

- <sup>40</sup> ¶ And a leper came to him,  
   imploring him,  
and kneeling said to him,  
                                 "If you will,  
                                 you can make me clean."  
<sup>41</sup> Moved with pity,  
He stretched out his hand  
and touched him  
and said to him,  
                         "I will;  
                         be clean."  
<sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.  
<sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> and 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,  
   for a proof to them."  
<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it,  
and to spread the news,  
                         so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town,  
                         but was out in desolate places,  
                         and people were coming to Him from every quarter.

**A leper** – In Greek the term for leper/leprosy is a broad one, going back to Hebrew and reflecting their own cultural understandings of sickness and disease. In Greek, leper means “scaly,” and refers to the patchiness that can develop on skin because of disease. Today we medically refer to the “worst” kind of leprosy as Hansen’s disease. It is a contagious bacterial infection that causes skin discoloration and nerve damage, so that parts of the body become insensitive to heat/pain/touch/etc. However, in ancient times, not known all the scientific facts, any kind of skin disease would have been classified as leprosy, including things like eczema, dermatitis, acne, etc. So many people deemed “leprous” may not have been in dire straits in their health, but nevertheless would have been unclean and ostracized from the community. Ironically, those with less serious diseases shunned could very likely have caught the more serious diseases as a result of their expulsion from the community because the only people unclean people could associate with is other unclean people. Regardless of what this man’s sickness was medically, in his world, he was a leper and there were very strict rules about what he should and shouldn’t do (see Leviticus 13 (which is all about identifying leprosy and isolating it) and 14 (which is about cleansing one who has been identified with leprosy)). These laws are strict and serious, but ultimately were not meant to ostracize, they were meant to prevent contagion and an epidemic.

In Leviticus, it was the duty of the priest to diagnose the malady and he had to do so properly. Not every skin ailment should have qualified for the pronouncement of being unclean. The main things the priest was looking for was severity of illness and its spread on the person's body. Both of those signs would have deemed one unclean, but lacking them would have been enough to keep the person from that stigma.

**Lev. 13:45-46 ESV** "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'<sup>46</sup> He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

**A leper came to Him** – More context would have been nice. It's not clear if the leper is where he technically should be, that is outside of the city, when he encountered Jesus or if he somehow broke protocols and found Him in a more public space. It is probably the former though.

In the Jewish tradition, leprosy, like many diseases, was seen as a "leakage of life." On the continuum between life and death, leprosy was headed toward death and connected to it. Serious leprosy left one scarred physically for life if it didn't kill that person. The escape of one's life is the concept that linked leprosy to other laws of impurity (such as when women were menstruating or when one came into contact with blood) which also were seen as miniature manifestations of life flowing out of a person. When one was afflicted with leprosy the sacrifices required to signify cleansing and a return to the communal life ultimately identified the person's need for atonement. Some people no doubt assumed that the sickness came because the person had committed such sin (see Num 12:10, 2 Kings 15

**Num. 12:10 ESV** When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

**2 Ki. 15:5 ESV** And the LORD touched the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and he lived in a separate house. And Jotham the king's son was over the household, governing the people of the land.

**Jn. 9:2 ESV** And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Though not all physical illness is directly the result of a given person's sin, but more generally because we live in a sinful world. Jesus through His healing mercy cuts through all of these thoughts. No matter the cause, He heals. He overcomes sin and brokenness and restores health and life. Who can forgive sins, but God? Who can heal a sin-stained world? The answer must be the same.

**Jn. 9:3 ESV** Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

**Mk. 2:7 ESV** "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

**If you will** – This is an interesting exchange. He is not doubting Jesus' power, but perhaps questioning Jesus' desire.

**Mk. 9:22 ESV** And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

**Make me clean** – This isn't just a request for healing. There is a strong emphasis on being made clean. Just because a person with leprosy was healed, didn't mean they could reintegrate into their world. They had to be declared clean/well first. This is supposed to be done by a priest, but here the man seeks out Jesus, who is clearly not a priest. The process for being made clean was supposed to involve animal sacrifices with animals brought by the sick person to the priest (see Leviticus 14 and Mark 1:44).

**Moved with pity** – This is a really interesting place to pause. Although the vast majority of extant Greek manuscripts have the word in Greek for "moved with pity," there is one Greek manuscript and Old Latin translations that have instead "moved with anger." In a place like this, textual critics (and translators) have to make a choice which they think is the correct reading, and then generally they will note the other reading in a footnote in their translation. The case for the "angered" reading is that it is such an unlikely reading, someone would not have just made it up. It's more likely that a scribe didn't like "angered" and softened it to the reaction more typical for Jesus. The problem though is that there are other passages where Jesus' anger is described and not altered.

**Mk. 3:5 ESV** And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

**Mk. 10:14 ESV** But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

This healing account is also in Matt. 8:2-4 and Luke 5:12-14 but there is no mention there of either emotion from Jesus. An explanation of where "angered" may come from in this particular reading is from Mark 1:43 where Jesus speaks a warning to the man.

1. At the leper's breaking of the Law by approaching him
2. At the interruption of His preaching ministry
3. Because of the implied doubt about Jesus' will to heal

4. With regard to the nature of the horrible disease
5. At the nature of what sin did to people, not just physically, but holistically (the social and spiritual pains this man would have experienced)
6. At Satan because of “his disfigurement of God’s creature”
7. For a reason that is not apparent from the story

**And touched him** – By touching a leprous man, according to the tradition of the Old Testament law Jesus would now become unclean.

**Lev. 14:46 ESV** Moreover, whoever enters the house while it is shut up shall be unclean until the evening,

Earlier, Jesus also touched Simon’s mother-in-law. While one could think it was Jesus’ touch which was necessary in order to heal, we know that Jesus could heal by His word alone (see the next story in Mark 2 about healing the paralytic). Jesus’ healings do not follow a set pattern so that we might think there is a certain recipe in order to heal someone. This too emphasizes Jesus’ authority. When Jesus touches the “untouchable”, He shows that He is not afraid/ashamed of the disease nor the person afflicted. His touch is an expression of His compassion. This is a smaller example of His greater compassion shown in the Incarnation itself, that God would become human, yet without sin.

**I will** – The leprous man questioned Jesus’ willingness, but did not question His ability or authority. Jesus responds in kind affirming that He is willing to make this man clean.

**Be clean** – In Levitical Law, it is the role of the priest to declare one with leprosy clean. The catch with Jesus’ words here is he is not technically a priest, not coming from the family of Levites. Yet there is another priesthood that precedes the Levitical priesthood. In one Old Testament story, Melchizedek is described as both a priest and king who blesses Abram and receives a tithe offering from him. It is on the basis of Melchizedek, a king being a priest, that the kings of Israel were also thought of as kings (though they did not necessarily usurp this role from the Levites). So Jesus in the Book of Hebrews is spoken of several times as a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6ff., Heb 6:20-7:28). For our purposes, the main thing to remember is that a priest is a mediator who receives and offers sacrifices for God on behalf of the people, but also pronounces God’s blessings and judgments to the people.

**Gen. 14:18 ESV** And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

**Ps. 110:4 ESV** The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

**Sternly charged him** – This phrase is another challenging phrase to translate and English translations vary in how they deal with it. It is often translated as “sternly warns” or “urgently admonishes” or the like. It is only used 4 other times in the New Testament

**Matt. 9:30 ESV** And their eyes were opened. And Jesus **sternly warned** them, "See that no one knows about it."

**Mk. 14:5 ESV** For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they **scolded** her.

**Jn. 11:33 ESV** When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved** in his spirit and greatly troubled.

**Jn. 11:38 ESV** Then Jesus, **deeply moved** again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

The Greek lexicon gives two different senses for it 1) to insist on something sternly and 2) to feel strongly about something. More literally the word means “to snort with anger” or “be indignant” and in classical Greek it’s used of warhorses snorting with anger. One commentator suggested translating this as “harrumphing with indignation.” Interestingly, this healing story and the story of Jesus casting out a demon from a young boy have similar language features

**Mk. 1:41-42 ESV** Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

**Mk. 9:22 ESV** And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

In the Mark 9 account, what is Jesus’ response to “if you can do anything, have compassion on us...”?

**Mk. 9:23 ESV** And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."

Granted, there are no non-verbal clues to understand the tone with which Jesus speaks there, but it is possible to understand that Jesus is as perturbed with this response, which would be similar to his reaction in Mark 1:43.

**See that you say nothing to anyone** – Jesus is very clear and direct that this man should remain quiet. This is now the first time He has told a person to keep silent. The rationale becomes clearer as we get to the end of this passage. Because this man did not keep quiet Jesus was no longer able to move freely among the people to continue His ministry as He had begun it. Jesus had just stated that His goal was to preach in

other surrounding cities, but now because of the fame surrounding Him, that task would become more difficult.

**show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded –**

In Leviticus 14, the Laws regarding cleansing of lepers lays out the process necessary for lepers to be declared clean and reintegrated into society. The priest was to go outside the camp to the leprous person to see if the leprosy was healed and if so there were a series of sacrifices and rituals to be offered for readmission to the community (Lev. 14:2b-8) and for readmission to the congregation (Lev. 14:9-31). Interestingly, the process involved not just a person's individual standing, but his or her standing in the whole community as it stands before God. The series of sacrifices offered including the shedding of blood and the sprinkling of that blood on the now healed person. Jesus does not completely disregard the Levitical Laws, here He tells this man to go and fulfill them, but Jesus doesn't follow them either. He does not give a diagnosis of this man's leprosy, but instead by His touch and His Word, He heals him. But it's more than that. Jesus took on this man's leprosy through His contact with him. In so doing, Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies that He would be stricken (a word also used to denote one affected by skin diseases) unto death but thereby justify sinners through His own intercessions on their behalf. (See Kleinig, *Leviticus* p. 274, 301).

**Isa. 53:4-12 ESV** Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him **stricken**, smitten by God, and afflicted.<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, **stricken** for the transgression of my people?<sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.<sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.