

"THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST"

I. Introduction

- A. In the first part of chapter 5, where Luke gives his account of the miraculous catch of fish, Peter responded by falling down before Jesus and saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
- B. In the verses that we have just read, the leprous man also falls down before Jesus, but instead of asking Jesus to depart from him, he asks Jesus to make him clean.
- C. Both of these men recognized something about Jesus's identity, and both responded to what they saw in the appropriate manner.
- D. When Peter saw Jesus's divine glory, he bewailed his own sinfulness.
- E. When the leper saw Jesus's power to make him clean, he asked Jesus to heal him of his leprosy.
- F. We saw last week that Jesus responded to Peter by comforting him with words of grace and mercy.
- G. Here in this text, Jesus assures the leper that he is willing to make him clean, and then he does precisely that.
- H. As we study this text today, we will see that it presents us with a remarkable picture of our Lord's compassion towards those who are defiled by sin.

II. Jesus Makes Us Clean

- A. Luke introduces this man by saying that he was "full of leprosy."
 - 1. As the footnote in your English Bible probably indicates, the Greek term translated as "leprosy" is not limited to what is known today

as Hansen's disease.

2. Instead, it covered a variety of skin ailments.
 3. We know this because the descriptions of leprosy in the Old Testament include a number of symptoms that have nothing to do with Hansen's disease.
 4. Whatever it was that this particular man was suffering from, Luke's use of the word "full" calls our attention to the fact that it was a severe case.
 5. This man had endured a great deal of suffering, not only physically, but also socially and spiritually.
- B. Under the Mosaic law, this man's condition rendered him ceremonially unclean.
1. And because lepers were a threat to the ceremonial purity of their fellow Israelites, they had to live as outcasts.
 2. The law made this very clear, as we see in these verses from the book of Leviticus: "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp." (13:45-46)
 3. While this may seem harsh to us, we need to remember that the Sinai covenant was a very unique arrangement.
 4. The Lord graciously entered into a covenant with Israel as a geopolitical entity and made his presence dwell in their midst.
 5. Israel was the only nation that lived in communion with the one true God.

6. For this reason, Old Testament Israel served as a type or picture or foreshadowing of heaven itself.
 7. Israel's kingship, Israel's temple, Israel's worship, Israel's civil laws — all pointed forward to the coming of the kingdom of God in its consummated state.
 8. Consider what that kingdom will be like.
 9. There will be no suffering, no sickness, no sin, and no death in that kingdom
 10. Only the pure will dwell in that kingdom.
 11. As it says in the book of Revelation, "[N]othing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27)
 12. The promise of heaven is the promise that God will completely heal the world of all the corruption brought about by sin.
- C. The reason why lepers had to be excluded from the covenant community in Israel is because they bore in their bodies the outward marks of the fall, the marks of death.
1. This does not mean that an individual leper could not experience God's saving grace.
 2. Those who put their trust in God as their Savior will most certainly be in heaven.
 3. But in theocratic Israel, they were unclean and unfit to live in fellowship with the covenant community due to the fact that the nation served as a typological picture of heaven.
- D. Strictly speaking, the leper in our text should not have been anywhere near the crowds that were pressing in on Jesus.

1. He was supposed to cry out, "Unclean, unclean" in order to make sure that people stayed away from him.
 2. But when he heard about Jesus's power to heal, his desperation led him to take this bold step and see if Jesus might be willing to make him clean.
 3. And Jesus responded by telling him that he was willing to make him clean, and then he did make him clean.
 4. What a wonderful picture of the gospel this is!
 5. It shows us that Jesus welcomes those who come to him for cleansing.
 6. It tells you that you do not have to make yourself presentable before you can come to Jesus.
 7. On the contrary, he invites you to come to him as you are, as a sinner, because he knows that he is the only one who can cleanse you of your sin.
- E. We should also take note of how Jesus healed this man.
1. He stretched out his hand and touched the man, even though he was "full of leprosy."
 2. Jesus did not have to touch this leper in order to heal him.
 3. He could have performed the healing simply by speaking the word, as he did when he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.
 4. The fact that Jesus touched this man calls our attention to his compassion toward sinners, and to his power to cleanse us of our sin.
 5. The law of Moses said that if you touched someone who was suffering from this kind of condition, you would be made

ceremonially unclean.

6. But this text shows us that Jesus possesses a purity that cannot be polluted.
 7. His contact with this man did not cause him to contract the man's uncleanness.
 8. Instead, it caused the leper to be made clean.
- F. Consider what this tells us about the lengths to which Christ went in order to save us.
1. It was no small thing for Jesus to come into contact with our defilement.
 2. He is the eternal Son of God.
 3. He is perfectly holy, perfectly pure, perfectly just.
 4. He utterly hates sin, along with all of the corruption and evil that it begets.
 5. Yet he was willing to come into the closest possible contact with our defilement in order to heal us.
 6. He was willing to do far more than just touch a leper.
 7. This is made strikingly clear when we consider something else that rendered a person ceremonially unclean under the law of Moses.
 8. Touching a corpse would make a person unclean.
 9. But Jesus did not merely touch a corpse.
 10. He became a corpse when he died on the cross in our place.

III. Jesus Satisfies the Requirements of the Law

- A. After Jesus healed this man, he instructed him to tell no one about what had been done for him.
 - 1. This might seem like an odd command.
 - 2. But Jesus wanted to prevent people from getting the wrong idea about what he had come to do.
 - 3. He had not come in order to deal with people's medical problems.
 - 4. While his compassion led him to heal many of those who came to him for help, even those healings served as enacted parables, ultimately pointing to something much greater.
 - 5. Jesus did not want people to miss out on the fact that his primary purpose in coming into the world was to deliver people from spiritual defilement.

- B. The other instruction that Jesus gave to this man was to go to the priest and make an offering for his cleansing.
 - 1. The law of Moses required those who had been healed of leprosy to fulfill certain ceremonial requirements before they could be pronounced clean by the priest.
 - 2. This procedure was not a small matter.
 - 3. It took eight days.
 - 4. It involved shaving off all of his hair, including his beard and his eyebrows.
 - 5. It required a trip to Jerusalem so that the appropriate sacrifices could be made in the temple.

6. The purpose of all of this was to symbolize that the person healed of leprosy experienced a sort of new birth.
7. He had been cleansed of all of his defilement and made into a new man.
8. It served as a picture of what Jesus does for all who come to him in faith and say,

*Foul, I to the Fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

- C. It is important to understand that the ceremonies prescribed in the Mosaic law could not make a leper clean.
1. On the contrary, those ceremonies could only be performed after the priest examined the person and determined that there was no more sign of the disease.
 2. In other words, the law could not help this man who was full of leprosy.
 3. The law only declared him to be unclean.
 4. Jesus did for him what the law could not do for him.
 5. And Jesus does the same for all who put their trust in him.
 6. As Paul says in Romans 8, "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (8:3-4)
- D. The other thing that we should note about the instruction that Jesus gave to this man after healing him is how it shows that Jesus did not come to

set aside the law.

1. He came to fulfill and uphold the law.
2. That is why he directed this man to show his gratitude by doing what the law required.
3. This is also how we should display our gratitude for the compassion that Jesus extends to us.
4. Our Lord does not cleanse us from our defilement so that we can ignore the holy requirements of God's law and live however we please.
5. He cleanses us and satisfies the law's requirements for us so that we can live under the guidance of God's law without fear.

IV. Jesus's Commitment to Prayer

- A. After Jesus performed this miracle, his fame as a healer continued to grow, making it all the more difficult for him to keep the focus upon his preaching ministry.
 1. We are told in Mark's Gospel that one of the reasons why the news spread so quickly was that this man disobeyed Jesus's first command and told people what Jesus had done for him.
 2. As a result, Jesus had to go out to desolate places to find a place to pray.
 3. In other words, the compassion that he showed to this leper resulted in him having to withdraw to the kinds of places where lepers had to live.
 4. What a picture of how Christ has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!

- B. Jesus was not being callous or selfish when he withdrew from all of the needs that were pressing in on him and spent time in prayer.
1. Instead, he was refusing to let these pressing physical needs distract him from his task of addressing man's deepest need.
 2. He knew why these people were coming to him.
 3. He knew that what they really wanted was relief from their physical suffering.
 4. And he knew that if he made that his mission, there would be no end to the needs that would be brought before him.
 5. Jesus was devoted to a life of prayer because he knew that he had to depend on his Father to help him keep the proper focus as he carried out his mission.
- C. This is the second time in the space of two chapters where Luke has mentioned that Jesus responded to the needs that were being brought before him by withdrawing to a desolate place to pray.
1. This teaches us something about how we should view our suffering.
 2. Our first impulse when we suffer is to ask God to take the suffering away.
 3. It is certainly appropriate for us to do that.
 4. But we also need to remember that God is the one who providentially brings the sufferings that we experience into our lives in the first place.
 5. If you are a Christian, your suffering is never a matter of bad luck.
 6. God always has a purpose in it.

7. He is using it for your ultimate good.
8. He uses it to complete his saving work in your life.
9. We have to remind ourselves that God did not send his beloved Son into the world in order to give us health, wealth, and ease in this world.
10. He sent his Son in order to deliver us from this present evil age, and from our enemy the devil, and from these bodies of death.

V. Conclusion

- A. In our fallen condition, every one of us is a spiritual leper.
 1. We are all unclean and unfit for communion with God.
 2. In the words of J.C. Ryle, "Sin is the deadly sickness by which we are all affected. It has eaten into our vitals. It has infected all our faculties. Heart, conscience, mind, and will, all are diseased by sin. From the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness about us, but covered with wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. (Isaiah 1:6.) Such is the state in which we are born. Such is the state in which we naturally live. We are in one sense dead long before we are laid in the grave. Our bodies may be healthy and active, but our souls are by nature dead in trespasses and sins." [J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke*]
 3. Those thoughts are not pleasant, but we know that they are the truth.
 4. We know it from Scripture and from our own experience.
- B. The good news is that there is One who is both willing and able to provide the cleansing that we need.

1. If you bring your defilement to Jesus, you can know for certain that he will never turn you away.
2. He will speak the same words to you that he spoke to that poor man who was full of leprosy.
3. He will say to you, "I will; be clean."