

# The Cure For Leprosy

Sermon by Ken Kreider

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Scripture Reading: Mark 1:40-45

"Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out [His] hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,

and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

However, he went out and began to proclaim [it] freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction."

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St. Francis of Assisi was a devout Christian in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. St. Francis was born at Assisi in 1182. After a care free youth, he turned his back on inherited wealth and committed himself to God. Like many early saints, he lived a very simple life of poverty, and in so doing, gained a reputation of being the friend of animals.

One day while Mass was being said, the words of the Gospel came to Francis as a call: "Everywhere on your road preach and say -- The kingdom of God is at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out devils. Freely have you received, freely give. Carry neither gold nor silver nor money in your girdles, nor bag, nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staff, for the workman is worthy of his hire" (Matthew 10:7-10).

It is probably safe to say that no one has ever set himself so seriously to imitate the life of Jesus Christ and to carry out so literally Christ's work in Christ's own way.

One day St. Francis had a very interesting experience. This is the way I heard the story from a Christian singer named Scott Wesley Brown back when I attended Walla Walla College.

One hot sunny day, he was traveling in his horse drawn carriage in a remote area and he suddenly noticed there standing before him a leper in the middle

of the road, standing perfectly still. One hand rests on the bell cord around his neck, the other hangs limply at his side. He is dressed in a filthy garment, patched together from bits of sacking and undyed wool, which hangs loosely upon his emaciated body. He had his head slightly turned and his chin lifted, the better to see them, for his disease has eaten away half his of face and he has only one eye. He is just standing there like a weatherbeaten statue, and Francis has the sense the he has been standing there, in his path, forever. Francis could ride on. There is no reason to stop. Francis thought about going around the leper, but his horse wouldn't turn. So he finally came to a stop in front of the leper. And as he sat there gazing at the leper, he began to have compassion for the man. And he stepped down and took a silver coin out of his purse and walked right up to the man and lifted up his hand and placed the silver coin into his hand. Then he got back on his horse and sat for a moment looking at the man and thought about leaving, but said to himself, "No, I haven't done enough." And he got back off his horse and stepped up to the leper again and tenderly brings his hand to his lips. Then he put his arms around him to hug him. Then he takes off his coat and places it around the man. Finally, he climbed back into his carriage and started to leave, but as he was leaving, he turned to take one last look at the man and he was gone.

And I did find one source that says:

That leper was Jesus Christ, Who had come on the Earth to receive a kiss from His servant.

Whether it was or not, I don't know, but Jesus did say, "inasmuch as you did [it] to one **of the least of these** My brethren, you did [it] to Me." Mt 25:20

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Some days later he took a large sum of money to the leper hospital, and gathering all the inmates together, he gave them alms, kissing each of their hands. Formerly he could neither touch or even look at lepers, but when he left them on that day, what had been so repugnant to him had really and truly been turned into something pleasant.

Indeed, his previous aversion to lepers had been so strong, that, besides being incapable of looking at them, he would not even approach the places where they lived. And if by chance he happened to pass anywhere near their dwellings or to see one of the lepers, even though he was moved to give them an alms through some intermediate person, he would nevertheless turn his face away and hold his nose. But, strengthened by God's grace, he was

enabled to obey the command and to love what he had hated and to abhor what he had hitherto wrongfully loved.

St. Francis of Assisi is well known for a poem that goes like this:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This prayer has many of the biblical truths of what it means to be a Christian - to seek to give, and in so doing, receive blessings; that the Lord's Prayer asks God to forgive us as we forgive, and that the goal of eternal life can only result from us putting to death our old sinful lives.

St. Francis died at the young age of 44.

He was once quoted as saying:

“It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.”

He also said: “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”

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Our story this morning is about a man that had a horrible disease called leprosy. Disease is a constant reminder of just how much things have changed since God pronounced a curse on the earth. At first, everything was “very good,” but Adam's sin brought death and decay into the world.

One of the most well-known examples of debilitating disease in this sin-cursed creation is *Mycobacterium leprae*, the infectious bacterial agent of

leprosy. **OF** all diseases known in the East the leprosy was most dreaded. Its incurable and contagious character, and its horrible effect upon its victims, filled the bravest with fear.

The term “leprosy” (including leper, lepers, leprosy, leprous) occurs 68 times in the Bible—55 times in the Old Testament (Hebrew = *tsara’ath*) and 13 times in the New Testament (Greek = *lepros, lepra*). In the Old Testament, the instances of leprosy most likely meant a variety of infectious skin diseases, and even mold and mildew on clothing and walls. The precise meaning of the leprosy in both the Old and New Testaments is still in dispute, but it probably includes the modern Hansen’s disease (especially in the New Testament) and infectious skin diseases.

The term “Hansen’s disease” was not given until 1873, when Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen described the leprosy bacillus (the lay term for the “bacterium”).

The Romans and the Crusaders brought the disease to Europe, and the Europeans brought it to the Americas. In 1873, Dr. Hansen discovered bacteria in leprosy lesions, suggesting leprosy was an infectious disease, not hereditary. However, patients with the disease were still ostracized by many societies and cared for only at missions by religious personnel. Patients with leprosy were encouraged or forced to live in seclusion up to the 1940s, even in the U.S.

Because the disease was poorly understood, very disfiguring, slow to show symptoms, and had no known treatment, many cultures thought the disease was a curse or punishment from the gods. Consequently, leprosy was left to be "treated" by priests or holy men, not physicians. And because leprosy was considered a curse of God, it was often associated with sin. It did not kill, but neither did it seem to end. Instead, it lingered for years, causing the tissues to degenerate and deforming the body.

Many have thought leprosy to be a disease of the skin. It is better classified, however, as a disease of the nervous system because the leprosy bacterium attacks the nerves.

Its symptoms start in the skin and peripheral nervous system (outside the brain and spinal cord), then spread to other parts, such as the hands, feet, face, and earlobes. Patients with leprosy experience disfigurement of the skin and bones, twisting of the limbs, and curling of the fingers to form the characteristic claw hand. Facial changes include thickening of the outer ear and collapsing of the nose.

Among the Jews it was regarded as a judgment on account of sin, and hence was called "the stroke," "the finger of God." Deep-rooted, ineradicable, deadly, it was looked upon as a symbol of sin. By the ritual law, the leper was pronounced unclean. Like one already dead, he was shut out from the habitations of men. Whatever he touched was unclean. The air was polluted by his breath. One who was suspected of having the disease must present himself to the priests, who were to examine and decide his case. If pronounced a leper, he was isolated from his family, cut off from the congregation of Israel, and was doomed to associate with those only who were similarly afflicted. The law was inflexible in its requirement. Even kings and rulers were not exempt. A monarch who was attacked by this terrible disease must yield up the scepter, and flee from society.

Away from his friends and his kindred, the leper must bear the curse of his malady. He was obliged to publish his own calamity, to rend his garments, and sound the alarm, warning all to flee from his contaminating presence. The cry, "Unclean! unclean!" coming in mournful tones from the lonely exile, was a signal heard with fear and abhorrence.

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So here in the story we have this man with leprosy. He hears about Jesus. He considers going to Jesus for help. And so this leper finally finds Jesus as He is teaching by the lake and healing people. The large crowd cowers back at sight of the leper. No one wants to get contaminated. But the man is not interested in the crowd. He is only focused on getting up to Jesus to ask his one request. And finally he arrives to where Jesus is standing, and he casts himself at His feet with the cry, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Mt. 8:2

Jesus replied, "I will; be thou made clean," and laid His hand upon him. Matt. 8:3, R. V. Jesus gladly heals him. Jesus is not contaminated by touching a leper. Then Jesus asks him to go show himself to the priest and

not to publish it abroad. Not one who came to Jesus for help was turned away. Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. And so it is with sin. This story of the leper is a perfect illustration of how Christ deals with sin and cleanses the soul from sin. Let's compare leprosy with sin.

**I. First of all, let's Consider SOME FACTS ABOUT LEPROSY.**

1. It was a loathsome disease. (You have already heard my detailed description.)
2. It was a contagious disease.
3. It was a deceptive disease.
4. It was a disease not inherited, but acquired.
5. It was a disease that had a tendency to increase.
6. It was a disease incurable except by the power of God.

**FACTS ABOUT SIN**

1. It is loathsome (Isaiah 1:4-6)
2. Sin is contagious (1 Cor. 5:6, 1 Cor;15:33)
3. Sin is deceptive (Hebrews 3:12-13)
4. Sin is not inherited, but acquired (Ezek. 18:20)
5. Sin has a tendency to increase (James 1:15)
6. Sin is incurable except by the power of God.  
(Heb. 9:22, Acts 4:12)

**II. Now listen to these six facts about SIN and take note of it's similarity to leprosy. And in understanding it's nature, we will also understand better how it must be dealt with. I'm also going to give you six very important verses in case you are taking notes.**

1. It is loathsome (Isaiah 1:4-6 The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, [There is] no soundness in it, [But] wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.) (Ezek. 18:20)
2. Sin is contagious (1 Cor. 5:6 Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?; 1 Cor;15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits.")
3. Sin is deceptive (Hebrews 3:12-13 exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.)
4. Sin is not inherited, but acquired (Ezek. 18:20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the

wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.; Ezek. 28:15)

5. Sin has a tendency to increase (James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.)

6. Sin is incurable except by the power of God.

(Heb. 9:22 ... without shedding of blood there is no remission.; John 14:6 ; Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.; 2Tim 2:10)

The man who came to Jesus was "full of leprosy." Its deadly poison permeated his whole body. The disciples sought to prevent their Master from touching him; for he who touched a leper became himself unclean. But in laying His hand upon the leper, Jesus received no defilement. His touch imparted life-giving power. The leprosy was cleansed. Thus it is with the leprosy of sin,--deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Isa. 1:5, 6. But Jesus, coming to dwell in humanity, receives no pollution. His presence has healing virtue for the sinner. Whoever will fall at His feet, saying in faith, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," shall hear the answer, "I will; be thou made clean." Matt. 8:2, 3, R. V.

In some instances of healing, Jesus did not at once grant the blessing sought. But in the case of leprosy, no sooner was the appeal made than it was granted. When we pray for earthly blessings, the answer to our prayer may be delayed, or God may give us something other than we ask, **but not so when we ask for deliverance from sin.** It is His will to cleanse us from sin, to make us His children, and to enable us to live a holy life. Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." Gal. 1:4. And "this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." 1 John 5:14, 15. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.

Before Jesus sent him away, He spoke earnestly to the man, saying, "Now don't stop to talk to anyone before you go to the priests."

Jesus wanted the priests to see him and pronounce him clean, so he could carry out the ritual which Moses gave to lepers. This would let everyone know that he was healed and that he was allowed to go home and live in the community. Jesus also knew that if the news of this healing spread, other lepers would crowd about Him and other people would be concerned about being contaminated by them.

But the man didn't listen. He thought that Jesus was just being modest, so he told everyone he met how Jesus had healed him. This greatly upset the priests, especially since the man hadn't yet carried out the prescribed ritual. So Jesus had to leave town, because He knew He would attract other lepers and be accused of breaking down the restrictions of the ritual law. He decided to carry on His ministry in a more isolated area, but before long people found Him and once again huge crowds came to see Him.

Now isn't that something? Here is a man who has been asked NOT TO TELL his story and yet he can't help but publish it abroad. And yet when we are specifically asked TO TELL and are given the Great Commission to "Go and tell all nations, preaching the Gospel" what do we do? We hide ourselves in our homes and do exactly the opposite. When we are truly converted, we can't help but tell others our experience.

We read about this phenomenon in *Steps To Christ*, p.78:

"When the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden."

"No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell."

But Jesus had another motive in healing this leper in spite of this outcome. I mean, He knew what the man was going to do, didn't He? Jesus knows all things. But Jesus was looking for a way to reach the priests. Yes, the haughty arrogant priests who were steeped in prejudice and tradition. Jesus loves everybody. He ministered to all who came to him, but longed for a way to reach those who refused to come to Him. In sending the healed leper to the priests, He gave them a testimony designed to disarm their prejudices. And according to the book *Desire of Ages*, the same priests who condemned the leper to banishment certified his cure. What a testimony for Christ that

must have been! Here standing before them is this former leper, now perfectly whole with flesh like that of a youth. So were priests converted? Let's turn over to Acts 6:7. This was after Christ's ascension: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

So you see, Jesus gave us an example. Shall we minister to the poor only? Or to those in prison only? Some say we should focus only on certain neighborhoods. No! Jesus wants us to reach ALL people of ALL different persuasions. I've heard some people say, "Those Mormons aren't interested in hearing our message." But we need to find a way to reach them. Amen?

You may remember a few other stories of lepers in the Bible. I think of Miriam, the sister of Moses, who got leprosy but was later healed when Moses prayed for her. I think of Captain Naaman who was a great commander that got leprosy and went to Elisha for help. And then there was Simon the Pharisee in the New Testament. Also in the New Testament were the ten lepers whom Jesus healed but only one came back to thank Him.

I just want to say a word or two about Captain Naaman's experience with leprosy. You all know the story. The little maid told him that he should go see the prophet Elisha. He finally went and Elisha asked him to go dunk in the dirty Jordan River seven times. He was almost not cured. But thanks to much coaxing by his servants, he finally did what he needed to do.

### **III. But what were some of the reasons that kept NAAMAN FROM BEING CLEANSED initially:**

1. he got mad (2Ki 5:11-12)
2. he had pride (2Ki 5:13)
3. he was prejudice (2Ki 5:11)
4. he wanted something sensational to happen (2ki 5:11, 13)
5. Because of that dirty Jordan River. (2Kings 5:12)

### **IV. But NAAMAN HUMBLLED HIMSELF TO OBEY**

2Kings 5:12

Conclusion:

1. What was the secret of Naaman's cleansing? He humbled himself.
2. The same thing must be true of sinners today.
3. Will you manifest the same kind of faith as Naaman had? He had to dig deep down to find that kind of faith, didn't he?

In 1991, Paul Brand, a well renowned physician, faithful to Christ, gave a seminar on leprosy. He said, “Doctors, leprosy does not cause the fingers to fall off. (But we know that lepers tend to lose their fingers.) Why do they lose their fingers? They sit near garbage dumps, in back alleys or street corners, and rats come at night. You see, an organism eats in the palm of the hand and severs the nerves so that no sensitivity is left. So pain is actually a good thing. Studying leprosy helps us to see why pain is actually a valuable “gift.”

And so then the rats come and eat the fingers of the lepers. Many of them die from Gangreen from infection and blood poisoning.

Dr. Brand would say, “I’ve got good news! I’ve found a cure! (You might be thinking, ‘What is this, some kind of anti-finger eating potion or something?’) No, buy them a kitty cat! It’s true! The rats come and the rat sees the cat and says, “I’ve lost my appetite.

Leprosy severs the nerves like sin severs the conscious. Sin is ugly. Sin kills. But I have discovered a cure! It’s true! You see, I’ve got this kitty cat. I call Him the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. And when this cat roars, devils tremble and disease flees!

A cat doesn’t restore the lepers nervous system. So what is the real cure for leprosy? It’s the same as the cure for all diseases: Jesus. And what is the cure for sin? It’s Jesus. “Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world!”

Do you long to be perfectly whole? Just say to Jesus, “Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”

In a moment we’re going to be singing our closing hymn #318 Whiter Than Snow, but first listen to the words of this last verse:

Lord Jesus, Thou seest I patiently wait;  
Come now, and within me a new heart create;  
To those who have sought Thee,  
Thou never said’st No;  
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Do you believe that? It's true. He never turns away those who seek Him  
with the desire to be cleansed from sin. He never says No.

Shall we stand and sing?

*"Whiter Than Snow" - Hymn #318 Spanish Hymn #270*  
Let's pray.