A Lesson from a Leper
Luke 5:12-15
42-63

We come now to Luke chapter 5 in our ongoing study of this amazing gospel: Luke chapter 5 verses 12 through 16. And I remind you as you're turning to this section of Scripture that Luke's gospel was written to prove that Jesus Christ was eternal God in human flesh. He came into the world to be the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer. Luke writes his gospel carefully, precisely, accurately, systematically, presenting an irrefutable case for the deity and the messiahship of Jesus Christ. He begins with the testimony of angels who came directly from heaven to speak to Zacharias and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary. And then he follows up with the testimony of Zacharias and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary as to the mighty working of God in the preparation of the coming of the Savior.

He adds the testimony of two old people who saw the infant Jesus in the temple, Simeon and Anna. And then there is that remarkable description of the virgin conception by which a child is planted in the womb of Mary, who has never known a man, further proof of Jesus' divine nature. His birth also is attended by corporate angelic testimony and the subsequent confirming witness of the shepherds who heard the angels. And amassing his evidence of the deity and messiahship of Jesus, he adds an incident from the life of Jesus, the only one in the first 30 years of His life recorded in Scripture, and at the age of twelve we find Him in the temple fully aware that He is God the Son.

We come then in Luke's account to His baptism and there at His baptism is the testimony of the last of the Old Testament prophets and the greatest, John the Baptist, who affirms that this is the Lamb of God. And to the testimony of John is added the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who descends from heaven upon the man Jesus in His baptism, and to that is added the voice of God, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." There is the affirmation that this is God's Son, who is holy. Luke then adds the genealogy of Jesus that proves Him to be in the messianic line through Abraham and through David.

The final stone in the foundation of the credentials of Messiah is the account of Jesus being tempted by the devil. And after a massive onslaught by Satan to a humanly weakened Jesus who has been fasting for forty days and forty nights, the proof is clear: This is God, for Jesus vanquishes Satan at every point. He comes out of the temptation in holy triumph.

That takes us through the first three chapters. The foundation of His credentials are established. Divine qualifications are met. Prophetic qualifications are fulfilled. Spiritual qualifications become crystal clear and legal qualifications are indicated as well. Having laid that foundation, we begin in chapter 4 to see the ministry of Jesus, which is predominantly a ministry of preaching and teaching. And the message is, "To the poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed," as they were identified by Isaiah in Isaiah 61, and Jesus says in chapter 4 verses 18 and 19 that He came to fulfill that, to preach the gospel of forgiveness and salvation and eternal life to those who know they are poor and prisoners

and blind and oppressed. To prove continuously that He is in fact the Messiah, who can forgive sin and bring salvation, He demonstrates supernatural power in three categories; the area of demons, the area of disease and the area of death.

So as the ministry of Jesus unfolds, as we go through the chapters in Luke, we're going to see Him not only teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the message of salvation, we're going to see His power over the spiritual world of demons, over the natural realm of disease and over the final foe, death itself. As we come to our passage, verses 12 to 16, we see Jesus do a miracle for a leper, verse 12. "It came about that while He was in one of the cities, behold there was a man full of leprosy and when he saw Jesus he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' And He stretched out His hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing, be clean,'" or be cleansed. "And immediately the leprosy left him and He ordered him to tell no one but “go and show yourself to the priests and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded for a testimony to them.” But the news about Him was spreading even farther and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

There are many diseases today. Perhaps we know of more of them, pathologically and clinically, certainly than any time in human history. But of all the diseases that we face in our modern world, none is more dreaded, none is more feared and none is more stigmatized than AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Its closest parallel in the ancient world was leprosy. In its severest form it was the most feared disease. It was contagious, incurable, for the most part, fatal. It devastated people. It had immense social implications and even religious implications.

The time sequence for this encounter with the leper is unknown to us. It occurred sometime in the Galilean ministry of Jesus, as He was moving around the lake. We remember — don't we — from verse 43 in chapter 4 that He had to preach the kingdom of God to the other cities in Galilee and that's exactly what He was doing. And in verse 44 He indicates that He focused His preaching in the synagogues of Judea which would include Galilee. Somewhere in one of those cities around the lake of Galilee, Jesus had come into some synagogue to preach the gospel and to attend that preaching with His miracle power so that He could attest to the fact that His message was true. In one of those occasions He encounters a man, a man with leprosy and He heals the man.

Luke writes about this and many other miracles, as do the other gospel writers, because miracles are essential to the scriptural record to identify Jesus as God. He does what man can't do. He does what doctors can't do. In fact, the miracle record of Jesus is essential to the Christian faith because these are the proofs of His supernatural, divine nature. If He is not supernatural, tear up your New Testament. The Christian faith becomes inexplicable on any legitimate grounds. It's fantasy or it's outright deception. But because the miracles did happen, they are true, He is God, and He is our Redeemer.

Let's meet this man in verse 12. Somewhere in the Galilee, no precise time or place, and by the way, Matthew 8 and Mark 1 also record this same healing and they also do not tell us when or where. But somewhere in some town: "Behold, there was a man full of leprosy."

Lepers were confined to the outskirts, but this man comes into town. Matthew tells us that he came to Jesus. He wasn't just wandering, he knew exactly to whom he was going. They were forbidden, actually, to come near anyone without the disease because of its contagion, because of its

disgusting and tragic effects.

This man, Luke, tells us — and Luke, remember, is the beloved physician — had leprosy in its maximum form. He was full of leprosy. Visible, frightening, ugly, isolated, destitute, that's what became of the leper. They became beggars. They had no connection with anybody in society who wasn't a leper. It was a kind of living death. This man could be stoned for violating the quarantines that surrounded leprosy, which were based on the Old Testament law. But at this particular point, stoning may have been relief. Jesus offered to him the only hope.

A little bit about the disease. Leprosy is a term in the Greek, *lepras*, and it really is a word that means “scale” or “scaly” and it can be used in a very general way. It actually can refer to a number of skin ailments that are not what we would know as leprosy in a clinical sense. The Old Testament word for leprosy is the same thing; it's a Hebrew word for “scaly.” And there is much discussion as to what the actual pathology of the disease was in ancient times, Old Testament times, New Testament times. We do know that they didn't have the benefit of modern medical science and so Old Testament and New Testament diseases are generally not described by their pathology. They... They are not described by some Latin term that describes some bacteria or some virus or something like that. They are generally described by their symptoms. They were described by how they were viewed by people. What they saw was how they described them and leprosy was in the category of something that showed up epidermilogically on the skin. It was something that they would describe as a skin disorder of a very, very severe nature and there were many such skin disorders but the ultimate one was leprosy which today — and since the discovery of a man in 1873 named Hansen — has been called Hansen's disease, which is leprosy as we know it today.

Most medical historians, interestingly enough, believe that leprosy is a very, very old disease. In fact, they say that it probably started in ancient Egypt. Interestingly enough, the reason they believe that, we can thank modern medical science for this, is that they have done tests on the cadavers of ancient Egyptian mummies which have been so well preserved that they can extract out of them fragments of ancient bacilli. And they found the bacillus identified today as Hansen's disease way back in 1873, which makes it according to some medical sources the first one to be identified as a cause of human disease.

So this is a very ancient disease. And you do remember, don't you, back in chapter 4 and verse 27 that Jesus said, in another conversation in the synagogue, that there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha. Leprosy was a very common problem in Israel, a very common problem. In fact, in the 13th chapter of Leviticus — which I'm not going to take you to or go into it, it's a very long chapter, I think there are almost sixty verses in it — you have very long and very careful prescriptions for diagnosing leprosy. God put it in His law as a way to preserve His people. Outside of Leviticus chapter 13 there are a number of other places in the Old Testament in the law where God says lepers have to be kept apart from other people because this is such a terribly disabling and disfiguring and deadly and contagious disease. And so, if you have the time you might want to read through the 13th chapter of Leviticus and you will note there the careful way in which a person was to be diagnosed by the priests. Remember now, the priests were the officers of the theocracy. They were the senate and the congress and they were the governors and the mayors, they were the people who were the officials and the inspections of people from the medical side to protect the society was to be done in front of the priests and prescriptions were given them in the 13th chapter of Leviticus as to how to conduct those kind of examinations. The worst situation, leprosy as we know it, Hansen's disease, caused for the person to be stamped "unclean." In the 46th verse of that

chapter, Leviticus 13, this person shall remain unclean all the days in which he has the infection. He is unclean. He shall live alone, his dwelling shall be outside the camp. Immediate, permanent isolation unless in some rare conditions the disease abated and disappeared and they could be introduced back into society.

This microbacterium *lepra*, as its Latin term indicates, is a very interesting disease. It attacks the nerves. At first it was thought to be a disease that just ate a person because people with leprosy didn't have noses and didn't have ears and didn't have eyes and had great holes in their head and their extremities were gone and the assumption was that it literally ate the person. There is some sense in which the disease may cause some regression in the skin. There are some who believe that it actually attacks the bone marrow and has the tendency to shrivel the bones. It attacks the larynx, according to some medical sources, and affects the larynx so that the person doesn't even speak well. It does have some power to attack both internal and external parts of the body. It generally starts on the face with a patch, a white or pink patch of skin usually on the brow, most commonly, or some other part of the face. It begins to spread in all directions and then spongy, tumorous swellings grow on the face. And some people have even called it lion's disease because it turns a person's face into such disfiguration that they begin to appear like a lion. This disease then spreads from there, becomes systemic, gets into the internal organs. It causes a certain clawing effect of the extremities. So it may have that...that effect. But the hard work of a modern physician by the name of Dr. Paul Brand who has been associated with the leprosy hospital in Carville, Louisiana has brought to light the fact that this disease primarily attacks the nerves and it’s an anesthetic disease. In other words, it destroys a person's ability to feel. It attacks also the teeth, every part of the body so that there is no feeling in these areas of the body. And what happens as a result of that is very, very frightening.

Dr. Paul Brand, he gives some indication that I think will make clear what happens. He writes, "In the villages of Africa and Asia a person with leprosy has been known to reach directly into a charcoal fire to retrieve a dropped potato. Nothing in his body told him not to. Patients at Brand Hospital, his hospital in India, work all day gripping a shovel with a protruding nail and never feel the nail tearing their flesh. They extinguish a burning wick with their bare hands. They do it all the time because they can't feel it. They walk on splintered glass or anything and everything else. They feel nothing." And watching these people, Dr. Brand began formulating his somewhat radical theory originally that H.D. was chiefly anesthetic and only indirectly a destroyer. On one occasion he tried to open a door to a store room in his place in India, but it had a rusty padlock and it wouldn't respond to the key. A patient, he says, an undersized, malnourished ten-year-old approached him smiling, "Let me, Sahib Doctor." He offered and reached for the key, with a quick jerk of his hand he turned the key in the lock and Brand was dumbfounded. How could this weak youngster out exert him? His eyes caught a tale-tell clue. Was that blood on the floor? Upon examining the boy's fingers, Brand discovered the act of turning the key had gashed a 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 turning a coin in his pocket. The daily routine of life literally ground away at the patients' hands and feet and no warning system ever alerted them. If an ankle is turned, tearing tendon and muscle, they would simply adjust and walk crooked. If a rat chewed off a finger in the night, they wouldn't even discover it until it was missing in the morning.

Stanley Stein, author of *Alone No Longer*, went blind because of another cruel quirk of H.D. Each morning he would wash his face with a hot washcloth. Neither his hand nor his face were sensitive enough to temperature to know how hot the water was. He was always using scalding water,

gradually destroying his eyes. This was leprosy.

Transmission was occurring through the inhaling of the bacillus, by bodily contact also, or in clothes where it had nested and passed into contact with the skin. The disease would go from ten to thirty years, eventually killing people from low resistance to other diseases, as well as internal injury. Since 1982 there has been a successful treatment that can treat this disease and in severe cases it takes about twenty-four months to do that. Obviously they can't recover what has been destroyed, but they can abate the disease through this medication.

This is still a common disease. You'd be interested to know that in 1999 there were 800 thousand new cases reported. One report is that there are four million reported cases in existence in the world. The actual figures are certainly double that because this disease attacks only about ten percent of the population who don't have immunities to fight it off and that ten percent of the world population is found in Third World countries, primarily in Southeast Asia, the poor, poor countries.

In biblical times it was so severe as to be a threat to society. Obviously through the centuries immunities have developed and micro-organisms have changed and so the disease as we know it today has a...it may be a little bit different and have a little different impact. But in ancient times even God said to Israel in Deuteronomy 5:2, "If you find anybody with leprosy, put him out of the camp." And David, you know, when he wanted to curse the house of evil Joab, he said the worst thing you could possibly say in 2 Samuel 3:29, David said concerning the house of Joab: "May it never be without a leper." It would be like saying to somebody today, "May your children have AIDS." That was really some kind of curse. Being a leper was the worst imaginable condition, horribly disfiguring, horribly ugly, pockets worn into your face and your head, clawed limbs worn away, open sores, religiously isolated, socially isolated, economically isolated, no family, no job, no friends, no worship, no hope. Pretty good illustration of sin, isn't it?

And you know what's really amazing? In Luke... In Leviticus 14 when somebody did have the disease abated, when somebody, through whatever means was cured of the disease, there was a process by which the person could enter back into society. They had to go back to the priest and it was an eight-day procedure that involved amazing rites of cleansing and sacrifice. And God, through the machinations of all that ceremony that lasted eight days and all those sacrifices and all those purifications, and blood was put on the right finger and the right ear of the individual, and all of that, all that was showing that as serious as the disease of leprosy was, a far more serious disease existed in the heart of man and that was sin. All that whole ceremonial system, all those sacrifices for all the various reasons that they were prescribed in Leviticus were pictures of sin and the need for the cure of the heart. So even in the Old Testament leprosy was a picture of sin. And there were times when God actually gave people leprosy: Naaman the Assyrian; Uzziah, the king, 2 Chronicles 26; Azariah. And so, if you had leprosy not only did you have the most socially stigmatized disease possible, but you could also bear the stigma that maybe you had that disease because God had cursed you.

This is a poor, sad, tragic man, all alone and the word is going all around the Galilee that there's a great healer here and that He's healing various diseases. That's what it says back in verse 40. Anybody with anything is getting healed. And somehow the word was spreading from leper to leper to leper. And so he came. Let's learn a little bit about him.

The story is pretty simple. Verse 12, when he came...or when he saw Jesus...actually Matthew tells

us he came to Jesus and saw Him. He was looking for Him. Now this was a serious breach of appropriate behavior for him, but he was desperate. That's the first point I want to make: He came with desperation. I mean, what could he lose? So he was stoned to death; that would be a relief. What could he lose? He had no more shame. He did what was unthinkable. He did what was shameless. He did what was fearless. He did what was dangerous. He did what was bold. But after all, he was desperate. He was full of leprosy.

He was past his fear, he was past his shame. He was past his embarrassment. He was past his reservations.

Josephus says that lepers were to be treated as dead men. And the rabbis said that next to touching a dead body, getting near a leper was the rankest form of defilement. In Palestine in Jesus' time lepers were barred from the city of Jerusalem and any other walled city. And if a leper ever came into a synagogue, in a town or a village, he had to go to a small isolated room called a *makitza*. He couldn't come near other people. The rabbis said they could come no closer than six feet upwind and 150 feet downwind. One rabbi said he wouldn't even eat an egg after he took the shell off of it if it was bought on a street where a leper had passed by, fearful of its contagion. Another rabbi wrote that he would throw stones at lepers to keep them away.

This man came to Jesus. He was desperate. He was also reverent. It says, "He saw Jesus and fell on his face." Matthew says, "Worshiping," *proskuneō*. That's a word used in the New Testament only for worshiping God. I don't know whether he believed Jesus was God. It doesn't tell us that. The body language here is the language of worship. The word that Matthew uses is the word of worship used in the New Testament to refer to worshiping God. He does call Him "Lord." It could mean "Sir," but it seems that attached to the worship here it could be more than that and perhaps he had been convinced that this man was from God. But he came with reverence. He fell on his face. He knew he was unclean, he knew he was filthy, he knew he was wretched. He knew he was miserable. He knew he was ugly. He knew he was disfigured and deformed. Prostrated himself acknowledging Jesus as you would a king or God.

Thirdly, he came with urgency. Falling on his face he implored Him, it says. That's the word for “begged.” He begged. Again this is irresistible to the heart of a compassionate Jesus, as we will see. This man is pleading for his life. He has endured this shame, this alienation, this isolation, this suffering, this disfigurement to its maximum point. Who knows how many years? He's got nowhere else to turn. He is crying out. He is pleading. He is begging.

Fourthly, he came with humility. He says, "Lord, if You are willing." I like that. He didn't have any doubt about His ability; that was becoming legendary. But he was not in a position to demand anything either; that wasn't his heart. He was aware of his wretchedness, perhaps of his sin. He may well have attached his wretchedness to his sin. And he doesn't come with any rights. He doesn't come making any claims on Jesus' healing power. He wouldn't have belonged to the "name it and claim it" group. There's no presumption in this man. This man... This man has a beatitude attitude. He's hungry and he's thirsty for something he doesn't have. But he's meek and he's broken and he's poor in spirit. He understands his bankruptcy. He knows Jesus doesn't have to heal him. He doesn't have any rights. He has profound needs but he has no rights. That's his humility.

And fifthly, he came not only with desperation, reverence, urgency, and humility, but he came with faith because he said, "If You're willing you can make me clean." You can do it. No doubt You have

the power. He had faith in the power of the healer.

I find this an irresistible analogy to the sinner, don't you? And while that's not the point of the passage; it is an irresistible connection. This man is a graphic illustration of how a sinner comes to Christ.

He comes desperate, the end of his rope, if you will. All shame is gone. All fear is gone. There is a desperate boldness, nowhere else to turn. No hope anywhere. The worst that can happen is maybe welcomed. If you don't heal me, I'll die. That would be better than this. This is the sinner's extremity. This is the sinner's desperation. This is the sinner pounding his breast in Luke 18.

He comes reverently, the sinner does. He comes reverently, falling on his face with no rights and desperate needs. When I talk to people about coming to Christ, I...I simply tell them, "You need to ask the Lord to be merciful and save you. That's up to Him." I can't tell you that you can say a few words, pray a little formula and you're going to be saved. All I can tell you is if you understand the gospel, in your heart you believe it, you cry out to Him to save You. He is the sovereign and you bow humbly as that man who beat his breast wouldn't lift up his eyes but fell prostrate. That's how you come.

This man was also urgent, begging, pleading. That's how the sinner comes, humbly, realizing you have no claim to lay on Jesus. You have nothing to commend you.

And the sinner comes with faith. This is a beatitude attitude. 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 after righteousness. This man is a classic analogy to the penitent sinner.

So he came. And verse 13 says, "And He" being Jesus "stretched out His hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed," or "Be clean," "and immediately the leprosy left him." Mark 1:41 adds that Jesus felt compassion. And when somebody comes in true penitence to the Savior, He feels that compassion as well. That compassion came out of that man's genuineness. Jesus could see his desperation. He could see his reference. He could see his urgency. He could see his humility. He could see his faith. And He healed him. That's like the desperate sinner.

He healed this man. He heals him, stretching out His hand, touched him. He did this very often. When Jesus healed, He healed with a touch. Contrary to Leviticus 5:3, which says never touch a leper, Jesus stepped right past that law because when He touched him he wasn't a leper anymore. The touch was compassion, yes, but it was also connection because it was very clear when the healing came whose hand was on him. It was also clear who the healer was.

Jesus not only healed with a touch, and we'll see that again, we see it in the 7th chapter of Luke, the 13th chapter, I think again in 18 and finally in chapter 22, and other places in the gospels where Jesus touched people; not just compassion but connection to make sure that people knew where the power was flowing from. And He also healed not only with a touch but with a word. "I am willing, be cleansed." That's all it took. "Be clean." "Be cleansed." Sovereign love responded with sovereign power and He spoke that healing into reality.

And let me tell you something. The miracles of Jesus were creative. We talk about them and perhaps

we think of them as restorative, and there is certainly a restorative element, but essentially the miracles of Jesus were creative. If, for example, the forehead was worn away and there was a great cavity in the head, there was a new skull, there was new tissue. And if the eyes were sunken or rubbed away, there were new sockets created. And if the brows were gone, as they do in the initial stages, and the eyelashes were gone, they were created in that instant. And if the bloody limbs were clawed and worn off, there were new arms and legs, fresh skin. Whatever was wrong on the inside disappeared and healthy organs replaced them; and may have even gotten some new teeth which could well have been ground down to almost nothing.

All you modern so-called healers: Match that or be silent in the presence of the true Healer.

It says at the end of verse 13, "And immediately the leprosy left him," just like that; Jesus' miracles by a word, by a touch, instant, complete, and works of creation. And now it was a new day. Like the sinner who comes and is cleansed, this man could reenter society. There would be new relationships, all those lost relationships, and now he could go back to family, friends, make new friends, meet new people and he could reenter a social world, a world of his people.

But before he did that Jesus had something to say to him, verse 14. "And He ordered him to tell nobody." Boy, that's tough, I mean, really tough. Would you agree? That is tough. I mean, your grandkid gets a B at school and you put a bumper sticker on your van, you know. This is tough. Tell no one.

Well, there's a reason. "But go and show yourself to the priests, make an offering for your cleansing just as Moses commanded for a testimony to them." There is in the Old Testament, Leviticus chapter 14, a prescribed way for the leper who is cured to get back into society, clearly laid out by Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God when He gave the ceremonial law to Israel. Leviticus chapter 14 says this is what you have to do. It was the priests in chapter 13 who did the diagnosis and it is the priests in chapter 14 who have to affirm the cure. So He says, "Before you just go running off telling everybody, you need to do what's right so that the healing can be affirmed and that you can have the certificate that was given at the end of the eight days." It may well be that he had to go to Jerusalem for this. That would take a few days, a few days down, eight days there, a few days back. Not only would he be doing what the law of Moses prescribed and making a very important testimony to the priests about the power of Jesus, but he would be buying Jesus some time because a miracle of this massive kind would just generate more crowds, more people and become potentially debilitating for Jesus. The crowds were already so big He had to go off the shore in a boat or they would have pushed Him into the water, as you know. So He says don't tell anybody. That's so hard.

You go to the priests, you go through the prescription indicated in Leviticus 14, and it was a quite interesting one. Two birds are taken and killed over running water and there are some cedar and scarlet and hyssop and the bird...the dead bird is wrapped in that, and it's a very interesting cleansing ceremony. The man washes himself, he washes his clothes. He has to go in and get everything shaven so they have a clear view of all of his head. He has to offer certain sacrifices. There was two male lambs, there was a ewe lamb, there were at least three animal sacrifices and other offerings that he had to give, flour mingled with oil and then the blood was sprinkled on him and so was the oil. And all of this and leprosy was this graphic illustration. I mean, if you had leprosy you had to go through all of this cleansing and God was saying, and you've got a much deeper problem that requires a much more profound cleansing. So, all the ceremonial system and sacrificial system pointed to the need for the cleansing from sin. But the man had to go through this and it would be a

testimony to the priests. "Them" at the end of the verse, I think, refers to the priests. "For a testimony to them." Go down there, let them do this and when you get all through this and they say, "You don't have leprosy anymore, it's gone," and, of course, you could...he could give them the story of his life and what it had been like and all of that, and then they would say, "How did you get like this?" And he could say, "Jesus did this," and this would be a great testimony also of Jesus to the priests. Also, it would buy, as I said, Jesus a little time.

Well, I don't know whether the man even made an effort to do what Jesus told him because in Mark 1:45 it says, "But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and spread the news about." You say, “Well that's not a very good analogy to a believer?" Really? It seems to me that it isn't too...too long after we've been converted that we're disobedient, but we don't want to turn this into an allegory, do we? But he did complicate Jesus' ministry and Mark says, "He went out and spread it all over everywhere to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city."

Let me tell you something. The Galilean grapevine was very efficient and word spread rapidly. And He couldn't go into any town, He was literally, totally overcrowded, couldn't function. "So He stayed out” it says in Mark 1:45, “in unpopulated areas and they were coming out to Him from everywhere." The city was just too much, the buildings. He had to stay out in the open areas where they could get around Him. Luke doesn't tell us what Mark tells us about the man's disobedience. But Luke does tell us, back to verse 15 of Luke 5, the news about Him was spreading even farther and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

Mark tells us how it happened. He had to stop going into the city because the...inside the wall where the buildings were it was just too crowded. He had to go to the open spaces, the crowds were so massive. And there Luke tells us that multitudes were gathering to hear Him. Remember the priority is always preaching, preaching, preaching and also to be healed of their sicknesses. I...I would venture to say that He pretty well banished leprosy from Galilee. And in order to sustain His power and His ministry, verse 16 says, "He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." That too is wonderfully human, isn't it? Wonderfully human. "He was in all points tempted like as we are." Though He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, He was in every sense touched with the feelings of our infirmities. And He needed communion with the Father.

"Pray" here is a kind of a habit of Jesus. We find it all the way through the gospels. Luke features it, chapter 3 and chapter 4, 6, 9, chapter 11. He kept His connection with the Father. Astonishing power, tantamount to ending the AIDS epidemic by healing everybody who had the disease. That's what He did. Now could you imagine... People think, "Well, if the Lord would do that, boy!” They tell us if you just...if the Lord would just come and heal everybody, everyone would believe." Really! He banished disease from the land of Israel and they killed Him. But some did believe and they came spiritually, like this man came, not to be healed of a disease but to be healed of sin. Salvation is so vividly illustrated here. The man had the worst human condition, wretched, disfiguring, incurable, dominating, isolating, deadly. He knew his condition. He knew there was only one person who could change it. He came desperately. He came reverently. He came urgently. He came humbly. He came trustingly. And the sincere heart was met by the compassionate Lord, and grace and power exploded upon that man's life so that he was recreated. And then he was called to obedience, and to witness. As I said, that's a pretty irresistible analogy of salvation, isn't it? The sinner is far more desperate than that, he has a far more deadly disease than that, far more disfiguring. The Savior comes to save sinners.

If you've come to that point in your life where you're like this man, in the spiritual sense, you've reached the level of desperation where you will fall on your face reverently before the only soul-healer, and urgently and humbly ask Him to cleanse you — believe me — with a word and a touch He'll recreate you. That's it, sinner. Jesus could heal physical diseases, but only really as evidence that He was the soul healer who cleanses from sin. He'll cleanse you if you come like this man came.

We thank You, our Father, that as sinners we have no rights, profound needs but no rights. We can lay no claim on You. We can demand nothing. But when we come desperate, reverent, falling on our faces with a humble urgency, crying out, "You are the only one who can cleanse me," when we come like that Your compassion, Your gracious power go immediately into action and we are created anew to obey You and to be a witness. Thank You, Lord, for doing that in so many lives. So many of us say, "Thank You, Thank You," and we praise You continually for this healing of our leprous souls. And we would pray for those for whom that healing has not happened because they have not come poor in spirit, meek, broken, hungering and thirsting, desperate, to You. Oh Father, how we pray that You would, by Your Holy Spirit, produce conviction and bring faith that will drive the sinner to Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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