

Jesus Heals a Leper

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon (All Age Service)
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 13th June 2010

Intro-

- We are going to look at a situation today where Jesus did an amazing healing miracle, and learn how we can also see some amazing things happening around us.
- Need 2 volunteers to act out as we read.

Read Luke 5:12-16

When we look to Jesus we find help

- The term 'leprosy' in the bible covered many conditions including leprosy. True leprosy is called Hansen's disease. A common misconception about leprosy is that it causes the skin to rot and fall off the body, but this is not really the case. It attacks the body's nervous system so that the person increasingly loses the ability to feel. What kills a person with leprosy is the damage done to the body as a result of not being able to feel pain.
- The man was 'full of leprosy'- advanced case, covered his body. Only Luke describes it in this way. Luke was a doctor by profession (Col 4:14) and so described the condition as very serious.
- There were people in the Bible before the time of Jesus who were healed of leprosy. Naaman the Syrian (2Kings 5:8-14) was healed when Elisha told him to dip in the Jordan river 7 times, but he was not a Jew. Miriam was healed of leprosy (Num 12) and she was a Jew but it was before the law of Moses was given. There are no instances of a Jew being healed of leprosy under the law of Moses, however in Leviticus 13-14 there are rituals to perform if a Jew was healed of leprosy. Therefore a belief grew up amongst the Jews that when the Messiah came he would heal Jews of leprosy. This leper's faith meant that he believed Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- The man had probably gone to doctors but they had been unable to help. When He saw Jesus He knew He could do what others failed to do- heal him.
- If Jesus can help a man in such an extreme condition He can also help us. We need to look to Jesus too, in faith. If we were the leper in this story would we have fallen on our faces and implored Jesus to heal us? Or would we just tolerate the illness? Are there situations where we are looking for help in all sorts of places, but not really bringing it to God in prayer? How far are we prepared to go to see the favour of God in our lives? This leper had a lot of trust in Jesus, how much have we?

Jesus was willing to touch the untouchable

- *Guess the object inside the bag by feeling*
- Leprosy was considered by the Jews to be a curse from God due to sin. Miriam became leprous when she grumbled against Moses (Num 12), King Uzziah was struck with leprosy when he illegally burnt incense in God's temple (2Chron 26:16-21; 2Kings 15:5). For this reason it became synonymous with punishment for sin and was known as 'the stroke' or 'the finger of God' by the Rabbis. The Pharisees would thank God that they were not born 'a Gentile, a slave, a leper or a woman'.
- Lepers were expected to wear torn clothing, live outside the town, and cry "Unclean! Unclean!" if anyone approached them (Lev 13:45). They were not allowed to have

contact with other people, including friends or family. If a leper refused to leave a town, the authorities could enforce it by threatening him with thirty-nine lashes, the most allowable by law. If a leper touched an animal, the animal had to be killed. If a leper entered a house, the house and all its contents had to be burned. It was viewed as a living death, and people were told not to go near those with leprosy for moral reasons also. They felt shame and rejection and some even committed suicide. This leper came into the city to find Jesus- people must have given him a wide berth to say the least.

- Jesus is asked if He is willing to make the man clean. This meant to heal him so that he could re-enter society again. Jesus, even before He answers the question touches the man (if a person touched a leper it was considered the same as touching a corpse and the person would become ritually unclean). The Rabbis especially avoided going near lepers. One Rabbi would not eat an egg purchased from a street that had a leper. Another Rabbi boasted that he threw stones at lepers in order to keep them well away (Edersheim 1988:495).
- In Isaiah 53:4 it predicted that the Messiah would be 'smitten and afflicted by God'. The Rabbis thought this meant that the Messiah would actually suffer from leprosy, hence the term 'leper Messiah' (also used in the song 'Ziggy Stardust' by Bowie). In reality however, Jesus suffered rejection on many occasions like a leper, and ultimately on the cross and took the sin, sickness and rejection of all mankind becoming like a leper for us. We are healed when we look to the cross- he took the curse for us. Jesus was 'a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief' (Is 53:3)- He identified with those who suffered around Him. Do we? Are we moved with compassion for those who do not know the Lord?
- Jesus was called the 'friend of sinners' (Lk 7:34) because of the people that He kept company with. Would people say the same about us? Dave Vaughan on Big Brother last night prophesying over a girl called Sunshine, whose mother died of cancer- Dave prepared to show God's love where needed, are we?
- The word Dalit means the untouchables. In the Indian society people who worked in ignominious, polluting and unclean occupations were seen as polluting peoples and were therefore considered as untouchables. Although the 'caste' system in India is now officially abolished racism still exists today. Before the caste system was abolished, the untouchables were not allowed to touch people from the four Varnas (social classes). They were not allowed to enter houses of the higher Varnas. They were not allowed to enter the temples. They were not allowed to use the same wells used by the Varnas. In public occasions they were compelled to sit at a distance from the four Varnas. In regions where the attitude towards the untouchables were more severe, not only touching them was seen polluting, but also even a contact with their shadow was seen as polluting. If, because of any reason, there was a contact between an untouchable and a member of the Varnas, the Varna member became defiled and had to immerse or wash himself with water to be purified. In strict societies, especially among the 'Twice Born' (the three top Varnas) the touched 'Twice Born' also had to pass through some religious ceremonies to purify himself from the pollution. If the untouchable entered a house and touched things of a Varna member, the Varna members used to wash or clean the places where the untouchable touched and stepped. In some incidences the untouchables who associated with the Varna members were beaten and even murdered for that reason.
- Who are your untouchables? What can you do to show God's compassion to them? How far are you prepared to go to identify with them?

The Man had a story to tell of Jesus' goodness- so do we

- Jesus knew the man would want to tell everyone about the miracle that had happened to him, but He also knew that this may limit Jesus' ability to appear in public, as the people may have tried to make Jesus out to be their Messiah King, and this would upset Herod. So He asks him to keep it a secret but only tell the priests, in order to be a testimony to them that He is the Messiah, and so that the man could be examined properly and declared to be 'clean' after one week's examinations (Lev 14:1-32).
- The man did the opposite- he told everyone except the people Jesus asked him to.
- Today things are different. We are not told to go to the religious and tell about God's

goodness, but to go to the people who really need it- unbelievers. However, are we obedient, or do we tend to share our God stories only with those who already believe?

- As we recount our God stories of the good things He has done our faith is increased to see things happen again, and the miracles start to flow. That is why evangelists often use many testimonies of healings in their meetings- to build up faith in the congregation for God to move- we need to do the same.
- Do you have a God story you can share with someone this next week? A story of how you/someone else was healed/set free from something/had an encounter with God/became a Christian?

Summary

- **Look to Jesus for help. Be willing to touch the untouchable. Tell your God stories**

Song- *There is a voice*