

Jesus Interrupts the Person with Faith

Luke 5:12-16

Good morning! As we all know, we all find ourselves in this rather difficult situation wherein when you're outside, touching is one of the most scariest things you can do or being touched is one of the least things you want to happen to you. We're afraid and careful so much so that when we meet people, we do fist bumps or elbow bumps. Gone were the beso-beso days.

Now, what we're going through is something that some people in Jesus' day have gone through. In fact, this is a phenomenon that has existed even at the time of Moses. Back then, if you had a certain kind of skin disease that was highly infectious, you were shunned by people. No one dared touch you and anything you touch became infected. That's why the priest in biblical times would declare you "unclean" and anything you touched was "unclean", too.

Now, most Bible versions call this disease leprosy. However, some scholars suggest that it was different, that it was just some kind of skin disease that was really bad. And probably that's the case because Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 contain laws concerning this disease and they talk about a non-lethal but possibly infectious skin disease which will clear itself up if left alone for a couple of weeks. So, they got quarantined for 14 days. Although they were isolated, it's not like they lived together in a leper colony and were forbidden to mingle with people. In Biblical times, those with this disease were free to roam around although they shouldn't get too close to people and announce that they were around.

Recognizing this, some versions of the Bible like the NIV, NLT, HCSB, and CSB have changed "leprosy" to "defiling" or "infectious skin disease" in Leviticus 13 and 14.

Meanwhile, leprosy as we know it is considered to be highly contagious and affects the nervous system and could cause deformity of limbs and decay of hands and face. Thankfully, antibiotics can now cure leprosy and that's why many leper colonies have closed.

In any case, in the passage we're going to look at in a short while concerns a man who was covered with leprosy. It is translated from the Greek word "lepra" which refers to "scabs" or "peeling". Obviously, he had a very bad case of skin disease that caused others to shun him.

We're on the third part of our series on "Divine Interruptions". We're looking at different instances in the Bible when persons had a personal encounter with Jesus and they were changed as a result. Like Peter and James and John who were living comfortable lives as fishermen but took up a different vocation which was fishing for men after meeting Jesus. And there was Paul as well who was bent on destroying the church by hunting the disciples of Jesus but then became the hunted when he started to preach the gospel after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Today, I'd like us to look at an unnamed person who encountered Jesus because of a great need in his life. This is a person who is desperate, truly distressed, probably descending into the pit of depression. But his life was interrupted when Jesus reached out to him after he reached out to Jesus first. The title of this message is "Jesus Interrupts the Person of Faith".

So, we'll look at what happens when we come to God in faith. While the result is not always the same, I think it would be helpful for us today to examine one instance where Jesus interrupted the life of a man of faith and changed it forever.

Read [Luke 5:12-16](#).

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:12-16 (NIV))

We see here that Jesus did something nobody else was willing to do at the time. He was willing to reach out and touch those people who were physically and ceremonially unclean. These were people who were untouchable to observing Jews. However, Jesus was willing to touch the untouchable. I believe this passage has a powerful application to each of us that we don’t want to miss. From this healing event in this passage, we’ll learn two principles that we can apply in our lives today.

The first principle is this:

1. OUR HOPE IS FOUND IN JESUS ALONE.

What is hope? How would you define hope? When you look at the dictionary, it says that hope is to wish for something to be true because it’s possible. So, we go to the movies and say, “I hope I get my money’s worth.” Or you’re going on a blind date and you say, “I hope he’s really cute.” Or you buy a lotto ticket and you say, “I hope my ticket will win.” By the way, years back I heard of this guy who won millions of dollars in lotto. This is a true story. So, this guy gave away some of his money to three churches.

Two pastors accepted and one did not. I wish that guy was a member of our church. Then, I'll tell him, "I won't accept the money but give it to my wife instead". But I can just imagine during the prayer meeting of these two churches whose pastors accepted the money, hands would come up and say, "Pastor, please pray for my ticket." "Pastor, please pray that I win big-time." That's one thing I hope wouldn't happen in this church. I hope you're not buying Lotto tickets, a form of gambling, a waste of time and money. The Bible tells us to be good stewards of God's money.

Now, the Bible uses the word hope in a different way. When the Bible uses it, it doesn't mean, "I wish", it means it's a fact. It's an assurance. It's not "I hope so..." It's, I hope... so I have confidence. I hope ... so I'm not afraid. I hope... so I can walk into the future.

The definition of hope in the Bible: **Hope is when I realize that God will do what he says he will do.** That's what hope is. When I see that, it changes everything in life. When I realize that God's plan will always prevail, I have hope.

We are all in need of hope. Just look around. Listen to the radio. Watch the TV. Read the papers. Afterwards, you feel like being hopeless than being hopeful.

We're desperately in need of hope. Everyone in this world is need of hope because of the coronavirus. Everyone in the US is looking forward to the elections. They're hoping for a better future. Every guy is looking forward to the football game this afternoon. They're hoping against hope that the local team will win.

This guy in our story with a really bad skin disease is looking for hope. His situation is hopeless. He has a vile disease. People are afraid to get close to him. He's lonely and in desperate need of relief from his sordid situation.

So, he does a courageous thing. He had heard about Jesus, so he fought through the crowd to find Him. He fell on his face and begged Jesus to heal him. Without a doubt, that was the most important decision this man ever made.

He found himself in a hopeless and helpless condition, yet he didn't give up hope. He sought the right help.

This guy serves as a good model to us on how we should seek Jesus. He demonstrates **two qualities I believe are required before a person can be changed by Jesus.**

a. He demonstrated humility.

He approached Jesus with a willingness to humble himself. The Bible says he fell on his face before Jesus. If you genuinely want to seek Jesus, you must be willing to fall on your face before Him – if not literally, at least in your heart. The Bible says, ***“He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.” Proverbs 3:34***

I am convinced the reason some people will never be saved is because they are too proud to even admit they need help. They deny they have a problem. It would have been like this man looking at himself and saying, “Defiling skin disease? No, it’s just a minor skin irritation. It will go away quickly.”

Others admit they have a problem, but they think they can fix it themselves. “Yeah, I’ve got a problem, but I am using this new herbal ointment my brother told me about. I am going to clean up this disease with my own medicine.”

Thankfully, this guy in our story is neither of those two. He realized he couldn't help himself and that's why he threw himself on his face before Jesus and begged for help.

b. He demonstrated faith.

He said to Jesus, ***“if you are willing, you can make me clean.”*** Before Jesus can change you, you must believe Jesus can accomplish what you are asking Him to accomplish.

What is faith? I once read this statement in a popular book on prayer: ***Faith is not believing that God can—faith is believing God will.*** Do you agree?

That sounds really spiritual, doesn't it? But is it correct? This guy said something which violates what a lot of people are teaching today. He said, "If you are willing..." Our poor guy must not have heard some of our modern preachers or read some of the books on faith. If he had, he would have approached Jesus and said, "I know you *will* heal me so go ahead, I *claim* it in your name!" You can't handcuff God to His Word and use it as some magical incantation. It's not about reciting the correct formula and demanding that God respond the way you desire. Simple faith is just that: simple. It says, "God I believe you can but I am not going to presume upon your will. This is what I desire but only if You are willing."

Do you have a need? Tell God you are absolutely certain that He can meet your need and express to the Lord that the only issue is His willingness to do so. That is how faith operates. You see, it doesn't show a lack of faith to pray, "Lord if you are willing, you can do anything." Remember when Jesus prayed at the garden before he was arrested, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

Humility and faith, they go hand in hand. Both attitudes display a surrendered heart and a willingness to hand over to Jesus the control of one's life. In doing so, you're believing that Jesus will never fail you and he will do what he says he will do.

So, when you've reached the end of your rope, reach out to Jesus who is your only Hope. That is what the guy did in our story. And that's the first principle. Which leads to the second principle.

2. OUR CLEANSING COMES THROUGH JESUS ALONE.

Now, I want you to notice the three statements Jesus makes to the leper. It is the same thing He says to every person afflicted with terminal sin who approaches Him in humility and faith. Sin is an affliction or a disease that is infectious and deadly.

It has been passed from generation to generation since the beginning of the world when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. There's nothing we can do as human beings to cure ourselves of this sin. Sin makes us untouchable. In fact, we are even unseeable before God because of sin. The Bible says about God, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing." (Hab. 1:13) And yet, he came down in the person of Jesus to heal us of our sin. Because he loves us. And Jesus showed his love and compassion to this guy by uttering three simple statements.

First, he said,

a. "I am willing".

Jesus recognizes the faith of this guy who has confessed he believed Jesus could heal him. Now, I can't say that Jesus was willing to heal everyone who had a defiling skin disease in Israel. No doubt there were thousands of them during His ministry that He did not heal. I believe Jesus can heal everyone and I don't understand why it is not always His will to do so. However, I can say with confidence that God wants everyone to be saved from their sin. How do I know that with certainty?

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

Now let's learn something very important about God's will people often miss. According to this verse, is it God's will that every person be saved? Yes. Is everyone going to be saved? No. You may think, "Hey! I thought God's will was always done" – Not necessarily. For God's will to be done, our will must agree with His will. What we can be certain about is that it was the will of God to heal that particular person in our story but it wasn't God's will to heal every person.

Another statement of Jesus we notice is

b. “Be healed!”

The most amazing thing about this story is where it says, “*Jesus reached out and touched the man...*” You see, Jews were forbidden to touch those with a defiling skin disease. To touch such person would make the other person ceremonially unclean. Jews were not even allowed to breathe the same air; that’s why those with this disease had to cover the bottoms of their faces. It was just like wearing a face mask. Everywhere they went they had to cry out “Unclean! Unclean!” Imagine we shout like that, “Covid! Covid!” Anyway, they shouted so clean Jews could avoid them. Then, the Talmud stated that a person with this disease could not get within six feet of a “clean person.” Hmm, Dr. Fauci must have read the Talmud.

Try to imagine this scene – Jesus is walking along when suddenly a guy with a skin disease breaks through the crowd and falls before Him begging Jesus to heal him. I can hear as the other members of the crowd gasp in horror. They cover their mouths and turn away from this guy who has broken the law and approached Jesus. Then Jesus shocks the crowd – He reaches out and touches him. Not as a doctor wearing a PPE who is examining a patient, but he reaches out in compassion and touches him with healing power. He touches the untouchable. Nobody else will touch this poor man – how long do you think it had been since he had been hugged or touched by another human? He was hungry for any human touch, and Jesus touches him with love and healing. In that instant, this person’s disease immediately disappeared. One second before, he was terminally ill and ceremonially unclean. In the next moment, he was physically well and ceremonially acceptable.

That is a beautiful picture of the moment of salvation. In one split second Jesus touches you, and says, “Be healed!”

In that second you pass from death into life. One second you are terminally afflicted with sin, unacceptable to God, in the next second, you are forgiven and accepted by God.

And the third statement of Jesus is

c. “Go, show yourself to the priest.”

Jesus told the guy who was healed to follow the Old Testament directions in Leviticus and let the local priest examine him and certify that he was clean. You see, there had not been a person like him who was cleansed in Israel since the time of the prophet Elisha. This would be the first such miracle this priest would have ever seen. Notice Jesus said, *“as a testimony”* to them. Jesus knew this priest would tell other priests who would tell other priests. That’s why verse 15 says, *“Yet the news about him spread all the more”*. The network of priests talked about this miracle to everyone. Through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. To think that so many people heard about it that, once again, Jesus had to escape to a private place to pray.

There are a couple of things we can learn from this. First, whatever disease you have, you can always come to Jesus in faith and believe he can heal you. Whether it’s physical or spiritual, you can come to Jesus and trust him. Whether he heals you or not with your physical disease is up to Jesus. But just surrender to Jesus because he can do miracles. He longs to touch you and show his power to you. The healing may not be physical, but emotional and mental healing will surely come. He will give you his grace and comfort and joy as you go through your difficulty.

Second, if you’ve been touched, you will testify. Have you done that? If you have been saved have you given your public testimony? Have you been sharing your testimony with others? This cleansed person couldn’t wait to tell others Jesus had made a difference in his life.

I can imagine that for the rest of his life he told that story over and over again. Has that happened to you? Can you look back at a time when Jesus touched you and you were saved? Have you testified to that change?

Jesus is still in the business of touching the untouchables. You may feel like you are too dirty, or too wicked for Jesus to touch you with His forgiveness today.

You may remember the movie “The Elephant Man,” based on a true story of a man living in London during the 19th century. Joseph Merrick was terribly disfigured by neurofibromatosis. His mother, who he was close to, died when he was 11. He was left in the care of his father and his step-mother who disliked him and mistreated him. Eventually, his father asked him to leave. He was taken in by his uncle who asked him to leave also after two years. He began to take odd jobs but because his disease became more aggressive causing him to become more disfigured, he had to quit as he couldn’t perform well and people were avoiding him. With nowhere to go and not knowing what to do, he decided to join a circus as a sideshow freak.

In the circus, a doctor named Fredrick Treves found Joseph. Dr. Treves took Joseph to a London hospital and began to treat him as a person instead of some sideshow oddity. He provided books for John and soon discovered he was a kind, intelligent person. After a newspaper reported on John’s progress, he was visited by W. H. Kendal, an actor and a former medical student, who then related his encounter with Joseph with his wife, famous actress Madge Kendall. Although Madge may not have visited him personally, she was instrumental in raising funds that brought Joseph the financial security to maintain him in the London Hospital. They had several correspondences which were helpful in lifting up the spirit of Joseph. She also sent him gifts like the newly-invented gramophone and recordings. She also encouraged him to pursue his interest in basket-weaving and creation of models of famous churches.

In fact, one of his creations, the Church of Mainz, is still in display at the London Museum. This friendship with Madge resulted in Joseph developing confidence in himself and he began to mingle with people.

In fact, Dr. Treves saw Joseph emerging into an object of patronage and interest. His protégé, once a homeless and shunned waif, was beginning to become the sought-after acquaintance of duchesses and countesses. And he shook hands with them. In his account, Dr. Treves recorded that John Merrick became a changed man. So, here was a man who was reviled and shunned and felt lonely but eventually found emotional and mental healing because later on he was touched by others literally and figuratively.

Sin has disfigured each of us until even our righteousness is as filthy rags. Compared to the perfect holiness of God, our sinful lives are hideous and grotesque. But the Lord Jesus Christ leaned over at Calvary from the cross on which he was nailed and gifted us with the mercies of heaven and since that day, none of us have ever been the same.

Do you need cleansing today? Will you come to Jesus and fall at His feet and say, “Lord, I need help. I have a sin problem. I know I’m going to die from this sin unless you forgive me. I know you *can* save me. Will you? I ask you right now to touch my sinful heart and take away my sin.”