

A Life-Transforming Touch Mark 1:40-45

Slide 1

The ability to touch and feel is critical. There was a study done in the 1940s on 26 children in an orphanage.

The babies were more or less cut off from human contact in their cribs, or where a single nurse had to care for seven.

By the time the babies were 1 year old, the isolated orphanage babies were less curious, less playful, and more subject to infections.

When they reached their second and third year of life, of the 26 children reared in the orphanage, only two could walk and manage a few words.

The ability to be touched makes all the difference in our lives. And that truth makes the story we're going to read about this morning all the more powerful.

In chapter 1, verses 40-45, Mark tells about the healing of a leper. But this healing was different, which is why he singles out this particular event.

Lepers were believed to be cursed by God. You didn't touch a leper, you didn't talk to a leper, yet Jesus did. So, let's see what we can learn from this story today.

Slide 2

Mark 1:40, *"A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'"*

This man was a leper, which meant he was in utter misery.

The word for leprosy used here was actually a generic term that described any serious skin disease. There are different types of leprosy, but the worst was what's known as Hansen's disease.

Bible scholars believe this was the type of leprosy this man had since Luke, a medical doctor, says the man was "full of leprosy" which sets Hansen's disease apart from any other skin disease.

Hansen's disease causes horrible physical deformities. Those with the disease first lose their eyebrows and eyelashes, then their hair; then their ears and nose became deformed, giving them a bizarre, alien appearance.

The disfigurement associated with Hansen's disease occurs because the body's warning system of pain is destroyed as the disease progresses.

The disease acts as an anesthetic, bringing numbness to the extremities as well as to the ears, eyes and nose.

The damage that follows comes from such incidents as reaching a hand into a fire to retrieve a dropped piece of meat or washing one's face with scalding water.

Continuous damage to the extremities causes them to become stump-like. So, the poor man Mark describes wouldn't have been able to feel for years.

His body was probably full of leprosy, mutilated from head to foot, rotten, stinking, repulsive.

But his worst agony was not physical, since the feeling of pain disappears over time. His worst misery was the social stigma and wretched living conditions in which he was forced to live.

Leprosy was contagious, therefore society ostracized and rigidly segregated him, and other lepers, to prevent contaminating the community.

The law of Moses stated that if anyone came close to a leper, the leper had to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” to warn people away.

In this way, he would be identifiable to others at a distance—again, for their protection. Also, he had to shred his clothing and dishevel his hair, if he still had any.

Besides what was written in the Law of Moses, societal restrictions would have isolated him from religious life, i.e. functions, attending synagogue, and celebrating the annual feasts.

His only companions were other lepers in the same miserable condition as himself. He couldn’t even come and go as he pleased.

He was cut off from his family, his former friends, and the fellowship of the people of God. He had no hope and no future; all he could look forward to was death!

Slide 3

Let’s read verse 40 again: *“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”*

This leper did something totally unconventional and forbidden and, in fact, unlawful. Seeking to be healed by Jesus, he entered a crowd of people.

He could’ve been stoned before he got five steps into the crowd, but he probably thought, “So what? I’m dying anyway.”

He had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Maybe his fellow lepers tried to dissuade him, but he couldn’t be deterred.

The disciples, who had run away mothers and little children that sought to come to Jesus, weren't so brave when this leper showed up!

You can bet that when they saw him coming, heard his cries of "Unclean! Unclean!," and saw the crowds parting, they let him right through!

Now, notice how this wretched leper approached Jesus. First, he approached Jesus with deep humility.

He apparently hadn't heard of the false "Name it and Claim it" theology. No, he knelt before Jesus in absolute humility and begged Jesus to heal him if He would.

Not only did the leper come to Jesus humbly, he came to Jesus in faith. *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."*

There was never a doubt in his mind that Jesus could heal him; the only question was, Would He?

I wonder what made him think Jesus would heal him. As I said earlier, lepers were thought of as being under a curse from God.

And surely, he knew where he fit in the pecking order of society. He was lower than tax collectors and prostitutes. He was only a step above vermin in the minds of Jews.

Yet, he believed that no matter how bad his case, no matter how seemingly cursed he was, no matter how low he was on society's totem pole, if Jesus was willing, He certainly could heal him.

This is a picture of the kind of faith that God honors!

Slide 4

Mark 1:41-42, *“Jesus was filled with compassion. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.”*

Three words in this passage jumped out at me: compassion, touched and immediately. Verse 41 says that *“Jesus was filled with compassion.”*

Before we go on, I want to say that I like the way the NIV Bible is translated, except for this verse. If you have an NIV Bible, notice immediately that instead of compassion, it says *“indignant.”*

This was one of the biggest blunders of the NIV translators. The NIV is the only translation that uses a Western Greek text that says *“indignant”* instead of *“compassion.”*

If you want to know why the vast majority of scholars reject the NIV rendering and why all other versions translate it as compassion, mercy, or pity, you can Google it.

Now, having established the correct word in verse 41, what’s compassion? Compassion is different from pity. Pity is an emotion; compassion compels action.

If you see a person in the church with a financial need and say, *“I sure feel sorry for so-and-so. They’ve been good stewards of their resources, but due to circumstances, they can’t make their car payment.”*

If that’s all there is to it, that’s nothing but pity. But if you give him \$50 or bought him some groceries—then you’ve shown compassion.

Remember, God didn't simply have pity on this world lost in sin. He didn't look out of the portals of heaven and say, *"My, my, what a mess they're in. Oh, well, it's their own fault,"* and then go about the business of heaven.

No, His very essence as a God of mercy and compassion demanded action for our dilemma, so, He sent His only son to die for our sins.

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he GAVE his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

And Jesus didn't merely have pity on our world either. He didn't just feel sorry for the condition of the lost world He saw below. He was stirred to ACTION.

He was compelled to do something about the world's plight. So much so that He left the glories and honor of heaven to come to earth as a lowly servant and die for sinners like you and me.

His compassion wasn't shown in just the big picture event of Calvary. Every miracle, every exorcism, every healing came from a heart that was moved with compassion.

It compelled Him not just to feel something, but to do something for every petitioner who came to him for healing or deliverance.

Also, **notice** the word "touched" in our text, *"filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man."*

To those of us who have read the Bible, or grown up in the church, what Jesus did seems as natural as night and day. But in Jesus' day, this was extraordinary.

No one touched a leper. Would you? Not only could you risk infection, but it was religiously forbidden. It was taboo. Yet out of compassion, Jesus touched the untouchable.

Since Luke tells us that this man was “full of leprosy,” he probably hadn’t been touched by a healthy person in years.

If he had a wife, he hadn’t known her tender touch, much less her warm embrace for many years.

What’s interesting is the Greek word translated “*touched*,” that Mark used here. It’s often translated “*to take hold of*.”

Jesus didn’t barely touch him, like a little girl reluctantly touching a slimy bug. He placed his hand firmly on the leper.

We can’t imagine the ecstasy that coursed through the leper’s body at that touch! A touch of love and compassion, care and concern! It must’ve been electric, even before he experienced the healing.

Jesus, moved with compassion, put his hand on him; He touched him like a normal human being for the first time in years!

Note **third** the word “immediately” in verse 43, “*Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.*”

There’s Mark’s favorite word again! He used it to move the story along quickly to appeal to his Roman audience. But its use here serves to accentuate Christ’s authority and power over illness.

At the Word of Jesus, the leper was INSTANTLY healed. He spoke! It was done! There was no long, painful surgery; no protracted convalescence.

There was no extended course of treatment; no stretched-out regime of therapy, exercise and diet; and no medicine to be taken twice a day for months on end.

His healing must have been a sight to behold! Did you ever see one of those sci-fi movies where a person physically transmogrifies from a normal human into some grotesque beast?

Of course, that's imaginary, accomplished through the wonders of CGI, but when Jesus healed this leper, it literally DID happen, yet in reverse, right before everyone's eyes!

His transformation was astonishingly sudden, instantaneous and complete! His feet, toeless, ulcerated stubs, were suddenly whole. The knobs on his hands grew fingers before everyone's eyes.

His hair came back, along with his eyebrows, eyelashes. Under his hair were ears again and before him a nose! His skin was as soft and supple as a baby's.

Imagine, upon witnessing this, a thunderous roar from the multitude! Now, instead of crying, "Unclean! Unclean!," he shouted, "I'm clean! I'm clean!" What a glorious day that was!

Slide 5

Mark 1:43-45, "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

Jesus strictly told the leper, “*don’t tell this to anyone,*” but go directly to the priest, following the Law of Moses, to be declared clean of leprosy as a “*testimony to them.*”

Mark doesn’t tell us if the man went to the priests as instructed, but he does tell us that he completely disobeyed Christ’s command to keep the news to himself.

Instead he went out and proclaimed it freely, spreading the news all around.

I like how the King James Version Bible translates verse 45: “*But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter.*” That sounds more dramatic to me.

Today, if people are healed or saved, we encourage them to “blaze it abroad.” But there are at least three good reasons why he should have followed Jesus’ instructions.

First, he disobeyed the Lord. God has a reason for every command, so we should obey Him. When God speaks, He never stutters. He commands; we must obey.

Second, it was a bad move by the former leper because it hampered Jesus’ ministry.

Verse 45 tells us that because of his disobedience, Jesus couldn’t enter into towns any longer because the people would mob Him.

Instead, He had to stay outside the towns, yet the people came in droves anyway.

I find it ironic that the leper could go into towns, but Jesus couldn’t! When we’re disobedient to Christ, it can hinder God’s ministry.

Third, his “blazing” message confused Jesus’ mission in the minds of the crowds. The people flocked to His miracles rather than the message He preached.

Jesus came to preach, not to perform. The primary purpose of the miracles was to validate His identity, authority, message, and mission.

But many people came to Him looking for a faith healer, a miracle-worker, a magician.

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Conclusion

Mark’s gospel is a message for believers today. As followers of Christ, we’re called to reach out with compassion, love the unlovable, and touch the untouchable.

Who are “untouchables” today?

- Those from a different political party
- Those of a different race or ethnicity
- Those in poverty
- Those with AIDS
- Those alone and forgotten
- The disabled
- Drug addicts and alcoholics.
- Anyone not in your clique or social class
- Anyone you’re holding a grudge against
- The elderly, especially those in nursing homes.

Philip Yancey writes: *“The modern church rejects the outcasts of society whereas these outcasts were the very ones who were drawn to Jesus.”* Here’s a question: Are you moved with mercy over the plight of the miserable?

If God has saved you, He saved you to follow Christ's example to reach out and touch the untouchables.

The story of the leper is a story about sin and salvation. Leprosy in the Bible is symbolic of sin. Like leprosy, sin starts out small and spreads. Like leprosy, sin can deaden and numb us.

Sin progressively enslaves us. In John 8:34, *"Jesus said, Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."*

Sin defiles everything it touches, disfigures us spiritually and isolates us. Sin can destroy our lives.

As someone has said, *"Sin will take you further than you planned to go and keep you longer than you were planning to stay."* And worst of all, like leprosy, sin is terminal, except sin's death is ETERNAL!

What Jesus did for the leper He can do for you today. Nothing is too gross, ugly, dirty or shameful for Jesus to cleanse!

Nothing is beyond the scope of Jesus' compassion. The leper had a transforming moment with the Master. This could be yours right now if you would turn to Jesus to be saved!