Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus Trades Places with a Leper
Scripture: Mark 1:40–45
Code: 41-7

Now we find ourselves in the last paragraph of the first chapter of Mark. Mark chapter 1, verses 40 through 45, that ends chapter 1. Now I told you we'd be moving through Mark faster than we moved through Luke ten years, or Matthew eight years plus. And just to prove that to you, we've been eight weeks in Mark and we are now at Jesus' healing the leper. If we were in Matthew, we wouldn't run into that until chapter 8 of Matthew and we would be three years in Matthew before we got there. Now if we were back in Luke, we wouldn't run into this until the middle of the fifth chapter of Luke and we would have been two and a half years in getting to this. So we are definitely moving faster.

As we said about Mark, Mark's gospel tends to be classified under the category of immediately, the common word that is used over 40 times. It's a fast-paced gospel, no wasted words, he moves rapidly and we're doing the very same thing.

Now as we come to the account that's before us which is included in Matthew 8:1 to 4 and Luke 5:12 to 16, we come to one of two occasions in the four gospels where Jesus actually heals a leper. Leprosy is common in Israel according to Luke 4:27, and had been common in Israel for a long time. So it is very likely Jesus healed many lepers. In fact, in Mark chapter 14 and verse 3, we come to an occasion where Jesus is at a gathering with a whole lot of people in the home of none other than Simon the Leper.

Well, he wouldn't have been a leper then cause if he had been a leper then he would have been an outcast and he wouldn't have been able to hold a party at his house and have people attend, which is to say to us that Simon used to be a leper which is very likely to say Jesus had healed him but there's no record of his healing given to us in the gospels. There are only two records of the healing of lepers, this one, one man, and the occasion in Luke 17 where Jesus healed ten lepers. Again that's not say He didn't heal many more.

Remember that the miracles that are recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are selective. For all intents and purposes, we could sum up the healing ministry of Jesus in the words of Luke, He healed them all....He healed them all. He healed people in the thousands. The record is in heaven of all His healings, we have only samples given us in the New Testament.

The purpose of all these miracles whether it is healing disease, ending death, casting out demons, feeding multitudes, walking on water, whatever it is that was miraculous was done in order to validate

the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore not only does He have supernatural power, but what He says is true. After all, the most important thing to Jesus was the message. Look at Mark 1:38, “He said to them, ‘Let's go somewhere else, to the towns nearby that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for.’” Or as Jesus said on another occasion, “I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” He came for the purpose of causing sinners to hear a message that would lead them to repentance and salvation, and in the language of verse 38, that meant to preach the Kingdom, to preach the gospel, to preach salvation. That's why He came. All the miracles did was validate the message.

If He had teachers running around everywhere teaching certain things, how do you know who's telling the truth. Well the one who can cast out demons, who has power over the whole kingdom of darkness, the one who can heal all diseases of all kinds in all people day after day after day, month after month, year after year, the one who has total control over life and death so that He can raise people from the dead, that's the one who is divine. And if He has divine power, then He can be trusted to be teaching divine truth.

So the testimony of the record of the miracles of Jesus with regard to physical miracles and spiritual miracles is to point to the validity of His teaching. Now keep in mind that for a period of three years, Jesus moved, first of all, Judea for a period of time, then for up to a year and a half, through Galilee, then back in the final months before His crucifixion into the south in Judea, going from town to town, village to village, place to place, and through all of these experiences He was teaching and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom which is the good news of salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, and at the same time validating that by doing uncounted miracles. So much so that John closes his gospel by saying all the books of the world couldn't contain everything He did. And the record is massive...massive. I often say that He virtually banished illness and demon possession from the land of Israel during the time of His ministry. It is a massive display of divine power, which leaves the nation fully aware who He is. They never denied His miracles, never denied His power. Only the leaders came up with the idea that He did it by the power of Satan, rather than the power of God. Therefore the whole nation is really indicted and self-condemned as they reject Him as their Messiah and Savior because the evidence is not arguable.

Now in the verses before us, verses 40 to 45, you have this one incident recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke of the healing of a leper. It's a fascinating situation whenever a leper appears in the Bible because of the nature of the disease, and I'll say a little bit about that. But let's read the account.

Verse 40, “A leper came to Jesus beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him and saying, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.' Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I am willing, be cleansed.' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed and He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away. And He said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses

commanded as a testimony to them.' But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopular areas and they were coming to Him from everywhere."

If you noticed this morning in the bulletin, the title of the sermon...the title is "Jesus trades places with a leper." And just listening to the reading, you can see how the circumstances of this particular healing literally juxtaposed the leper and Jesus. The leper, an outcast, having to stay in isolated places, came into the city, met Jesus. Jesus in the city because of the leper ended up in isolated places. Jesus trades places with a leper. I'll say more about that later.

Let's begin the simple story, the simple and magnificent account by looking at the leper's predicament. Then we'll look at the Lord's response, then the leper's response and then the Lord's predicament. The leper's predicament is simply stated, "And a leper came to Jesus." All it says about him, he's a leper. The assumption is that he has the kind of leprosy that makes you an outcast. The word "leprosy" is from lepros meaning scaly. It is a term used to mark scaly skin manifested disease. And there is much discussion as to exactly what the disease was pathologically and clinically in biblical times.

Since there was really no pathology in ancient times, since they didn't know what caused diseases, they didn't know about bacillus, bacteria, things like that, viruses. All they could do was look at the symptoms and judge a person's condition by virtue of the characteristics of those symptoms, and there would have been many, many skin disorders and skin diseases which could have demonstrated themselves in a scaly fashion, psoriasis, eczema, and others.

Many biblical kinds of leprosy could be in view. But I think it's best to assume that in this kind of a situation where you have reference to being made clean, that we're talking about the kind of leprosy that rendered someone unclean. And you have the same kind of thing in the account of the ten lepers in Luke 17 because it says they were standing far off.

When it was deemed that a person had this kind of leprosy which is today known as Hansen's disease, the kind of leprosy we associate with the word leprosy, they were put out of society all together. And we'll say more about that as well in a moment.

This labeled them then unclean. According to Leviticus 13, they had to say unclean, unclean, unclean everywhere they went in order to give people warnings. They had to tatter their clothes, shred their clothes, rip and tear their clothes so that it would be apparent to everyone that they in fact were lepers. They had other very indicating...very indicative tell-tale signs as well. But it was important that they be designated as unclean. And the fact that this man who has leprosy of whatever sorts says if You're willing, You can make me clean, indicates that whatever kind of leprosy he had, it was that kind that rendered him unclean. Most medical historians believe that leprosy

originated in Egypt and there's an interesting reason for that, the disease has been found, the bacteria for that disease, believe ir or not, in a mommy from Egypt...the bacteria was mummified along with the mummy. In fact, some say the leprosy bacterium is the first bacterium to be identified as causing human disease.

Now Leviticus chapter 13, and we won't go into it, I went into it in more detail in our study of this same account in Matthew and Luke, gives preliminary examinations that were to be done by the priests. The priests were the protectors of the people and if you had some kind of a skin disorder, your family, your community would send you to the priest and Leviticus 13 gives a long list of prescriptive tests that need to be taken to diagnose what this person has. In fact, there are 59 verses in that one chapter just sorting out the various possibilities of skin disease. They were after an accurate diagnosis to protect people from this contagious bacillus that could move from person to person. There...there were obvious signs of leprosy and if a person was obviously a leper, they knew exactly what leprosy looked like, they wouldn't have to go through all the tests. But there were people who had an emerging case of leprosy, beginning stages of leprosy or perhaps at least not fully developed so that they could actually be certain about a diagnosis and therefore there were tests given in Leviticus 13 by which they could discern a person's condition. It was particularly important for anybody who was questionable, not for those who clearly had the disorder. So if you look at verse 18 or so, and go all the way to verse 59 and you can read all the various ways in which they tried to discern this.

When you come down to verse 45, I'll read that to you anyway, in Leviticus chapter 13, verse 44. “If the person is identified as a leprous man, he is unclean. The priests shall surely pronounce him unclean. His infection is on his head. As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, that is so that he can be easily identified as wearing rags, the hair of his head shall be uncovered because leprosy tends to show itself in reddish blotches and open sores on the head, they need to be visible. He call cover his mustache and cry ‘Unclean, Unclean.' He shall remain unclean all the days in which he has the infection. He is unclean, he shall live alone. His dwelling should be outside the camp.”

Now all of that points to what we would see as kind of a clinical case of leprosy, to be distinguished, as I said, from eczema, psoriasis, batilico(?), acne, ringworm, keloid, whatever other kind of skin disorders there are. In obvious cases, again, that test wouldn't be necessary that's given in Leviticus 13, unless in obvious cases it was very, very important to determine it. We now know it is a micro-bacterium lepra(?), as it is called, that causes the disease. And what that bacteria does is attack the nerves...it attacks the nerves in the skin and below the skin. And what it essentially does is anesthetize the feeling, the body and the limbs are so viciously attacked by this bacillus that feeling disappears. Thus the potential for injury is extremely severe.

It usually starts with a whiter pink patch of skin, usually on the brow, on the nose, on the ear, the cheek, the chin. The patch begins to spread in all directions. And one of the early signs is the eyebrows and eyelashes disappear, then spongy tumorous swelling grows on the face and then on the body. The disease becomes systemic, it involves the internal organs as well as the skin, fingers and toes can be reabsorbed into the body because the baccilus-invading the bone morrow impairs the blood supply, causes the bones to shrivel, it causes the extremities to shrivel. And because of the loss of feeling, because of the terrible nerve damage, the victim then destroys his own tissue because he has no feeling and there are stories about people who literally wore off their fingers doing simple things like washing dishes or tying their shoes, or using a rake because they cannot feel anything. The bacillus can destroy the eye, cause blindness, can penetrate the teeth so the teeth fall out, it penetrates the internal organs, causes sterility. It's a horrendous disease.

One writer, a Dr. Hoisingus(?) says about it, “Leprosy generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body, numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original color, gets to be thick, glossy and scaly. The thicken spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch with deep furrows between the swelling so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. The disease-producing agent frequently also attacks the larynx. The leper's voice acquires a grating quality, his throat becomes hoarse. He can now not only see, feel and smell the leper, you can hear his rasping voice.

The world-renown expert on this in modern times is Dr. Paul Brand. You may have read some of his writings on it. He has really helped this generation to understand this disease...1982 there were drugs developed that can bring relief and cure, although no drug can restore what has been lost. Concerning Paul Brand, the writer says, “Hanson's disease is cruel but not all the way...the way other diseases are. It primarily acts like an anesthetic, numbing the pain cells of hands, feet, nose, eyes and ears. Not so bad really one might think, most diseases are painful and we would like them not to be. What makes a painless disease so horrible? Well Hanson's disease numbing quality is precisely the reason for its fabeled destruction and decay. For thousands of years, people thought Hanson's disease called the ulcers on hands and feet and face which eventually led to rotting flesh and loss of limbs. Mainly through Dr. Brand's research, it's been established that in 99 percent of the cases, Hanson's disease only numbers the extremities, the destruction follows slowly because the warning system of pain is gone.” People literally wear out their limbs.

On one occasion it says a man with leprosy tried to open the door of a little storeroom but a rusty padlock would not yield. A patient and undersized malnourished ten-year-old approached him smiling, “Let me, Sahib Doctor,” he offered and reached for the key. This is from Paul Brand. “With a jerk of his hand, he turned the key in the lock. Brand was dumbfounded. How could this weak youngster do this?

“His eyes caught a tale-tell clue, was that a drop of blood on his hand? Upon examining the boy's fingers, Brand discovered the act of turning the key had gashed the finger open to the bone, skin, fat and joint were all exposed, yet the boy was completely unaware of it. To him, the sensation of cutting his finger to the bone was no different from picking up a stone or a coin in his pocket.” Brand says, “The daily routine of life ground away at the leprosy patient's hands and feet, no warning system alerted him.” Horrible disease.

The disease would go from ten to thirty years, the victim's is usually dying because they had no resistence to other diseases. Transmission occurs when bacillus is inhaled, so it was communicable, or by bodily contact, or by contact with the clothes of a leper. The last figures I saw around the year 2000, there were reported almost a million cases of leprosy and they think that's probably less than half of the real cases because most are not reported.

In biblical times, God sometimes used leprosy as a judgment. It was such a visible horror. “Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper.” For the safety of Israel, as early as the time of Moses, they were putting them out of the camp. But a stigma grew on top of that because 2 Samuel 3:29 says, “When David cursed the house of evil Joab, the curse included this, my it, your house, your family, never be without a leper.” It was a despicable disease. It was even believed that it was not just a human curse but it was divine punishment. It was God, you'll remember, who smote Uzziah with leprosy, 2 Chronicles 26, further stigmatizing its victims. They had a horrible disease and had to leave the camp and say, “Unclean, unclean.”

On top of that, it was as if someone had cursed them. On top of that, it was as if God had cursed them. They were religiously cut off. They couldn't go to the temple. They couldn't go to the synagogue. They couldn't go home. They couldn't associate with their family. They had to be isolated from all healthy people, they could only associate with other miserable lepers and that's why in Luke 17 we see the ten standing afar off together...no family, no job, no friends, no worship, no hope.

How severe was this man? Luke says he was full of leprosy, Luke 5:12...visible, ugly, frightening, a living death...a living death.

Now the fact that he came to Jesus is a shock...it's a shock. He's not supposed to do that. Outcasts were forbidden to come near anyone. The rabbis said...at least one rabbi that I read said, “Upwind a leper can come within six feet of a person, downwind, 150 feet.” Josephus wrote that “Lepers were treated as if they were living dead men, corpses.” In Israel they were barred from the city of Jerusalem all together, and all walled cities. And if they did enter any other place, they had to keep those distances. If a leper came near a synagogue, he would be rejected and sent to a small holding room until they could deal with him later. Rabbis used to pride themselves in avoiding lepers. One rabbi said, “He wouldn't eat an egg purchased on a street where a leper had walked.” Another rabbi

prided himself at throwing stones at lepers.

But this leper came to Jesus, through the crowd cause there was always a crowd. He violated all necessary standards of exclusion in his desperation. He came to Jesus beseeching him, begging Him with strong pleas, showing his desperation. His attitude was humble, respectful. It says that he was falling on his knees before Him. Matthew says worshiping, proskuneo, a verb that is always referring to worship of God every time it's used in the whole of the New Testament. He had a worshipful attitude, a respectful, reverent humble attitude. Luke says he fell on his face. He not only went on his knees, but he went down on his face. He flattened himself in humble adoration before Jesus.

Luke adds something else. Luke adds that he said, “Lord,” and it appears as if this is all the right stuff. Did he believe Jesus to be the Son of God? The Messiah? The Lamb of God? The true King? The Anointed One? His body language might indicate that. He was willing to risk the shame, the embarrassment, the disdain to go where he was never supposed to go. That's how desperate he was and that's how confident he was in the power of Jesus which was now widely known. He had great confidence in Jesus' power to heal him, and he says to Him in verse 40, “If You are willing, you can make me clean.” He had no doubt about Jesus' power. The only thing he didn't know was whether He willed to do it.

There's something very good in that. He acknowledges sovereign prerogative. He knows he has no just claim on Christ. Look, he would view himself as an outcast. He would view himself as despicable. He would view himself as despised by men. He would view himself as cursed by God. So he would come with the hope that if Jesus is indeed the Son of God, maybe God would change His mind, but he know he could lay no claim on God, he would be well aware of his own wretchedness, his own internal sinfulness as well as his own physical wretchedness. He would know well that he is a sinner. He would have borne the stigma of his sin physically in his own mind and he knew he could lay no claim on God. If God had cursed him this way, maybe God wanted him that way and no healing would come from this one, even if He were the Son of God.

So though he is respectful and reverent and calls Him “Lord” and bows down and gives Jesus the prerogative, if You are willing, You can make me clean...nonetheless he's desperate enough to show up, desperation, reverence, worship, humility, confident faith, respect, that's all the right stuff. And he pleads for what he needs...cleansing.

A little footnote. Scripture only talks about cleansing with regard to leprosy, never healing...never healing. Scripture always speaks of cleansing lepers, never of healing them because that connects it with the true disease, the disease that is defined in Leviticus 13 for which one is rendered unclean and socially isolated and ostracized.

And by the way, the defilement was worse than the disease. The disease was horrendous. The disease was horrible, but it is compounded by the fact that you have no ability to interact with anybody but the people who also have the disease. The defilement and the disease itself compelled the man, his confidence in the power of Jesus caused him to breach all laws and expectations, and he came.

Horror must have swept through the crowd, for Luke's words are understood that he was full of leprosy, that was because that was evident. So the leper's predicament.

Secondly, the Lord's response...the Lord's response. Although...just to make a note here...Jesus healed people who did not believe in Him, He healed people who didn't show Him respect, He healed people who didn't bow down, He healed people who didn't worship Him, He healed people who didn't call Him Lord, in fact He healed all kinds of people, most people certainly did not believe in Him...He healed non-believers, He healed them whether they had faith or didn't have faith. He cast demons out of people who didn't want Him necessarily to do that, they were being controlled by the demons who didn't want to be expelled.

So it had nothing to do with a man's attitude. His attitude is interesting but his attitude is not the reason Jesus healed him. Luke 4:40 says He healed everybody. He healed everyone. He didn't make distinctions about having faith, enough faith, too little faith. That was immaterial. He healed everybody. As I said, He banished illness from Israel.

The only thing that moved Jesus to heal a man is indicated in verse 41, His compassion, He was moved with compassion. He felt the man's pain. He felt the agony of this man's isolation, physical distress, social isolation, religious isolation. The man's plight triggered Jesus' compassion. God is a God of compassion. God is a God of all compassion. God feels the pain of sin's effects on sinners and Mark chapter 6, for example, and many other places, but close by in Mark chapter 6 and verse 33, “The people saw him going and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd and He felt compassion.”

This is the heart of God who feels the pain of suffering in this world. That's what motivated Him. It wasn't some trigger by the man's level of faith, for Jesus healed everybody all the time, faith or no faith. Jesus stretched out His hand, I told you last week He healed with a word and a touch, He stretched out His hand, touched him and then said to him, “I'm willing, be cleansed.”

Now in Leviticus 5:3 there's a law forbidding anyone to touch a leper. But Jesus couldn't be defiled by anyone...He could not be defiled by anyone. Do you understand that? There's no record in the Scripture that Jesus ever had an illness, a disease, no record that He ever had a cough, a cold, a

sneeze, no record that He ever had any infliction upon His perfect sinless body.

You say, “But He died.” But nothing killed Him. He died only because He gave up His life voluntarily. “No man takes My life from Me, I lay it down by Myself.” He was not affected when a prostitute ran her hands all over His feet. Most men having a prostitute do that would be fighting off illicit thoughts. Not Jesus, nor was He affected when a leper touched Him or when He touched a leper.

His touch was a touch of compassion. His touch was a touch of connection. It is Jesus linking Himself directly to the healing. Mark mentions this a lot. Mark talks a lot about touch, so does Luke. There are probably a dozen times in the gospel of Mark where we find Jesus is touching somebody or somebody is touching Jesus, and the same would be true in the gospel of Luke. Jesus loved to give people the touch of compassion, the touch of tenderness, the touch of kindness, especially people that nobody else would touch. They were known as the untouchables.

And then He said to him, “I am willing, be cleansed.” Sovereign love responded and sovereign power acted. “I'm willing, be cleansed.” And here comes Luke's...or Mark's favorite word, verse 42, “Immediately...Immediately,” on the spot, at that moment, because that's how Jesus healed, right?, instantaneously and completely the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus heals him by a word and a touch, instantly, completely, no gimmicks, no process, and no explanation.

It was obvious and His miracles were creative. There is no medication that can restore what leprosy has eaten, even though since 1982 we have a medication that can stop the disease, it can't stop and reverse the effects of the disease, but Jesus didn't have those limitations. If his forehead had been worn away, if his face had been disfigured, all of that disappeared in that moment. If his eyes were sunken and even absent, they reappeared, freshly created. If his eyelashes and eyebrows were gone, they suddenly were back. If his bloody limbs had been worn off, if his throat had been scarred, if his fingers and toes were curled up like claws and worn away, all this was instantly restored...instantly restored. This is a true healer...true healer, and it all happened instantly.

Let me tell you something else. He was not only well, he was fit. And if you have had something like leprosy for years and years, the destruction of your system that isn't visible on the inside, the internal organs, the problems with the blood would render you weak. And the recovery period could be months, if not years. But in this man's case, Jesus sternly warned him in verse 43, “And immediately sent him away.” On your way, and He said to him, “Go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded.”

Where would he have to go to do that? Jerusalem...to the temple, to the on-duty course of priests where all necessary offerings and sacrifices were made. Walk 60-70 miles to Jerusalem. So when I say he was healed and he was also fit, that's what I mean. In the healings of Jesus, there's no rehab.

Now, our Lord gives him some instruction that I think is so fascinating in verse 43. He sternly warned him...that's an interesting verb, it comes from the roots to snort...snort not like cocaine, but like a horse. To make a loud snort as if irritated and impatient. This is verbal noise that came to refer to a very strong demand. This is very strong language. This is not a suggestion. The Lord snorted at him, "I'm warning you, get out of here right now, immediately." And He gives him two commands...a negative one and a positive one. The command, first of all, verse 44, "He said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone.'"

Oh, come on. That is so counterintuitive. That is so difficult. That's a test of obedience, isn't it? Why? Well He doesn't tell him why. Remember the rich young ruler? He gave him a couple of tests and he wasn't willing to do it and he walked away, right? You remember the rich young ruler came to Jesus, bowed down, "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" All the right questions, all the right stuff, very much like this guy. Jesus tells him to do two things, you know, basically take an inventory of his life and admit he's a sinner and secondly, be willing to give his money to the poor. Then he walks away. So the acid test of a true faith is in the obedience. "If you continue in My Word, you're My real disciple. If you obey My Word, you're My real disciple," John 8.

Jesus gives him a simple command, not a difficult one, but at this point He's establishing whether or not the man when he said "Lord" really meant it. Now it isn't unusual for Jesus to silence somebody. Go back to chapter 1 verse 25. The demon in the synagogue in Nazareth, or in Capernaum, rather, the demon in the synagogue in Capernaum says in verse 24, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God." And Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be quiet, come out of him."

Down in verse 34, end of the verse. "He was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who He was. He did not want publicity from demons. So He's been silencing the demons and now He's going to silence the people who are healed. This becomes a pattern. I don't want you to say anything. Chapter 3 verse 12, "After healing many people, many afflictions, unclean spirits, verse 12...3:12...He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was."

Chapter 5 verse 43, "After the miracle with the twelve-year-old girl that astounded everybody," verse 43, "He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this." That seem strange? Don't tell anybody. Chapter 7 verse 36, this is the healing of the deaf man. "He gave them orders not to tell anyone," chapter 7 verse 36, "but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it." Chapter 8, here He heals a blind man and down in verse 25, laid His hands on his eyes, looked intently, was restored, began to see everything clearly, and He said to him....He sent him to his home, He said, "Go home, do not even enter the village."

Now what is this about? Well He doesn't give this man...go back to Mark 1...He doesn't give this man any explanation to what it's about but I'll show you the explanation in a moment. Don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody. Go immediately, get somebody...obviously who will accompany you...head for the priest in the temple at Jerusalem to do what is prescribed.

Back to verse 44, “Go show yourself to the priest.” That's the positive. The negative is, “Don't tell anybody,” the positive is, “Go show yourself to the priest, offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded,” that's what I want you to do.

Now the Old Testament gave a prescription. Leviticus 14, that when a leper was thought to be cured, there was a process the leper went through, a process of examination and a process of offerings and sacrifices that were to be done at the temple. So Jesus is upholding the Law. He upheld the moral law, and He upheld also the...we could call it the medical law, or the health part of the law which protected the nation Israel from contagious diseases. So He says you've got to follow the prescription according to Leviticus chapter 14. Go to the priest, go to the priest...the priest, as we note when you read through Leviticus 13 and 14, are the ones who are the health officials in the nation.

Now the ritual is very interesting. Here's kind of how the ritual goes. The leper is examined by a priest, two birds are taken and one is killed over running water, in addition they're taking cedar, scarlet and hyssop, these things are taken together with the living bird, dipped in the blood of the dead bird, then the living bird is allowed to go free. The man...this is all symbolic...the man washed himself and his clothes, shaves himself, seven days are allowed to pass and then he's reexamined. He must then shave his hair again, his head, his eyebrows, certain sacrifices are then made consisting of two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb, three tenths of an amount of fine flour mingled with oil and the restored leper is then touched on the tip of the right ear, the right thumb and the right great toe with mixture of blood and oil. Finally examined for the last time. And if the cure is indeed real, he is allowed to go with a certificate that he is cleansed. So He says, “Go do that.”

Why? End of verse 44, “As a testimony to them.” Who? Priests. You're going to go to the temple, you're going to talk to the priests. I want this miracle confirmed to the priests. That...that would be something they couldn't ignore. You take...obviously he's going to take some people from his family with him, they're going to tell the story because to look at the man, you'd never know he had leprosy. But I want them to know that you have been totally healed of leprosy. He wants the priests to have to face His power. He also wants the priests to know that He upholds the Mosaic Law.

The testimony then will indict the priests. And if they are sufficiently indicted, and convicted of their sin of rejecting Jesus Christ, remember now, they're at the temple and He already cleansed the temple so they already have a severe anti-Christ attitude. You go back, you tell them this incredible story. They go through the tests. If indeed they face the reality that you are a leper who is now completely restored, then if they reject me, they condemn themselves by their own findings...by their

own findings. If they believe in Me, it will be because they have made the obvious connection. This kind of power belongs only to the Son of God. So it's important to the testimony to the priests that they might be convicted, convinced and believed or that t hey might be condemned by their own findings.

Well we know eventually they all screamed for His blood and condemned themselves in the process. Jesus wanted the man to give a testimony to the priests. What did he do?

Well, we've seen the leper's predicament, We've seen the Lord's response, gives him a negative and a positive command, here's the Lord's predicament...we're back now kind of where we started. Started with a leper's predicament, the leper puts the Lord in a somewhat similar predicament, verse 45, “He went out, began to proclaim it freely and spread the news around.” Just exactly what he was told not to do.

So if you had any big-time illusions about this man's spiritual interest in Christ, it sort of seems to fall apart here, doesn't it? Man's disobedience eliminated the opportunity for the testimony to the priests which is what the Lord wanted him to do. Secondly, the man's disobedience in spreading this all over everywhere had a negative effect on even what Jesus was able to do. It says in verse 45, “He spread the news around to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas. He couldn't even go into a city. Josephus says there are about 240 towns and villages around Galilee, He wanted to go to all of them, that's what it said in chapter 1 verse 38 and 39, let's go to all the towns and all the villages and preach. Let's go everywhere. That's what He wanted to do.

But there was just too much hysteria. And remember, a moment ago I read you chapter 7 and verse 36, this thing reaches a fever pitch. He gave them orders not to tell anyone. The more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. And now He can't even get near a town. Any where there's a mass of populous, they crush Him. He has to escape that. You see Him out in the wilderness from here on. You see Him out by the seashore somewhere. Sometimes He has to get in a boat and float off just to get away from the people enough to speak to them. The enthusiasm has reached a fever pitch and it's all about the healing. It's unrealistic Messianic expectation. His popularity is exploding. In fact, in chapter 2 verse 1, when He does come back to Capernaum, His home base, several days after this and it's heard that He was at home and many were gathered, there was no longer room, not even near the door and that led to the story about the man being let down through the roof to be healed. Just crushed everywhere. And all they all wanted was the healing...the healing...the healing...the healing. Jesus said we don't need anymore of that promotion, we don't need anymore of that publicity, just go tell the priests, I want the priests to have to face the reality of My divine power.

You know, this was the first sign that the Galilean ministry was being ground down...ground down, eventually to a halt. And one of the grinding stones was the hatred of the leaders and the other grinding stone was the massive popularity of the people. In between the two, they were just grinding down that ministry to a stop. Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city but stayed out in unpopulated areas.

Drop down to verse 13 of chapter 2. “He went again out by the seashore and all the people were coming to Him and He was teaching them.” He couldn't go to a city anymore. Chapter 3 verse 7, “Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples and a great multitude from Galilee followed and also from Judea and from Jerusalem and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.” And that's when He told His disciples that He was going to have to get in a boat.

If this man had obeyed Him, it might have slowed the crush. It might have allowed Him to go to a town He never was able to go to, maybe heal some people that were unable to be healed. The people who tended to be ill, severest, couldn't leave the town. If He couldn't go to the town, He couldn't get to them.

Still, the end of verse 45, “They were coming to Him from everywhere, out to the wilderness, out to the mountain side, out to the hills, out to the valleys, out to the fields, out to the seashore...massive crowds. And He can't enter the city.”

Now here's the title, Jesus exchange or trades places with the leper. The leper started in the wilderness in isolation and after meeting Jesus, was able to mingle in the city. Or Jesus started in the city after meeting the leper, was isolated to the wilderness. So Jesus trades places with a leper.

And I think that's a metaphor in closing for what He did at the cross, is it not? We are the spiritual lepers who lived in alienation and isolation from God. We met Him, we were brought into the presence of God in the Kingdom. But the only way we could ever be taken from our isolation and brought into the presence of God was if He left the presence of God and went Himself into isolation. And that's what He did on the cross because Jesus was forsaken, because Jesus was treated as an outcast we are accepted and welcomed into the presence of God.

So here you see in this one little healing, Mark uses language that really irresistibly draws us to the fact that Jesus takes the place of sinners.

We thank You, Lord, again to this wonderful glimpse of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for each glimpse we have but never enough. And even when we look, we know there's much more that we surely missed. What a joy it would have been to have been there then. We think we would have believed, but the whole nation rejected Him, it seems to us incomprehensible. We don't even know

what happened to this man. We have no idea what happened to this man, but we do know that when he had an opportunity to obey, he refused. So whatever he meant by “lord” didn't seem to be very serious. Father, we want to thank You that Jesus Christ exchanged places with us, that He traded places with us, that He took our sin and our judgment and our punishment, that He became an outcast, that He was forsaken by You in order that we might be received and accepted and be made sons. We rejoice in this with grateful hearts. And we ask that You would cause us to proclaim this great message which is such blessing to our own hearts, may we tell the story. Leprosy is a picture of sin, is there any better physical picture of sin, destroys the whole person, alienates, isolates, cuts people off from You. But Jesus ushers the sinner into Your presence by taking the sinner's place. What a wonderful truth this is. Thank You for it. We thank You for the salvation that is ours in Christ, and we ask, Lord, that You give us opportunity to proclaim it to His glory. Amen.

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