whole body was full of sores, perhaps some parts even eaten away by the cancerous disease. He was hopeless, for all were powerless to help him. But somewhere, somehow, he heard about Jesus and His Godly power. Hope sprung up in his heart, and he began to search for Jesus. When he found out where Jesus was, he made his way to Him. Mathew tells us that he found Jesus on the mount where Jesus was preaching the great *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt. 8:1-4). He heard Jesus preach, and what Jesus said burned in his heart and turned his hope into enormous faith. As Jesus made His way down the mountain, the leper burst forth and fell at Jesus' feet. Note three things:

1. The leper (the most unclean) was so desperate and so intent on seeking Jesus' help that he forgot everything else and everyone else. He forgot all about the law requiring him to come no closer than six feet. He forgot all about the thronging crowd that surrounded Jesus. He saw no one and thought of no one except Jesus. It was his desperate need and the enormous hope aroused in him by Jesus that drove him to race through the crowd and fall upon his face begging for help.
2. The leper worshipped Jesus. All three gospel writers throw light upon the *intensity* of the man's act.  
=> Mathew and Mark says that he knelt down before Him (Mt. 8:2; Mk. 1:40).  
=> Luke says that he fell with his face to the ground (Lk. 5:12).
3. The leper saw in Jesus the divine power of God Himself. This was evidenced by his worship of Jesus and the words spoken to Jesus. Note he did *not say*, "You can ask God and God will make me clean." He said, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." He was saying that Jesus possessed the power of God to cleanse him.

**Thought 1.** The leper is a picture of the sinner. Jesus will heal any man who approaches Him as the leper did, even if he is the most unclean person on earth.

**Mark 2:17** *On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*Acts 22:16* “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

*James 4:8* Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

## II. *Mark 01:41–42* **Compassion of Jesus**

Jesus was moved with compassion for the most unclean. Looking down upon the leper, Jesus knew the man: his miserable condition, his heart, his hope, his faith. And Jesus was moved with compassion (See *Compassion*, Mt. 9:36). Note what happened.

1. Jesus was moved to reach out and touch the man. He did not ignore the man. Jesus did not push the man back. He could have, for the man had no right to approach Jesus.

But Jesus, knowing the man's heart, was moved with compassion; and He reached out and touched the man (the most unclean).

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

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

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

*Isa 63:9* In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

2. Jesus was moved to speak the most wonderful words known to man: “I am willing... Be clean!” He spoke His Word of power. Jesus wills to make every man clean. It is His will that every man be made whole. But what is so desperately needed is for every man to approach Jesus just as this poor sinful leper did.

Every man needs to approach Jesus...

- with an intense hope
- with an intense faith
- with an intense worship

*Acts 10:38* How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

*Heb 7:25* Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

*Isa 66:2* Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the Lord. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

3. The result was just as Jesus willed and spoke. His Word of power cleansed and healed the man. In healing the man, Jesus demonstrated three things.
  - a. He cares and is moved with compassion by the plight of men, even by the most unclean.
  - b. He is most definitely the Son of God who possesses the very power of God to cleanse men of their sin and uncleanness. Leprosy was a type or symbol of sin, so in cleansing the man's leprosy, the man was being cleansed (healed) both physically and spiritually.
  - c. He is superior to the law. He reached out and touched the man — which was against the law. Lepers were by law to remain at least six feet away from others, even from family members. A person must know that Christ came to fulfil the law. Jesus said He was neither contradicting nor abolishing the Old Testament Scriptures nor standing against them (Mt. 5:17-18). He was fulfilling them, completing them, bringing out what was implied. He was showing what the real meaning of the Old Testament Scripture is, its full meaning — all that God intended the Scripture to say. As God's Son, He is the Revelation of the truth. He is to reveal the true and complete meaning of the Scriptures.

### MATHEW 09:36 COMPASSION (SPLANCHNISTHEIS)

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. **Mathew 09:36***

Compassion means to be moved inwardly; to yearn with tender mercy, affection, pity, and empathy. It is the very seat of a man's affections. It is the deepest movement of emotions possible, being touched with the deepest feelings possible. It is being moved within the deepest part of a person's being.

***Rom 8:35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

***Heb 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.*

***1 Pet 5:7** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

***Psa 78:39** He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.*

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

*Psa 103:17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children.*

*Isa 63:9 In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them: he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

*Lam 3:22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. □*

### III. **Mark 01:43 Warning Against Sin**

Jesus warned the most unclean to go and sin no more. This point is missed with a quick, surface reading. It can be seen by noticing two facts.

1. What Jesus charged the man with (v. 43) seems to be different from the directions He gives the man in verse 44. Thoughtful reading of the two verses seems to indicate this.
2. The phrase *strong warning* (*embrimesamenos*) is a threatening phrase. It is a strong, severe warning to the man. It is the same kind of charge Jesus gave to the man who had been bedridden for thirty-eight years: "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (Jn. 5:14).

*Thought 1.* When we are forgiven and cleansed, Christ expects us to "stop sinning." We are strongly and severely warned, "something worse may happen to [us]." (Mt. 12:43-45; Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-19; 4:1-13; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39. See Eph. 5:5-6; 2 Th. 1:8; Heb. 2:2-4.)

*Isa 1:16 Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong.*

*2 Cor 7:11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.*

*2 Tim 2:21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

*James 4:8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double — minded.*

### IV. **Mark 01:44 Witnessing Demanded from the Most Unclean**

Jesus demanded that even the most unclean person must witness to His Messiahship. Jesus gave the cleansed man two different charges.

1. "See that you don't tell this to anyone": "Do not boast in your cleansing. Guard against pride, against feeling that God is partial to you and that you are a favourite



of God and more special than *anyone* else.” Apparently there was something within this man that *would* tend toward pride. His attention was not to be upon what had happened to him (his cleansing and healing), but upon Jesus, the compassionate and merciful One.

**Thought 1.** Too often we look at the sinner and say, “*But for the grace of God, there go I.*” Such are the boastful and proud. It is true that the grace of God has saved us, but God saved us not because we are favourites of His. We are not saved to compare ourselves with the sinner by going around saying (testifying) and thinking that we are above the sinner. We are saved to proclaim the grace of God to the man walking along the street. Our task is not to stand on this side of the street and testify: “*But for the grace of God, there go I.*” Our task is to cross over the street and declare to the man: “The grace of God saves and cleanses from all sin. God has cleansed me, the sinner of sinners; His grace will cleanse you. There is cleansing and forgiveness for everyone.”

2. “Go... show yourself to the priest....” Jesus demands for three reasons.

- a. The man needed to obey the law, for he was not above the law. He was to live righteously just as the law demanded. Jesus did not annul or do away with the law. He fulfilled the law; therefore, He is more than the law. The man was being taught to obey the law and more: he was being taught to obey Jesus who includes the law and more (Mt. 5:17-18). His righteous act was to be his primary witness, his final act of obedience.

**Thought 1.** Obedience, that is, living righteously, is our primary witness for Christ. There is no real faith apart from obedience and work.

**Heb 5:9** *And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

**James 2:17** *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

- b. The man must be acknowledged as *cleansed* by everyone. People would not accept him until they knew he was cleansed. The priest had to *pronounce* him clean.

**Thought 1.** Every cleansed person is to go to church, profess his cleansing and become a part of God’s society and family of believers.

**Acts 2:41-42** *Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

**Heb 10:25** *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- c. The priest needed to testify to the divine power of Jesus. All the people knew that only God could cure leprosy. By declaring the man cleansed, the priest would be declaring Jesus to be the Son of God, the Messiah (Lev. 14:2-20).

**Thought 1.** Every time a man is truly cleansed from sin, Jesus is proclaimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. A cleansed man becomes a living testimony and witness to the power of Jesus.

**2 Cor 5:17-21** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**1 John 2:13-16** *I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father; I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

## V. **Mark 01:45 Witnessing — Disobedience**

Jesus made a great impact. The news was spread by the man. The man disobeyed Jesus (just as many of us so often do). Because of the man's disobedience, Jesus was forced to withdraw from the area. In this particular case, He had to leave because the crowds were just too large. Note: there is also a spiritual application here. When we disobey Christ, Christ is forced to withdraw. His presence is no longer sensed by us or seen by our associates. It is as though He is forced into *a lonely, unpopulated place*. It is interesting that nothing more is said about the disobedient leper. Imagine the people who were never helped because Jesus was forced out into *a lonely, unpopulated place!*

**Thought 1.** We may not understand the command of our Lord, but we must obey. The consequences of disobedience are too terrible, destroying lives through our lost witness.

**1 Cor. 15:34** *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame. ■*