

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

Written by Tim Black

Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

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Body

1.

The Untouchable Leper vv. 1-2. Matthew first tells us about the untouchable leper.

1.

Text

1.

1 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.

2.

2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

3.

Leprosy

1.

Leprosy was a bodily disease

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A "spreading disease," according to Lev. 13:27, 57.

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

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It was a result of the fall.

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Leprosy also included sanitary but symbolic conditions.

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If leprosy covered the whole body, then a person was clean! (Lev. 13:12-13)

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The spread of leprosy symbolized the active power of evil in sin and death.

-

The symbolic separation of unclean lepers from the clean community symbolized separation from God, from holiness, and from life.

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Sin is the leprosy of the soul.

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Leprosy was sometimes a mark of God's particular displeasure for a particular sin. Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah each were stricken with leprosy for committing a single sin. It was also considered an ailment man's medicine could not cure, because when the king of Syria asked the king of Israel to cure Naaman of leprosy, the king of Israel exclaimed, "Am I God...to cure a man of his leprosy?"

" (
2 Kings 5:7
)

-

The Mosaic Cleanliness Law

1.

Ostracized – Outcasts! The effect of the Mosaic cleanliness laws was that lepers became outcasts; they were ostracized.

-

Every leper had to cover his mouth when someone approached and call out "Unclean! Unclean!" Do you get what that means? If you were a leper you would have to tell people, "I'm dirty, don't touch me! Don't even come close! Leave me in my loneliness and misery."

-

Cleansing. The Mosaic law in Lev. 13-14 provided a way for lepers to be cleansed. If God had healed them over time, they could be examined by a priest, present an offering to God to atone for their sins, and then be declared clean.

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Atonement for guilt!

-

Notice that this was a guilt offering, which made the leper ceremonially clean. But was the leper guilty for his leprosy? Not necessarily by means of his actual sins, but certainly by his original sin in Adam. Ceremonial uncleanness is a picture of our guilt for our original and actual sin. Only if your guilt is removed can you be restored to the presence of God and communion with Him.

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Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

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Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

The scapegoat bird is like the scapegoat goat on the Day of Atonement!

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The dead bird means the uncleanness is dead and gone.

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The live bird means you are brought to new life. You're free to rejoice in life with God among His people.

-

The blood was put on the leper to symbolize a substitutionary atonement for the forgiveness of sins.

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It was even a "baptism" in blood, a baptism for the forgiveness of sins! Note that it was by means of dipping, and sprinkling, not immersion. But the word for "dip" in Lev. 14:16 is "*bapto*!"

So "

bapto

" and "

baptizo

" don't always mean "immerse." They mean to dip, to wash, to wash by wetting.

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Restoration & Worship

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Notice also that these offerings brought about restoration and worship. The offerings are like the regular offerings which the leper could not have given when he was unclean. He

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

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Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

couldn't offer them before, but now he can. What made the difference? God healed him of his leprosy. The priest didn't heal; God healed, then the priest investigated and confirmed that fact. But healing alone did not suffice for the leper to be restored. The leper also had to give an offering

. The lamb was killed to symbolize atonement for the leper's guilt, and the offering was waved before the Lord to indicate it was a gift to God. Through the atonement you are restored to communion with God and the joy of worshiping Him.

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But this leper could not enter God's temple; he couldn't even enter a city, unless God made him clean.

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The Priest Who Heals v. 3

1.

Text

1.

3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

2.

"touched him" - The Priest who touches the sinner

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

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Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

1.

First, Christ is the Priest who touches the sinner. Jesus touches the untouchable, and surprisingly, heals them! If Christ were an Old Testament priest, a mere man, he could not touch the leper, because that would make Him unclean. But because Christ was God, He was not polluted by the man's disease, his ceremonial uncleanness, or his sin. Christ healed the disease, removed the man's uncleanness, and cleansed him of his sin. Jesus is the only priest who can touch the sinner, and heal him

.

2.

Hebrews 10:1

-

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

-

Hebrews 10:14

-

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

-

At the high school basketball game this past Friday night I saw some saints, and many sinners. Some whose hearts and minds are captive to the ways of this world, whose lives need to be cleansed by Jesus Christ. Some whom I don't want to touch. But Christ sends His church as He sent Paul in **Acts 26:18**,

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

Written by Tim Black

Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

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18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

-

Will you tell a sinner that Christ can cleanse him from his sin? Peter confessed, "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

" (

Acts 10:28

) If Christ touched the unclean, we must preach the good news of this Savior to all who will hear. He is the Priest who touches the sinner

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"I will" - The Priest who heals at will

1.

Second, Christ is the Priest who heals at will.

2.

In these simple words, "I will," we see so beautifully displayed Christ's tender mercy, His compassion, His grace and kindness.

3.

Christ did not assign the leper to go and wash seven times, as Elisha commanded Naaman; no demanding ritual, no medicine, was needed. Christ healed the leper directly, by His will, by the word of His power. Like God's words at creation, Christ said what He would do, "and it was so." There was no need to pay Him; He healed free of charge. You should learn from this that He is able and

willing not only to heal that leper, but to save sinners, of whom that leper was a picture.

4.

You should call out to Jesus like this leper did. Ask Him, "Jesus will you cleanse me of my sin?" Don't you see what His answer is? "I will!" "All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved!" (Rom. 10:13) Jesus the Redeemer can save you when you call on Him because He is the all-powerful God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Christ can be gracious to you, a sinner, because He is your sovereign Creator.

5.

"Immediately...cleansed" - The Priest who needs no cleansing

1.

And immediately the leper was healed, and more than that, "cleansed" of his ritual impurity. In this immediacy we hear a hint of Christ's own perfect purity. Once you are touched by Christ, you no longer need any other priest to cleanse you. The leper was not just healed; he was "cleansed"

." Christ still sends the leper to the priests in the temple to verify that he had been healed, so they could declare him clean, in order to keep the ceremonial law for the time being, because that law was still in effect. But Christ would fulfill that law, and thereby render it no longer necessary. The man was already clean, because Christ said so, and made him so.

2.

In this we learn thirdly that Christ is the priest who needs no cleansing. He is a greater priest than any other because of His divinity—it is because He is God that He can touch the sinner and not become unclean, and that He can heal at will. But because He is God He also has no sin, and so needs no cleansing. By contrast the Levitical priests were sinners, so always had to cleanse themselves with washings, and make an offering for themselves before making an offering for someone else. But the first cleansing Jesus performs in the Gospel of Matthew is not for Himself. It is for the sinner who has no right to enter God's presence.

3.

The Covenant of Peace v. 4. Christ came to establish with us what scripture calls the "covenant of peace

." Though in the OT God did reconcile sinners to Himself through faith in the promised Messiah, in the NT God sent that Messiah Himself to accomplish that reconciliation in Himself, and to apply it in greater fullness and power through His Holy Spirit. With us this leper received " peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

" (

Rom. 5:1

)

1.

Text

1.

4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.

"

2.

"Tell no one...as a proof" - Notice first the Messianic Secret is revealed to lepers and priests . To those who are a picture of sin, and those by whom God brings cleansing.

1.

Surprisingly, Jesus says "tell no one." Jesus did not want the crowds to hinder His revelation of Himself, His preaching, or to prevent Him from dying on the cross. Jesus did not reveal Himself fully in all His glory all at once; rather He revealed Himself and His gospel gradually. In Matthew 10 He will send his disciples with the charge to proclaim the gospel freely: "What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

" (

Matt. 10:27

) But even that proclamation was for a limited time, in a limited place. Only after Pentecost would the gospel be ready to be proclaimed to all the world. (

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8

)

2.

Jesus tells the leper to keep the secret, but not to keep it from everyone. To whom should the leper tell the secret? The priests. "Show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them." The word for "proof" is "

marturion

," a witness, a testimony. A testimony to the priests. There are two kinds of testimony here. First, a proof that the leper was clean. Only by the priest declaring him "clean" could the leper take part in the worship of God and the fellowship of God's people. But second, this was a proof to the priests that Jesus is the Savior. God alone heals leprosy; the priest can only verify whether God healed the leper. But this leper was healed by Jesus. Jesus is telling the priests there is now a greater Priest walking in their midst who is the Savior.

3.

Jesus is not so much keeping a secret here, but He is directing it to the right people. He reveals Himself to lepers and priests. To the outcast and the gatekeeper. And He tells them both, "

I am the way

" to the Father. (

John 14:6

) Sinner, come to Jesus, who says " whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

" (

John 6:37

) Saint, don't think the key to heaven is in your pocket. Jesus says "

I hold the keys

" (

Rev. 1:18

); you've entered His kingdom because He gave you life (

John 10:28; Eph. 2:5

), and you'll stay there because He holds you in His hand. (

John 10:28

).

Jesus

is the Savior, whether you are a leper or a priest.

4.

You are the leper. Your sin has separated you from God. You must call out to God to forgive

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

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Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

you of your sin, because He can make you clean, if He wills. And praise be to God that "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

)

5.

The priests were to make peace between man and God

1.

But you also are the priests. The priests were to make peace between man and God.

2.

Though Levi murdered in revenge, God made his tribe ministers of reconciliation. God says "My covenant with him was one of life and peace." (**Mal. 2:5**)

3.

When Phinehas the priest obediently made atonement for God's people, in **Numbers 25:9** God gave to him and his descendants His "covenant of peace;
" peace with God and the honor of reconciling men to God.

4.

In **Ezekiel 34** God promised that though the priests would fail to shepherd God's people, God Himself would shepherd them in the person of Jesus Christ, and thereby would make with them a "covenant of peace." (**v. 25**) In **Ezekiel 37** God promised that in the New Covenant, when He would establish His covenant of peace (v. 26) with them, "They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

" (

v. 23

)

5.

God has made you a kingdom of priests (**Rev. 1:6; 5:10**) and a holy nation, "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

" (

1 Pet. 2:5

) You are no longer an outcast, but God claims you as "a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

" (

1 Pet. 2:9

) God "through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

" (

2 Cor. 5:18

)

6.

Conclusion

1.

You are the leper, and you are the priest, in this story. Once you were untouchable, but Christ touched you and made you whole. And now He sends you to proclaim that good news "through out the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

" (

Matt. 24:14

)

To the Gentiles. Those who once were ceremonially unclean. Those who still are sinners. Even who have an infectious disease—they're sinning against you. They will hurt you. But they will be healed by Jesus Christ, who lives in you. So Christ tells you in

Matt. 10:26

, "

Have no fear of them.

" Let it be only the love of Christ that constrains you (

2 Cor. 5:14

Matt. 8:1-4 - Salvation for the Untouchables

Written by Tim Black

Sunday, 01 February 2009 12:59 -

), "
that [you] who live might no longer live for [yourselves] but for him who for [your] sake died
and was raised.

" (

v. 15

) By healing this leper, Christ calls you to receive this
blessing of discipleship

—

to receive and to pass on the ministry of reconciliation
. That reconciliation is the first blessing of discipleship.