

Receiving the Healing Touch of Christ

Through the Gospel

Scripture: *Mark 1:40-45.*

Summary of Sermon: Through the gospel, Christ touches us with His *salvation* to heal us of our spiritual *sickness* of sin, and He ends our spiritual *separation* from God.

Introduction

Two years ago, the whole world found itself facing the global Covid-19 pandemic. The most frightening thing about the corona virus was 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 explains 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 like that. It was seen as a highly contagious disease that could infect anyone who encountered 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 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 Jesus Christ touched and healed a leper of the *sickness* of leprosy and, by doing this, Christ, with His *salvation*, thereby ended the leper's *separation* from society.

So, this morning, we are taking a brief gospel view of 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.

I'll read passage now, and we'll look at these **3S's** from it.

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 seen 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 they were also considered to be 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; he was deeply ashamed of his condition.

- 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 discolored 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) You know 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 insensitive to the needs of other people around us.

II. Separation (Verse 40)

- 1) In **Leviticus 13:45-46** this is what the Law of Moses told the Israelites about leprosy: *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 had 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 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, the corona virus still does not carry the same moral stigma of isolation and separation that leprosy carried in the days of Christ Jesus.

This explains why, today, because we have effective vaccines against the corona virus, and also because of herd immunity, we are slowly coming to learn how to live with the corona virus.

- 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.

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. 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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 when we sin by lying to them, or stealing from them, or committing sexual immorality with them, and so on.
- 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.

III. Salvation (Verses 41-45)

- 8) In the days of Jesus Christ, the Jewish rabbis whom we read about in the NT thought of themselves as being so close to God that not only lepers, but even other common sinners, were not allowed to get too close to them, and the more religious the rabbis became, the more unapproachable they became.
- 1) Jesus Christ was addressed as "rabbi" by the people. In this passage, therefore, we see that the only true rabbi the leper could approach was God the Son 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 Jewish rabbis of His day was that the Jewish rabbis could not be easily approached by the ordinary people because they considered themselves to be too holy.

But Jesus Christ was the exact opposite. He drew to Himself the people whom the rabbis considered to be sinners. 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, 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 **verse 41** tells us 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 Gospels 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**, 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 Christ that flowed into the life and body of the leper was so powerful that the man’s leprosy simply could not coexist with it.
- 5) In **verse 44**, 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.

In **verse 45**, instead of not telling anyone about the miracle of his healing as Christ had told him, 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 the good news “spread” like the omicron 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.

- 6) You see, 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 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. When we place our faith in Christ, God also indwells us with His 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**.

These **3S’s**, as you can see, show us how, through the gospel, with His *salvation*, Christ touches us and heals us of our spiritual *sickness* of sin and He thereby ends our spiritual *separation* from God, when we place our faith in what He did for us on the cross.

The healing of the leper in this passage presents to us a picture of what happens to us, when through the gospel, we receive the spiritually healing touch of Christ that brings God’s salvation into our lives. Like the healed leper in this passage, 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.

And when we are spiritually healed and transformed like that, our faith in God becomes so infectious that instead of the people around us infecting us with their doom and gloom, we infect them with our faith in God and we 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 that we all need in these difficult days.

Let me end by sharing a true story with you.

Let us pray!

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