



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Foulest Made Clean

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Mark 1:40-45

Clint Pressley

⁴⁰ And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." ⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³ And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

(Pastor prays)

Maybe some of you will remember this: in the 1980s, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker built a worldwide empire. They were televangelists and prosperity preachers. They built it not too far from here, the old PTL. You also will remember that at the end of the 80s, that empire came crashing down. And the rot of their tawdry lives was put on display for all the world to see.

Turns out they had cheated faithful people out of millions of dollars. In the meantime, they had been unfaithful to one another, cheated on one another in their marriage. And so they ended up not only being criminals but also were pariahs in the world of Christianity. Even today, Jim Bakker operates out on the fringe of respectability. But back then, in the 80s and early 90s, if you were a serious Christian, you didn't want to be anywhere near those people. They were radioactive as far as solid Christians were concerned.

And in the middle of all that shame Jim Bakker wrote a book and the title of it was "I Was Wrong." I read that book. And in that book, Jim Bakker talks about the time when he was fresh out of prison, and he ended up at an event and there at that event was the most famous and best-respected Christian in modern day history, Billy Graham. And he says that Billy Graham did something different than every other Christian he knew.

Most Christians tried to get away from him and looked away from him. Billy Graham happened to look across the room and looked right in his face. Bakker says that at that event Billy Graham waved for him to come over, shook his hand and in front of thousands of people, set him down right beside himself for all the world to see.

In a higher, more glorious way, that's similar to what we're seeing in this passage. You can find this story in the book of Luke. But with the way Mark tells it, he pulls the camera angle down on just two people. He gives us this story with just two characters involved: a leper, a man who has leprosy, who is outcast, ostracized and suffering. And the second character is the compassionate Lord Jesus. The compassionate Jesus who never steps back from the filthy, wayward, hurting people. And whenever the compassionate Christ meets up with a yearning sinner, what happens is the sin is completely gone. This story, as Mark tells it, is given to us as an actual event. Jesus actually did heal a leper.

But although this story is an actual event, it is good for us to understand it as a metaphor. A metaphor of Jesus coming and touching the ugliness and stench of our sin. Jesus coming to us, bringing healing and forgiveness. Now, most of us in this room could name several people who are involved in our lives and who have had some sort of influence in our lives. What I want you to do this morning, for the time we have together, is to bring the camera angle down in your life to just two people: you, unclean, and Jesus, pure. What happens when you meet the compassionate Jesus? I'll tell you what happens.

Jesus Makes the Foulest Clean

What I want to do today is just take these two points this morning. One has to do with the man who has leprosy, the other has to do with Jesus Christ. Both of them represent for us what can happen in your life. Here's the first point:

We need to see ourselves like we really are

We need to see ourselves like we really are, not the way the culture sees us. Not the way the world sees us, not the way people that we work with see us, not how your spouse sees you. We need to see ourselves like we are. You see it there, don't you? I read it in verse 40.

It starts out like this. A leper, you don't touch a man with leprosy. The man in question could have had any number of skin diseases; there are up to 70 different skin diseases in the Old Testament that would be described as leprosy. He has this disease, which is what we know as leprosy. It is a terrible disease. You lose the feeling at the ends of your fingers and toes. It's an agonizing disease. For that man to have leprosy, it was an absolute death sentence. It was a death sentence that was amazingly slow to be fulfilled. In the ancient world, it was probably the most dreaded disease. It was a slow and terrible way to die. There was no hope for it. If you had the disease, there is no cure for it. There was no comfort. There was no joy.

Josephus, who was the Hebrew Jewish historian from antiquity, who gives us so much color on how we understand the day and time, Josephus says for us, that to be a leper is no different than being a corpse. A lot of you this January picked up the Bible and started reading it through Genesis. You have lots of stories that you know. You have the very familiar creation. You have all of the Patriarchs. Exodus is exciting. And then you get to Leviticus and you wonder what happened. It's hard to get through Leviticus. Sometimes you read about some of the rituals and they start talking about these skin diseases and you're just trying to have a devotion. You need another cup of coffee to get through Leviticus.

Leviticus 13 and 14 outlines for us the lifestyle of a leper. How would they live out their miserable lives? What do you do if you're a leper? You had to wear

tattered clothing. It's a certain kind of clothing, tattered so that everybody would know that you actually have something wrong with you. You had to take one piece of that linen and wrap it across your face at the bottom part of your face, covering your mouth right up under your nose. If you were walking down the path and you came across a person, as you approached that person, you had to start yelling "Unclean, unclean!" You had to live your life alone, away from people. You couldn't go into a walled city. You never could go into Jerusalem. You wouldn't see the temple. You had to stay at least 50 paces, 150 feet, from every person you saw. The man in our story is a pitiful man. It looks as if this disease has run its ghoulish course. This man is living a sadly dark life. He is ceremonially unclean, which makes him feel that even God doesn't want to be close to him. He is separated from the religious life, estranged from his family, devoid of friends, out of money, emotionally destitute. Look, you don't touch a leper. He wasn't just unwell, he is unclean. He's The Walking Dead. There's no hope for tomorrow. There's no real cure.

And the truth of the matter is that, outside of Christ, we are all spiritual lepers. We are disfigured, twisted, and distorted by sin. We are The Walking Dead. There is no hope for a cure, no promise of joy, nothing to look forward to. And then one day something happens. We see him over there, the second character, and he's not named yet. He's not yet named but we know he's there. You see it in verse 40. The text says, ⁴⁰ *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."* There you have it. There is faith. He came to him. That little phrase, he came to him, there is faith. Somehow this leper had heard of this man, Jesus. I don't know how he heard of Him with all the restrictions. But somehow, he heard that this man could make him clean. Well, he ran to that man and he believed. I want you to join me here. Put yourself in the text. Put yourself here in this man's rags and take on the faith of the leper. What kind of faith did he have? Let's talk about his faith. What kind of faith did he have? Well, the first kind of faith he had was a directed faith.

A directed faith

The text says that he came to Him, he went to Him. He broke every rule. He broke every form of protocol. He didn't care what people thought. He went to the only one who could give him hope, the only one that could give him healing. He went to the only one who could cleanse him, the only one that could give him life. Look, he didn't even know if Jesus would do it or not! What he'll say is "I know you can if you want to." Now remember, don't let people talk to you about whether or not you've got strong or weak faith. Remember, it's not the *strength* of your faith, but the *object* of your faith. The weight is not on you and your faith so that you can generate in yourself if you have enough faith. No, the weight is on what you're believing in. It's not how strongly we believe, but how strong what we are believing in *is*. Have you directed, have you put your faith in the only one who can save you?

Now here's a good place for me to talk about the Gospel, how you actually become a Christian. So if you are here today and you're not sure, and you would like to hear about Jesus, about how you go from not being a Christian to actually being a Christian, I'll explain it to you very quickly.

The Bible teaches that God created us in His image. You are created in the image of God. The image of God in you has been disfigured by your own sin. Sin is that which offends God. It separates us from God. It's what got Adam and Eve thrown out of the garden in Genesis 2 and 3. It's been a problem since Adam and Eve.

That problem is not just that we are separated from God, but we're even worse than the leper. Here, the leper is a metaphor. But we are even worse than he is. But God doesn't leave us in that condition. God is a God of love, even as He is a God of justice. God loves the world, and the Bible says He loves the world in such a way that He gives us Jesus. Jesus comes to us.

The Gospel of Mark is about Jesus. Jesus will come and do what we should have done. Adam should have been in perfect fellowship with God, but sin broke that fellowship. And so what does Jesus do? He comes and does what we should have done. Everybody here has something you wish you would have done. You wish you had fought off temptation. There are things you

wish you would have done. Jesus comes and lives perfectly. Does all of that. He does that as a man because man is the one that fell away. Jesus comes as a man, as a representative for us. He not only lives for us, but the Bible also tells us that He goes to the cross.

Why the cross? Remember, God is also just. He must punish sin. And the way He does that, He pours out His wrath on Jesus at the cross. Look, if you're struggling, God is not judging you. If you're in Jesus, if you're a Christian and you're going through something hard, that is not God's judgment on your life. The judgment you deserve is gone. You're not under judgment. You might be being disciplined as a father disciplines his children, but you are not being punished by a judge.

Jesus died on the cross, and there He took the wrath of God for all sinners who will ever be saved. God raised Him from the dead on a Sunday. It's why we go to church on a Sunday. The resurrection is confirmation that the sacrifice has worked. And the Gospel says, if you will just believe like this leper here. Belief doesn't have to be a strong faith. It could be the faith the size of a mustard seed. Believe. It's a directed faith. But it's not just a directed faith. Join me there in verse 40. Notice that it's a desperate faith.

A desperate faith

Do you see the phraseology that Mark uses in verse 40, that the leper came and he is imploring him? That word in Greek is *parakaleo*. It is calling out for help. He is pouring out his heart, confessing his desperation, his need. He is confessing it all. He is completely aware of his condition and how much of a dead man he is. I think we take conversion too lightly. We don't talk about it strongly enough. This is why I hate the "prosperity gospel" and the false gospel and the cheap gospel and every other kind of (unbiblical) gospel out there. It's why I hate it. Because I think people hear something is going to make them feel better but they're not really converted. We don't ever come to grips with the fact of how desperate our condition is. Have you come to the place in your life and it's not just that you want to feel better and want something to work out, it is that you are desperate? You hate the condition of

your life. You believe that only Christ and Christ alone is your help. Do you have a directed and desperate faith? Look at him there in verse 40, he is not only imploring, calling for help. The text says that he's kneeling. Do you see this? Do you see this pleading? This is...

A pleading faith

Look at this pleading, humble faith. In verse 40, he is kneeling. A better translation of that is that he has dropped on his hands and knees. It's a physical picture. Jesus is high. This man is low. Here is abject humility. Here's the understanding that I don't have anything to offer. I've got nothing to give. I've got no bargaining chip. All I have is need. Have you thrown yourself on the mercy that is Christ? This is the pleading, humble faith of the leper. There's something else about his faith and that is that it is ...

A trusting faith

Finally, Jesus speaks in verse 40. Look what the leper says in verse 40. Look at what he says to Jesus. It's interesting. ⁴⁰ *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."* Let's start at the back of that phrase, "you can." You have power. I believe you have power. You are sovereign. Here's what the leper is saying. I think you have power to do what nobody else can do. He was convinced in the power of Jesus, but he wasn't sure about the mercy of Jesus. He says, you can do it, but will you do it? Nobody ever offered him help. Look, it's sometimes easier to believe in the power of God than it is the mercy of God. It is sometimes easier to believe in the strength and the sovereignty. We have this great doctrine of how big God is. We can believe that easier than it is to actually believe in the mercy. Do you know this is what shame does? This is how Satan uses shame in people's lives. Satan uses shame to convince you that it's going to be so bad if you ever actually confess, that God might not actually forgive it. This leper, he came and he knew about the power of Jesus. He just didn't know if Jesus would actually do it. Do you believe? Do you believe that he will cleanse you? It's the mercy of God. But before we can get there, we have to actually see ourselves as we are. There's a lot of attention on the leper.

Let's turn our attention now to Jesus. What do we know about Jesus?

Number 2. Here's the second point.

We need to see Christ as He really is

It's true. We are worse than the leper. We need to actually then go to Christ and see Him as He really is. What a picture of the living Lord Jesus there is in verse 41. What do we see about Him? Well, here's the first one. You'll notice that...

He is indignant at sin

Indignant at sin. He hates sin. Notice the phraseology in verse 41. The text tells us that He was moved with pity. It's a strange and unusual reaction, in fact, that little phrase, "moved with pity," in other translations, comes off as He was angry. Paul Tripp, the great Presbyterian preacher, who wrote lots of good books— By the way, whatever Paul Tripp writes, get it, read it. He wrote about marriage and parenting. He is a great writer— Paul Tripp translates this as the angry sympathy of Jesus. That Jesus sees this leper and it is not just did He feel sorry for him, there's something else. He is overwhelmed with His anger at sin. Jesus is infuriated at the fall. When Adam and Eve fell in the garden and committed sin, that sin didn't just affect them, it affected all creation. That's why we live in this world. We live in the terrible effects of the fall. You've seen it. Some of you have wept because of it. You have seen how sin has wreaked havoc and destroyed lives and hurt people and devastated society. The text says, He looked at that leper and the literal word is that He felt it in his gut. Some of you know all too well that feeling, you've been there. You've had a child get hurt in some terrible capacity, or, God forbid, you've lost a child. You've felt it; it's more than just sadness. Jesus looked at this man and He feels it. Here is the empathetic, righteous savior. Every one of us here, all of us, have felt this in some capacity. We have felt the effects of the fall. We felt that in our own lives, we know our own heart. We know our own minds. We know our emotions. We know our sinful nature. We know the actions that we've done and Jesus comes and feels that. And its angered sympathy. There

is something else about Jesus. Keep looking at him there in verse 41 and 42, we see Jesus as a compassionate savior.

He is a compassionate savior

I love verse 41. I love how Mark writes it that Jesus is moved with pity. Look what He does. He stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." Why didn't Mark just say, He touched him? Mark dragged it out for us. He stretched out His hand and touched him. Nobody had touched him in years, not a handshake, not a pat on the back, not a hug from a family member. Jesus could have looked at that man and just healed with a word. We're going to see Him do that later on in Mark, but instead, why? Why did Jesus reach out His hand and touch this man? Remember, you don't touch somebody with leprosy. The prevailing thought at the day was if someone with leprosy touched you, that foulness flowed toward you. But not with Jesus. With Jesus, you have the pure touching the impure. Jesus is not going to get what *he's* got. *He's* going to get what Jesus has got. You have this radical intervention of grace. I love how the Bible tells us that our Redeemer, He does not stand at a distance. He comes and touches. And Jesus takes the isolation. He takes the curse, He takes the shame, He takes the defilement. Jesus comes and touches the ugly, the stench, the foulness of sin to bring healing and forgiveness and hope with the touch. There is something else about Jesus. Keep looking at it.

He is merciful

He's merciful. He's compassionate, that's one thing, but He's merciful. Let me read verse 41 and 42 together. Finally, Jesus speaks in verse 41 and 42.

41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." *42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* I do want to heal you, and then he does it. *41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."* *42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* And **immediately** write it down: **immediately.** *42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* Jesus desires to give mercy. *I will.* Then He

brings mercy, *be clean* and that mercy takes effect immediately. *And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* You have the instantaneous removal of what you might have thought was going to be permanent. You thought that you were always going to feel like this. Some of you have had things happen to you that feel as if it is going to be a permanent condition in your life. And it's had some sort of crippling effect. Maybe you were sinned against. Maybe you were the one committing the sin. Maybe you've been wrapped up in some twisted part of our culture and your sexuality has gotten so twisted. Maybe that's where you've been. Maybe you just overcome it. Maybe you're just mad. You're just angry. You don't think you'll ever get rid of this sort of besetting sin, and Jesus comes and touches and the purity flows *that* way. The Holy God of the Bible has given us a merciful savior in Jesus who instantaneously takes away a lifetime of sin and pain and regret. He's merciful. But there's something else here as a picture I want you to see. Here is something else we find about Jesus. That is that...

He is our substitute

Our substitute. I intended on this being a third point when I first started studying it. But I decided to bring it into just two. But I do want you to see it. It's a long passage and there are other things here but let me just read it. But the main thing I want you to see is down in verse 45. I have a couple of things to point out on the way. But that's where I want to land in verse 45. Let's start in verse 42. ⁴² *And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* ⁴³ *And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once,* ⁴⁴ *and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone,*

Here are two commands. One is don't tell anybody. We're still seeing the secrecy of the Messiah. Don't tell anybody. But go, here's the second command. *but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.*" I got hung up there. Why did he tell that guy to go to the priest? Why go to the temple? He hasn't been to the temple in years. Who knows? You go to the temple, and in Leviticus it says in the books of Moses, you fulfill all of that, and the priest is going to

declare you clean. You're going to be welcomed back into society. You'll get to see your family again. You might even get a job again. Here is Jesus giving him a command to go and be restored. But there is one command he didn't obey, and that was that he started talking about it. Verse 45 tells us, ⁴⁵ *But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news,* He did what Jesus told him not to do. And when he did, his disobedience had consequences. *so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places,* Stop there. This story shows Jesus and the leper trading places. Let me show you what I mean. When we met the man with leprosy, he was isolated. He did not have people. He was living out in a desolate place. He meets Jesus. Now, as the story closes, the leper is now cleansed. He is accepted into society, he is restored, and according to verse 45, now Jesus. Is on the outside in the lonely, desolate place. Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but he was out in the desolate places. And as the story closes, we see the Gospel displayed. Christ redeems us from the curse by becoming a curse for us.

You know what Paul said in Galatians 3:13, ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”*— Or, more clearly in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul says, ²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Do you see it? He will take on our sin and our sorrow and our shame, and in return, He gives us His Holiness, His forgiveness, and His righteousness.

You know what this story tells us? This story tells us that Jesus makes the foulest clean. For that to happen, we need to see ourselves as we really are. We are worse than the leper. We need to see Jesus as He really is. He is our savior, compassionate and kind and merciful. And we need to come to Jesus this morning. As I close the time of the sermon and we get ready to sing, I want to invite you to think with me on some of these things. As you bow your heads with me as we pray together, I want to ask you a couple of questions. One is: will you this morning come to Jesus? Some of you here have felt ashamed and this kept you from it. But today you've heard that Jesus will take

it. Will you come to Jesus? Will you humble yourself before Jesus? When you see yourself like the leper himself, will you come and trust Jesus and today be made clean?

(Pastor prays)