



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Jesus Can Make Me Clean (Luke 5:12-16)

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Jeff Whitebread / 484-680-4260 / Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

We will begin to see in the Gospel of Luke the growing controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus. Luke recounts for us six incidents in which the actions of Jesus and his disciples will result in criticism from the Pharisees. The first of these six incidents could be seen as the religious leaders being put on notice by Jesus' actions. In healing a man with leprosy, he not only makes a statement to the religious leaders of that day, but to all men everywhere, one can be cleansed through the command of Jesus.

Luke 5:12-16 - (12) While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." (13) And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. (14) And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." (15) But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. (16) But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN

"There came a man full of leprosy" – While travelling through one of the cities in the region of Galilee, Jesus finds himself confronted by a man who was "full of leprosy." Luke, the physician, uses a medical term; "full of leprosy," this describes the severity of the man's advanced case of leprosy. The Greek word translated "leprosy" in the NT basically means scaly. This term was used to describe a psoriasis-like skin condition. The Greeks appear to use another word to describe what we moderns would classify as leprosy. This word when translated is "elephantiasis" and is not found in the NT. While there is much confusion in the academic community about the historical spread of leprosy, this much is clear. The man who confronted Jesus had a chronic skin disease, it was in an advance stage, and he was considered to be defiled because of this ailment.

Jesus attitude toward this man with leprosy was significantly different from the rabbis of that day. Josephus wrote that lepers were to be treated as dead men. The rabbis taught that next to touching a dead body, getting near a leper was the rankest form of defilement. One rabbi would not eat an egg purchased in a street where there was someone with leprosy. Another rabbi threw stones at lepers in order to keep them away.¹ The rabbis also believe that curing a leper was as difficult as raising a person from the dead.

In this interaction, it was not Jesus who initiated contact, but the leper. Let us for a moment consider what drove him to pursue Jesus. We see there is certain desperation as we consider the significance of this man's actions. It was a serious offense for a leper to come into town and be in contact with other people. He could have been stoned to death for violating the law in this manner, but this man was desperate. What did he have to lose? If stoned to death, at least his misery would be over. He had no shame and did the unthinkable because he understood the desperation of his situation. He would not be stopped until he came to Jesus.

"If you will, you can make me clean" – Not only was he desperate about his condition, he was also thoroughly convinced that Jesus could cleanse him. Let's take note of a couple things in this statement. First, he approaches Jesus with faith, he believes in Jesus' ability to cleanse his defilement. He sees his own brokenness and bankruptcy and does not come with any rights. In this, he realized he was a man of profound needs, and also, a man with no rights to be claimed. In this manner, he humbly puts himself into the hands of Jesus. Second, he was not asking to be healed, but to be cleansed. In the Old Covenant this disease not only affected his physical condition, but it also had social and spiritual implications. His cleansing would bring him into community with God's people and allow him to experience communion with God through worship at the Temple. He understood it was cleansing that was needed, and by addressing his spiritual condition as the priority, he would experience a dramatic change in his life.

APPLICATION:

It is only when the desperation of our situation is combined with the confidence that Jesus is our only hope that we can come to him humbly seeking to be cleansed. This man is the classic example of the repentant sinner. For those who are seeking Christ or claim to follow him, this is what it means to be poor in spirit. This is what it means to be meek. This is what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We have nothing to offer Jesus but our brokenness, our failure, and our shame. We make no claim upon him because of our value or our worth. We throw ourselves down at the foot of the cross and believe that we can be cleansed through the command of Jesus.

I AM WILLING

"I will; be clean." – Up to this point our attention has been focused on this man's desperation and his faith. It is time to turn our attention to the great physician. Imagine the commotion that took place among the disciples

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and any who happened to be in the vicinity of this incident. All eyes were on Jesus at this moment, and they wondered how he would respond to such a person. Remember, these are the same disciples who would drive the little children away from fellowshiping with Jesus (Lk 18:16). What must be going through their minds? Jesus does not hesitate, but he responds with clarity. He heals him not only with his touch, but with a word. That is all it took, and this man's cleansing was immediate. Here, sovereign love responds with sovereign power, this man was met where he was at and was made whole.

APPLICATION:

Can Jesus be trusted or will we be made to look foolish in turning to Him or by following Him? Jesus was not aghast by the man's appearance or the implications of their interaction. He received him as he was and cleansed him. Our condition is not a shock to Jesus, we may do our best to disguise ourselves from others, but we cannot hide from him. We are no different from this man's pitiful condition in and of ourselves. Jesus sees us for who we are, and is willing. We can have this confidence because we see the depth of Jesus' love as revealed through his death on the cross. As the apostle Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, or whom I am the foremost." (1 Timothy 1:15) It is not our sin that keeps us from Jesus; but the inability to acknowledge the truth of our condition.

A PROOF TO THEM

"Go and show yourself to the priest, ...for a proof to them." - The Old Covenant had a prescribed manner in which one cured was brought back into society. We find in Leviticus 13, that it was the priests who did the diagnosis, and it was the priest in Leviticus 14 who had to affirm the cure. Not only was Jesus doing what the law required, a statement was also being made about His power to the priest. We find in Luke 7:22, the cleansing of a leper was tantamount to the announcing of the Messiah's arrival. In sending this leper back to the priests, the religious establishment is put on notice, and scrutiny would be brought upon His ministry. No one could accuse Jesus of ministering behind closed doors. Paul says as much when speaking of Herod Agrippa's about his awareness of Jesus ministry, "I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26)

APPLICATION:

The simplicity of obeying the Word of God frees one from worrying about how our actions are perceived by others. As we consider Jesus, how do we view his actions? Was he being obedient to the law, or was he confronting

the religious leaders of the day? This answer seems to depend on one's perspective. If a person is drawn to a Jesus who is bold and confrontational, then we see Jesus in this light. If Jesus is calculating and cautious, then we see his actions along these lines. But if Jesus is the Son of Man who lived his life obedient to his father in heaven, should not his actions be considered through this paradigm. Is it possible, that our primary concern should be living as the Scriptures teach; instead of thinking we are responsible to build Jesus' church for him? In this, it seems best to leave the implication of our actions in the hands of our Sovereign God and Savior. All we can do is live on the basis of God's word, allowing Him to orchestrate the outcome of our actions.

THE PRIORITY OF JESUS' MINISTRY

"Great crowds gathered to bear him and to be healed of their infirmities" - We find in V15-16, Luke laying out the foundation of Jesus' ministry. He came to preach, to heal, and would retreat to secluded places to pray. The priority to the preaching ministry of Jesus is seen over his healing ministry. He came to preach, and the people came to listen to this man who spoke with authority never before heard. In the context of His preaching ministry, he would heal. These signs and wonders gave credence to Jesus' message; he used them to validate the claim of being Messiah. But in this last aspect of Jesus' ministry we find his humanity on displayed through his emphasis on prayer. Luke communicates to us through the syntax of the Greek, that His prayer in this manner was a regular practice of Jesus.² He was committed to retreating from the crowds in order to maintain his connection with the Father.

APPLICATION:

The mainspring of Jesus life was his communion with God, and in such communion, he found both strength and guidance to avoid submitting to temptation.³ Can we make this statement about our lives? Prayer is what grounds us to God and brings our thoughts and actions in conformity with His will. Our prayer life speaks to whether we are relying on God's strength or our own. If Jesus needed to get away and pray to face life, how much more must we commit ourselves to praying in this manner!

- 1- Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988). 1324-25.
- 2- Robert H. Stein, Luke, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 173.
- 3- I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke : A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New international Greek testament commentary (Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press, 1978). 210.