

Chapter 19

If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean

Matthew 8 vv. 2 - 4

Mark 1 vv. 40 - 45

Luke 5 vv. 12 – 16

What a privilege it is to have good health. Most children do not consider this. No, they play and romp to their heart's content. But just ask a weak girl or a sick boy, who has had to lie in bed for years, if they would like to come and play. ... Then you will see sadness in their eyes, sadness and longing. This is quite understandable too.

Just suppose, boys and girls, that you yourself had to lie there, weeks ... months ... years perhaps, how dreadful that would be. Have you ever thought about that?

Why do some boys and girls lie sick for years, and why are most of you healthy? ... Are you any better than those unfortunate children? ... Never think that, for you deceive yourself.

It is not pleasant to be ill. But it does depend a great deal on what illness you have. Moreover, when you are ill you are looked after by your father, and especially by your mother. She often prepares special treats for you, which your brothers and sisters do not get.

In Eastern lands, however, there was, and indeed still is a terrible sickness known as LEPROSY. This is the most terrible sickness you can imagine. Leprosy is incurable. The cleverest doctors cannot heal anyone from this disease. The whole body gradually becomes covered with sores. The fingers, the toes, then the hands and the feet just fester away. The teeth fall out of the

mouth. Most lepers suffer great pain. Sometimes the boils irritate unbearably. That is why Job sat among the ashes and scraped himself with a potsherd.

And the worst part of all was that lepers in Israel were not allowed to stay in their own homes. They had to live alone in some cave or shelter outside their city or town. They were unclean. No-one could come near them. Nobody was allowed to bind up their painful boils, for then that person too became unclean.

Leprosy was catching. So anyone who had dealings with a leper, also became leprous. These poor sufferers never had any visitors. If a stranger came close to them by mistake, then they had to warn that stranger. It is said that every leper had a sort of rattle which they had to use and we read that they were to cry out "Unclean! Unclean!"

Whenever a healthy person heard that dreaded sound, he would flee as soon as possible from that dangerous place.

The disease became worse and worse. At last the poor sufferers died, sometimes in terrible agony.

Usually they either begged a living, or were helped by their relatives. No, they did not bring their food to them, that was not allowed. But they put the food on the ground at quite a

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distance from the leper. Then they retreated hastily and the leper could pick it up.

Lepers often sought each other's company. Then they could at least help each other. But that was the only comfort which these poor people had.

Even nowadays there are still many lepers in the East, but doctors do now go to help the poor wretches. In those days, however, this was not so. They carried on without any means of healing.

I have told you that leprosy was incurable. Only God could remove the disease. When it did occur, that God restored such an one to health, then he had to go to the priest. The priest examined him carefully and if it was evident that the disease had completely disappeared, then he had to bring an offering, and after that the priest pronounced him clean. He could then return to his home and family.

But I must add that such a thing happened only very rarely. No, nearly all sufferers knew that they must die of this disease.

So you see, boys and girls, that is leprosy. I had to explain this to you first, otherwise you would find it hard to grasp what follows.

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A man walks swiftly along one of the roads in Galilee. His head is bowed and furthermore his face is largely covered by a piece of cloth. He hurries on without looking left or right. Timidly and anxiously he listens to every sound. He is on the way to one of the cities of Galilee. He is on the way to Jesus, to the wonder-working Prophet.

But why? ... What does he want with the

Lord Jesus? ... Who is this man? ... Listen. He is a leper. Whether he came together with other lepers, we do not know.

In his lonely hut or cave, far away from his friends and acquaintances, he drags on his sad life. He has no hope of recovery, no, he must die. The disease will get worse and worse. So he is really waiting for death. What a terrifying thought.

One day, however, he hears something. A great Prophet has arisen in Galilee and He is preaching in the cities and towns of the district. Yes, he hears that this Prophet performs miracles, many miracles. The dumb speak; the halt and the lame are healed at the word of Jesus of Nazareth; evil spirits are cast out of those possessed. In short, He heals all who are sick.

Oh, probably he thought at first that it was not true, or that it was very much exaggerated. But no, it is not exaggerated. How he came to know that, we do not know.

Look, there he sits in his silent shack. He is thinking about those things that he has heard. If there were other lepers with him, then no doubt they discussed it between themselves. However that may be, he is unable to forget what he has heard.

All sorts of questions come into his mind. "Would this Prophet be able to heal him?" Very likely he shook his head at first. After all his sickness is incurable. ... He is condemned to die.

But still the thought will not leave him. He stays awake at night thinking about it. Could there yet be any hope of recovery for him? Is there any possibility of his being healed of this deadly disease? ... It appears that this Prophet has great power.

The more he hears about it, the greater

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becomes the hope that restoration is possible for him also. Into his heart there comes a longing to meet the Lord Jesus, and to ask Him. Oh, if only Jesus would come to him. But no, that will not happen. If only the Lord Jesus came nearby, somewhere in the district. Oh, that is not likely to happen either. Such thoughts very likely came into his head.

Should he go to Jesus? ... Should he go and look for Jesus? ... Oh, he hardly dare do that, for he is forbidden to come near other people. He is unclean. And yet the idea becomes more and more positive. At last he decides to risk it. And that is why this man is on the way to Jesus.

At last he comes to the place where Jesus is, but evidently Jesus is surrounded as usual by a large crowd of people, who were listening to His preaching and beholding His miracles.

Oh, if only he could just speak to the Lord Jesus on his own for a moment. Then he would ask Him if He would heal him. Jesus was able to do it, that he believed quite definitely, but would He be willing to do it? ... In that leper's heart faith was at work, faith in God's almighty power.

Apparently he stood at a distance and observed the situation, but he cannot get close by unnoticed.

Then he thinks "Shall I go on? Shall I push through the people?" ...

Oh, he hardly dares to, and yet, ... and yet. He stands there undecided.

Suddenly, he straightens himself. Do you know what? ... He is going to try it. He can lose nothing by it. If Jesus refuses, well, then he must go back to his pitiful dwelling and wait for death to come. But ... but ... if the Lord Jesus does not



*The leper going to Jesus*

refuse, if he now should be healed, oh, how marvellous that would be!

Quite decided, he walks up to the Prophet.

The listeners, who see him, move aside in fright. They make room. They do not want to come into contact with an unclean person, for then they too would be unclean. Very likely they spoke angrily to this rude man who dares appear in their midst.

But he doesn't listen to them; he is not frightened away by this. He has nothing to do with the people, but with Jesus. He keeps his eye firmly fixed on Him, from whom he hopes for relief. There he is, very close to Jesus.

Just look! ... He falls down on his knees with his face to the ground and prays: "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean". Do you hear that? He says "Lord". This wonder-working Prophet can indeed do it, He has the power to do it, but will He do it? ...

There he lies before the Great Physician and waits. ... His heart is full of anxiety and suspense. Will Jesus listen to him, to him, unclean as he is? O, he is not really allowed to come there. Will Jesus let him lie there, and jump back in horror, with eyes full of loathing?

No! ... The King of kings bends down and touches him.

But does not Jesus then become unclean also? No, boys and girls. Anybody else would

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certainly have become unclean through contact with that leper, but not Jesus. The Lord Jesus is without sin. He cannot therefore be polluted by the consequences of sin.

He, the Pure One, touches the unclean, and remains clean.

But, yet more happens. Jesus speaks, with a voice full of compassion: "I will, be thou clean!"

At that same moment the awful, incurable disease departs. The leper feels it in his body. It is just as though new blood streams into his veins. He is healed. Permanently healed. Completely healed.

He stands up. What is going on in that man's heart? ... His soul is filled with deep reverence for this Prophet, who has not sent him away, because He was mighty to heal him, and who had restored him.

"See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded", says the Saviour.

The Lord Jesus sends him straight off, now that he is healed.

How overjoyed the man was. He goes away. But he cannot keep quiet. He spreads the news abroad telling what a great wonder has been wrought in him. He, the leper, the incurable, is healed by Jesus' mighty word.

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Do you know what leprosy is likened to?

We also are leprous! All of us, without exception. No doubt you will think: "That is untrue" ... and yet it is so. No, not literally so, but we are leprous through SIN.

Leprosy is incurable. Sin is also

incurable. Nobody in the world, however powerful, however rich, or however learned they may be, can save us from sin. God only can do that.

Whoever was leprous was sure to die of it. But we too must all die. That comes through sin. God had spoken: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die", and that is what happens.

Leprosy destroyed the whole body. Sin also destroys however. Sin destroys soul and body.

A leper was thrust out of the city or town in which he lived. Through sin, Adam and Eve were thrust out of the glorious Paradise.

A leper was separated from all whom he loved. Through sin we are separated from God.

Nobody, nobody can save us from sin. Only the Lord Jesus, the Saviour, can break for us the bands of sin. Just as a leper had to be cleansed from his fearful disease, so must we be cleansed from sin, if it is to be well with us for eternity.

Leprosy made a person unclean, loathsome in the eyes of other men. Sin makes us unclean and loathsome in the eyes of God.

Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from sin. The leper whom we have told you about in this chapter, did not come to Jesus with the words: "You must cleanse me, I have a right to it". No, he came as unclean, as one who had no right at all.

Neither must you call upon the Lord Jesus, saying that He must save you that you have a right to salvation. No, you too must come as unclean, as children who have no right.

The leper pleaded for mercy, for compassion. Let us also plead for mercy. The

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Lord owed nothing to the leper. Neither is the Lord under any obligation to us. He would be righteous in condemning us.

So you see boys and girls, that is why leprosy is an emblem of sin. Can you understand that a little now?

May this be our prayer also: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean".