

# Receiving the Healing Touch of Christ

## Through the Gospel

**Scripture:** *Mark 1:40-45.*

**Exegetical Big Idea:** Christ touches us through the gospel to heal us of our spiritual *sickness* of sin, and with His *salvation*, He ends our spiritual *separation* from God.

### Introduction

There are still many things we don't know or understand about the corona virus. However one of the frightening things we do know for sure about this virus is how highly contagious it is and how easily it is spread by coming into close contact with someone who has been infected with the virus. This is why social distancing and separation are considered to be important ways of avoiding being infected with this virus.

In the days of Jesus Christ the disease of leprosy was considered to be like that. It was seen as a highly contagious disease that could infect anyone who came into contact with someone who had been infected by the disease. Because of this, just as it is with the corona virus today, social distancing and separation were considered to be important ways of avoiding being infected with the disease of leprosy.

Our passage of reflection this morning, **Mark 1:40-45**, is a story about how Christ touched and healed a leper of the *sickness* of leprosy and thereby ended the leper's *separation* from society with His *salvation*.

So, this morning, we are taking a brief gospel view of these **3S's** from this **Mark 1** passage to see how it teaches us that, through the gospel, Christ heals us of our spiritual *sickness* of sin, and with His *salvation*, He ends our spiritual *separation* from God. (*Read passage*).

This morning, we are reflecting on what these **3S's** from this passage should mean to each one of us during these Covid-19 pandemic days.

### I. Sickness (Verse 40)

- 1) The first verse of this passage, **verse 40** says, "A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged Jesus on his knees, saying "If you are willing, you can make me clean."
- 2) In the days of Jesus Christ if a leper came into someone's house, the house was considered to be defiled and should therefore be destroyed. If a leper was seen on a public street people were allowed to throw eggs and stones at him. Leprosy was assumed to be a curse from God. Because of this the disease also carried a moral stigma. This is why, in the NT, we read that other diseases could be *healed*, but leprosy had to be *cleansed*. In other words, lepers were considered to be not just physically sick, but also spiritually "unclean" and defiled.
- 3) This is why **verse 40** tells us that the leper came begging and kneeling before Jesus. This is also why the leper said to Jesus, "If you are *willing*, you can make me clean."

In other words, the leper had no doubt that Jesus *could* heal him, but he doubted if Jesus would *want* to heal him because he carried in himself this deep sense of being unclean, of being defiled, and of being unworthy, and he was overcome with shame.

- 4) In the days of Jesus Christ the first sign of leprosy on a person's body was regarded as a death sentence. The disease began with the infected person feeling very lethargic and feeling pain in their joints. This was followed by discoloured patches appearing all over their body that left their face unrecognizable. The smell from the sores on a leper's body was very, very strong. This made it difficult to be in the presence of a leper. Even the vocal cords of the leper would be affected, making his or her voice very hoarse.
- 5) I'm sure you've heard how people infected with the corona virus lose their sense of taste and smell. Well, with the disease of leprosy, one of the most distressing symptoms was the victim's loss of sensation and sensitivity in his body, so that the infected person stopped feeling pain. For example, lepers often lose their fingers and toes, and people think this is caused by the disease, but what actually happens is that, sometimes, at night, as the leper is asleep, rats would come and chew at the lepers' infected fingers and toes, but because they do not feel any pain they would sleep right through it and they would wake up in the morning to find that those parts of their body were gone.
- 6) So, in this passage, this man's sickness of leprosy is a picture of our own spiritual sickness of sin that spiritually defiles us before God and makes us insensitive to God and to the needs of other people. Our spiritual sickness of sin makes us more concerned about ourselves than the will of God and the needs of others.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our first S** from this passage by saying that it reminds us about our own spiritual *sickness* and defilement by sin that make us insensitive to God and also insensitive to the needs of other people around us.

## II. Separation (Verse 40)

- 1) When we go to the Law of Moses in the OT this is what we read in **Leviticus 13:45-46**: *Anyone with the disease of leprosy must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.* When I read this part about covering the lower part of their faces, as you can imagine, it reminded me of the face masks we have to wear everywhere today because of the corona virus.
- 2) Because of how highly contagious the corona virus is, it creates fear in us, but fortunately, we also know that it is not always fatal, so, although we still socially distance and separate ourselves from a person who is infected with the virus, fortunately, the corona virus still does not carry the same moral stigma of isolation and separation that leprosy carried in the days of Christ Jesus.
- 3) As we have already seen, the leper in our passage came to Christ with a sense of shame and unworthiness about his condition. He was isolated, he was ostracized, and he was separated from society by his illness. This is just like those infected with Covid-19 have sometimes been in these days.

For the lepers of Jesus' time, however, just imagine the thought of never being touched again by another human being. Just imagine the thought of never feeling the hug of a little child. Just imagine the thought of never feeling the hand of a friend shaking your hand. Just imagine the thought of never feeling the embrace of your spouse, or the arm of your friends across your shoulder, because anyone who touched you would become defiled themselves.

- 4) The religious leaders in Jesus' day adopted a very strict strategy of quarantine, isolation, and separation for lepers. A rabbi would not even look at a leper; they considered it their responsibility to make sure that the Law of Moses about leprosy was strictly adhered to, especially concerning lepers avoiding people in public.
- 5) In fact, a rabbi was the last person a leper wanted to see because he knew that if he got close to a rabbi he could easily be stoned to death. The rabbis thought of themselves as being so close to God that not only lepers, but even other common sinners, were not to be allowed to get too close to them, and the more religious the rabbis became, the more unapproachable they became.
- 6) In **Gen. 3:23-24** we read that God banished our first parents, with all of us inside them, from His presence in the Garden of Eden after they sinned against God through their disobedience. **Isaiah 59:2** tells us that our spiritual sickness of sin is like a facemask that hides God's face from us. In other words, our spiritual sickness of sin quarantines and separates us from God.

The symptoms of our spiritual sickness of sin include our pride, our bitterness, and our un-forgiveness that isolate us from God and that also sour our relationships with other people and isolate and separate us from them.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our second S** from this passage by saying that it reminds us that our spiritual sickness of sin *separates* us from God and from other people around us. (Eg: Stealing, dishonesty, sexual immorality, etc.)

### III. Salvation (Verse 41)

- 1) Jesus Christ was considered to be a rabbi by the people. In this passage we see the irony that the only rabbi the leper could approach was God Himself. Unlike the other rabbis of His day Christ Jesus was extremely approachable. He could be easily approached by prostitutes and tax collectors and Gentile pagans, and even by forsaken lepers, as we read in this passage.
- 2) The difference between Jesus and the rabbis of His day was that, the more spiritual they became, the less approachable they were, but with Jesus, it was just the opposite. Jesus had the kind of profound "differentness" that drew sinners to Him but the rabbis and the Pharisees had the kind of superficial religious differentness that pushed people away. Jesus was easily the most approachable human being who ever lived.

After the leper had said to Christ in **verse 40**, "If you are willing, you can make me clean" **verse 41** tells us that, "Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be made clean!" Notice that **verse 41** tells us that Jesus was *indignant* when He heard the leper's request.

This is because, in the original Greek text of this passage, the words that are used give the impression that the response of Christ to the leper's request was very, very strong indeed. In other words, Jesus couldn't believe the leper would doubt that He would want to heal him, so Jesus literally stamped His foot down hard on the ground in indignation, and said something like, "If I am willing? Of course, I am willing! Be made clean immediately!"

- 3) Because the leper knew what the Law of Moses said about his condition, his approach to Christ was tentative and unsure, and he made no attempt to touch Jesus, but we read in **verse 41** that Jesus touched the leper *before* He healed him. He touched the leper *while the leper was still unclean*.

This would have shocked anyone who was watching. To touch a leper in those days was to be regarded as being unclean yourself! But here was God Himself in the form of Jesus Christ, God who, after all, *made* the Law of Moses, breaking His own Law, for the sake of healing this despised, forgotten, and forsaken leper.

Christ did not need to touch the leper to heal him because we know from other stories in the NT that Christ sometimes performed healing miracles from a distance by just speaking a word of healing. But, in this case, Christ touched the leper because He knew that this isolated and ostracized man needed to feel His healing touch to heal his soul of the stigma of aloneness, isolation, and separation from society.

This is the good news of the gospel; Jesus took on our sin so that we could take on His life. No one would touch this leper because everybody knew that touching a leper meant being infected with leprosy.

- 4) In **verse 42**, we read that as soon as Jesus touched the leper, the leprosy left the man. The leper did not infect Jesus with his sickness. Instead, Jesus infected the leper with His life! The life of God that flowed through Christ was so strong that the man's leprosy simply could not coexist with it. The leper's response to the healing of his leprosy in **verse 45** show us that he placed his faith in Christ, and he thereby also received the spiritual healing of salvation from sin.
- 5) In a contagious world, we learn to keep our distance, as we are doing in these days of the corona virus. We live in a world infected and contaminated with sin. So much so that this world should be quarantined from heaven, and no reasonable God should touch this spiritually infected world with even a ten-foot pole. But in, and through Christ, God showed us that He is not a reasonable God.
- 6) The good news of the gospel is that, in and through Christ Jesus, God became a human being, and He took on our sickness of sin, and instead of the world infecting Him, God infected this world with His salvation through Christ. On the cross, Christ took all of our sin to death, and He rose again from the dead to give to all who place their faith in Him, God's eternal life, and God's Holy Spirit who vaccinates us against sin and who gives us spiritual immunity and power over our sickness of sin.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our third S** by saying that the good news of the gospel is that Christ came to heal us of our spiritual sickness of sin with His salvation, and to thereby remove the barrier of sin that quarantines, isolates, and separates us from God, and from other human beings.

## Conclusion

So, those are our **3S's** from **Mark 1:40-45**. First, we see how, through the gospel, Christ touches us and heals us of our spiritual *sickness* of sin. Second, we see how Christ ends our spiritual *separation* from God with His *salvation* when we place our faith in what He did for us on the cross.

**Verse 44** of our passage tells us that Christ instructed the healed leper to say nothing to anyone, but to go, show himself to the priest, and offer for his cleansing what Moses commanded in the Law. Throughout the NT, we see that whenever Jesus healed people, He would tell them not to go and tell anyone about it, just as we see Him telling this healed leper in this passage. This was because He knew that people would focus more on the physical healing than on the spiritual symbolism of that healing, which, as we have just seen from this passage, was that He came into the world to His heal us of our spiritual sickness of sin.

**Verse 45** tells us about the healed leper's response to the instructions that Christ gave him. Instead of not telling anyone about the miracle of his healing, he went out and began to talk freely about his healing, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, and people were coming to Him from everywhere. The former leper had now become so healed with the life of Christ that he now became contagious, no longer with leprosy, but with the life of Christ. Even though he was warned to be silent, he just could not be silent. His faith became so infectious that we read here in **verse 45** that the good news "spread" like the corona virus, but, of course, this was the good infection with the very life of Christ; everybody caught it from this healed leper, and people came to Christ from everywhere.

This is a picture of what happens to us, when through the gospel, we receive the spiritually healing touch of Christ in our lives. We become so healed of sin and so infectious with the life of Christ that we infect people with the good news of the gospel that has spiritually healed and transformed us.

In these Covid-19 pandemic days we have the rare opportunity of redeeming the extra time we now have on our hands by deepening our relationship with the Lord through extended times of prayer and meditation on His Word so that we can grow closer to the Lord than ever before.

It is this closeness to the Lord that will make our faith in God become so infectious that instead of the people around us infecting us with their doom and gloom, we can infect them with our faith in God and draw them to Christ, just as the healed leper did in this passage, because it is only in and through Christ that human beings can find the real hope and comfort we all need in these difficult pandemic days.

Let us pray!

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