

## Jesus and the Leper

Last week, on October 31st - people from around the world celebrated Halloween. As a child, I remember Halloween was a day I looked forward to because we could dress up to school... more than the candies - what excited me was the costumes... the guys would dress up as power rangers or pirates, and the girls would for the most part be dressed up as their favourite Disney princess...

However, in recent years, many socialists have noted that Halloween has been becoming darker and darker... No longer are the costumes children wear playful and cute. And no longer is it just the children that are dressing up.. Grown men and women have now joined in on the fun.. and it is striking that the “cool” thing for grown adults to do is dress themselves up as zombies... Zombies.

This is in part due to the huge surge of interest in the occult - the hugely popular tv show - the Walking Dead is a good example of this - having entered its TENTH season... and the award winning video game like PLANT vs ZOMBIES which, if we are honest, I think ALL of us have played at one time or another...

And according to IMDb - there have been 70 movies released just in 2015 with zombies in them... with the notable titles being Hotel Transylvania 2 and Maze Runner...

Now, the reason that we can just wave all of this off as ENTERTAINMENT is because we all know that zombies don't exist... But what if I were to say that there is a REAL disease that has been haunting mankind for thousands of years... that bears a striking resemblance to zombies??

What is this disease, you ask? It is leprosy. In fact, the idea for zombies most likely came from leprosy... There are remarkable

similarities between the two... In severe cases, leprosy eats way at the skin and the bones... and even the eye sockets... covering the body of the leper with sores and blood... And their bodies, over time, would become numb to the pain, that they could break their ankles and simply just adjust by walking crooked... There is even a documented case of a leper destroying his eyes because he washed his face in the mornings with scalding hot water but registered no pain..

Thankfully, over the years, mankind has adapted to this disease - rendering 90% of the human population IMMUNE to leprosy.. and in the 1980s, a discovery was made to successfully treat lepers.. That being said, there are still as much as 4 million documented cases of this around the world... and most likely an upwards of 10 million undocumented cases... but what I want to do today is walk through the text with you all in a way as to show that we are ALL lepers before God... we are not just SINNERS but we are LEPERS in need of healing..

So with that, would you turn with me your Bibles to Luke 5:12-13.

Notice... Luke - the physician... tells us that this man was FULL of leprosy.. Let me connect the two dots for you... to show you how serious and ugly this disease was... This LEPER... would LITERALLY have resembled the zombies that we see on screen...

And like the zombies we see on screen.. they were shunned by the general population... and treated in a shockingly similar manner.

Josephus said that lepers were to be treated as dead men. And the rabbis of Jesus' day said that next to touching a dead body, being in close proximity with a leper was the worse form of defilement. Some even went as far as to condone throwing stones at lepers so that they wouldn't come near you - for fear of contracting the disease. What

ended up happening was that lepers were sent to these colonies on the very outskirts of civilization... and were forced to live there alone...

ALL around the world, lepers were and still are marginalized and dehumanized to the point where they are literally counted as dead men - lepers for the most part of human history had NO legal rights and were treated worse than animals...

So this man - who is full of leprosy - has it REALLY BAD. He is a wretched man. And he is a DESPERATE man... Knowing full well that he could have been killed for breaking the quarantine laws, he approaches Jesus and falls on his face... and begs Jesus... I am BLEEDING ALL OVER AND MY SKIN IS ROTTING...I am UGLY... Sure I'm living.. but I'm not really living.. when the people around me, including my family, treat me as if I were a DEAD MAN.. If you will Lord, you can CLEAN ME!

v. 13. And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him... saying I will; be clean."

Notice that Jesus chooses to touch the leper. Jesus TOUCHES HIM! He could have just said, "BE CLEAN". But instead... he touches him. When Jesus saw the leper... he didn't cringe back in disgust... like so many of us do.. I mean - if I were to see a man covered in blood and who smelt of rotting flesh.. I would go so far as to HELP him BUT not to TOUCH HIM...

But that's what Jesus is doing! OUR KING IS REACHING out his hand to touch a leper...In fact, the word is much stronger than just a touch. The Greek could literally be translated, TAKE hold of. Maybe Jesus put his arm around his shoulders. Maybe Jesus gave him a hug! And whats so amazing is - Jesus could have healed the man without touching him. He does it all the time! He can heal with just a word... IN FACT - there were times when Jesus healed from a great distance, without a word OR a touch. But Jesus knows that this leper needs love just as much as he needs healing...

So he reaches out... and takes hold of him... In order to show that He cares for him.. that He loves him! Jesus isn't above getting dirty... Jesus was not scared of his sores, or put off by his rotting flesh. The touch said, "I am here with you. I sympathize with you when no one else does. I understand. I love you."

HOW MANY YEARS ... must have passed since someone had hugged this man? How many years had it been since someone had done something as simple as give his shoulder a loving squeeze? How many years do you think it had been since this man had been touched?

Do you ever feel like a leper? Jesus is saying the same thing to you right now... "I am here with you. I sympathize with you when no one else does. I understand. I love you."

But beyond this, I believe Jesus shows love to the leper for another reason. Remember from last week.. Jesus had just called his first disciples to follow him and told them that He would teach them how to become fishers of men.

This is their first fishing lesson. Jesus is telling them that if they want to catch men, they first need to love them. Jesus is showing his disciples how to become fishers of men; namely, reach out and touch someone. Look past the scars and the wounds and the rotting flesh, the missing fingers and toes, and just love them.

3 years ago, while I was out worshipping God on the streets with my friends, I met a man named Roger... and for those of you who have met him, you know that he is a former hells-angels member.. and that he is .. well big! and GRUFF. What I didn't know at that time was that this big man was on the way to kill someone. But as he was passing by... I felt the Lord prompt me to go speak with him...and as I approached him.. I noticed that he was missing a finger... and that he was carrying a weapon.

Common sense dictates that at this point - YOU WALK AWAY... But I ended up offering to buy him food and even give him my phone... and later on, when someone breaks into his house and beats him up until he is all bloody and he is too scared to stay home alone... I offer him my bed to sleep on for the night...

And I tell you this story because... if I had not looked past his missing finger.. or the weapon he was carrying.. Or his past... and his bloody body... he would not be in training to become an elder of a church right now. Let me be clear - MY TOUCH did not SAVE Roger. My LOVE did not change Roger... But it did give me WONDERFUL opportunities to share with him the gospel!

Too often, we as Christians do our best to avoid non-Christians. Rather than seek them out, we often run from them because we are scared of unbelievers... let alone LEPERS! We - as Christians - cringe away from opportunities to interact with perfectly normally looking people with no contagious disease... Lord help us...

Take some time to think... Who in your life needs to be touched? Who in your neighbourhood needs a loving word said to them, or a kind deed performed for them? We all need to make attempts to love those who often go unloved. That is what Jesus modeled here for his disciples. If we are his disciples, we will do the same thing.

He reaches out - TOUCHES the LEPER... and says... BE CLEAN.. And IMMEDIATELY - the leprosy left him.

What a sight that must have been... A man full of leprosy would have had BLACK skin from the rotting... he would have had weak organs and bones because of the damage leprosy had caused.. and IMMEDIATELY - that all left him.

He was a new man. He no longer smelled. He no longer had black rotting skin... He no longer was UGLY.

This is the POWER of King Jesus - He who created the universe with the power of His word can completely heal this man FULL of leprosy in an INSTANT.

Now, that's all good... Jesus has the power to heal lepers! HOORAY! How does that apply to us? I mean none of us in this room have leprosy... How does this story apply to a room full of beautiful people like yourselves?

Would it offend you if I said that before God, you are no better than a leper is before the eyes of men?

We sing about it in church.. and we have listened to sermons about it - how Jesus has saved us from our SIN... But I have the feeling that many of us have become DESENSITIZED to just HOW AWESOME and GREAT that statement is... GOD... REACHED out to US IN OUR SIN... Are we MOVED and TAKEN back by that... or are we more moved and taken back by the fact Jesus TOUCHED a leper...

Brothers and sisters - too many of us are desensitized to the ugliness of sin... But I am standing here today to remind you that SIN is MUCH more ugly than leprosy...

You see... just as lepers were ceremonially defiled and cut off from public worship, so are sinners were DEFILED before the sight of God... Sin defiles us so much that even our good works is as FILTHY RAGS before the Lord!

And just as leprosy grew progressively worse until the leper died, so it is with sin. If it is not cleansed by Jesus Christ, the sinner will die... but not just a death of the body... but also a death of the soul - which the Bible calls the second death...

And while we now have a treatment for leprosy.. back then... there was no human cure!

He had no hope apart from a miraculous cure through Jesus. In the same way... there is no human cure for sin. You may tell yourself that it isn't there.. But it *is* there - inside your heart - and there is no human way to remove it. This leper shows us the only hope for us as spiritual lepers... we must FALL before Jesus and seek His mercy...

IN all these ways and more... Leprosy is a parable of sorts - it is pointing towards the UGLINESS of SIN in our HEARTS.... THAT is what is WITHIN YOU AND ME... and THAT IS OUR CONDITION apart from JESUS CHRIST...

But praise be to God - that through our Lord Jesus Christ, we are CLEANSED of all our sin! Jesus does not give us a cosmetic solution. Its much more than that! It cleanses the defiled conscience, the inner man... our heart! Just as this leper was instantly and totally healed, so the sinner who trusts in Christ is instantly and totally cleansed and reconciled to God!

Even though you are full of the leprosy of sin, come to Jesus and appeal to Him for cleansing and He will freely and instantly grant it.

Now... I want to end by addressing something I believe that some of you are struggling with...What if... I believe in Jesus.. and I have already asked him to clean me... and HE HAS SAID - you are CLEAN... and there are moments when you do feel clean.. like at church, when you are singing praises... or when you are reading your Bible at home... BUT... most of the time.. you feel like a leper?

You look inside your own heart and you see something so ugly.. so repulsive.. that you even begin to doubt whether or not you are a Christian...

To those of you who feel this way.. I want to just say this... I feel EXACTLY the same way... When I look inside my own heart, I see something so UGLY that if you were to see it, I wouldn't be able to look you in the eye..

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

First - we need to come to Jesus everyday... There is a sense in which we have been made CLEAN INSTANTLY like the leper was... we are RIGHTEOUS before God.. But their still remains in each and every one of us sins that need to be dealt with.

But do not make the mistake into thinking that you have to kill these sins on your own... You MUST come before Jesus and ask Him to CLEAN you... everyday... For as long as we live in this body of sin and in this world that is marred with sin... WE WILL sin... But the Bible promises us... for those who hope in the glory of God.. who wait eagerly for the coming of Jesus Christ... and FOCUS their EYES UPON HIM... NOT YOUR SIN - BUT UPON JESUS... the Bible promises us that we will become beautiful like Jesus!

So don't FOCUS on yourself! If you do.. you will become discouraged by your own ugly sinful heart! RATHER.. For every 1 look you take at your sin... LOOK 10 Times at the cross! And as you behold Jesus hanging on the cross... you WILL be transformed into His beautiful likeness...

Second... We must wait eagerly for the return of Jesus Christ. When He comes, Jesus is going to bring heaven down to earth and give us new bodies... bodies that do not know death nor sin.. And there will be no suffering nor pain nor sin there. Our longing to be whole... our longing to be FREE from the powers of sin... is meant to awaken in you a hope and longing for Christ's return. You get a taste of that now as you LOOK towards Jesus... But when He stands before you face to face... THAT is when you will be GLORIFIED and all your ugliness will be but a distant memory.

Let's pray..

