



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | [believerschapeldallas.org](http://believerschapeldallas.org)

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 1:32-45 Mark

“The King, Crowds and the Leper”

TRANSCRIPT

Our passage this morning is Mark 1:32-45. This will conclude chapter 1 of our study in Mark. So if you have your Bibles open, follow along with me as I read, beginning with verse 32.

“When evening had come, after the sun had set, they *began* bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ He said to them, ‘Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for.’ And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

“And a leper came to *Him*, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying *to Him*, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He 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 testimony to them.’ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we do thank You and praise You again for this opportunity that we have to come together and to study the Scriptures, to open them up and as a body with one mind study the revelation that You have given to us of Your Son, of His ministry, a ministry that reflects His character, His power, His compassion. And we pray that as we study this morning, You would bless us and open our minds to Your truth, and help us to think clearly and understand the principles that are set forth there and be influenced by them in our thinking and in our conduct. We pray that as we study together that You would prepare us for the week that’s before us, that we would go forth from this place to be a people that serve as lights in a dark world and salt in this earth. Equip us and prepare us for that through our time of study.

We thank You, Father, for this privilege, to come together and to read the Scriptures. And we thank You also for the privilege that we have to draw close to the throne of grace and bring our petitions to You and intercede for one another because we are a needy people and we look at our situation and it varies from person to person. So many of us don’t sense any physical need at the moment. You have provided abundantly for us. And the danger of that, Father, is that we grow complacent and indifferent, and we begin to assume that what we have is what we deserve. We take it as the norm and we forget You as the author, as the source of all good things. Help us not to do that, Father. Deliver us from that kind of an attitude and fill us with gratitude.

And for those that are lacking, and who are in need of material provisions, in need of employment, we pray for them and ask that You would supply. And we recognize, Lord, that You are sovereign over all of these things and the hand that gives is also the hand that withholds. But you do so for a good purpose, for the purpose of changing us and sanctifying us. The same is true, Father, for physical affliction that we undergo, and there are many in physical need in terms of sickness.

We pray that You'd encourage. We pray that if it be Your will You would heal and raise them up, demonstrate Your power in them.

But whether that be Your will or not, Father, all who are in need, we pray that You would bless them spiritually. Enable them to draw close to You. Give them perspective on life and a stronger love and devotion to You. Pray that for each of us here. We pray that for this church and pray that we would be a people who are filled with love for You and that that would show in our conduct, in our words, in our deeds. Bless us that we would be a people filled with joy, filled with enthusiasm, and that we might go forth and proclaim Your truth in this city and throughout this nation, throughout the world, wherever we may go, Father, we pray that You would bless us, that we would serve You well.

And we pray for this nation. We pray for it politically. We ask that You would bless this land with leaders who are wise, leaders who desire righteousness and that You would bless this land with good government. Bless it with a spiritual awakening as people come to know the truth, people serve You. May we be used of You to that end. May we be prepared for that at this time as we sing this final hymn and study the Scriptures together. May this be an enjoyable time together and a profitable time together. May Christ be exalted. May You be glorified. May each of us be edified, we pray, in Christ's name, Amen.

Our subject this morning is the King, the Crowds, and the Leper. I don't need to remind you that we are in an election year and because we are, one of the most familiar scenes on the evening news is that of the candidates standing before crowds. Hopefully for them, they're cheering crowds. Candidates love crowds. They need crowds. And in particular, they need enthusiastic crowds. If a political rally should draw only a thin crowd of people and perhaps some with hecklers in it, that could cause panic. Not to mention an embarrassment in the media. And so they do what they can to draw crowds and win crowds. They crisscross the country making promises, kissing babies, eating all kinds of ethnic food, advertising their qualifications, doing what they can to muster support and win converts. An effective politician knows how to draw the people and how to work the crowds.

I suppose it's always been that way, and so it's striking that when our Lord comes on the scene as Israel's King and large, excited crowds begin to gather to Him, He doesn't deal with them as a politician. He doesn't look for crowds. He doesn't work the crowds. For Him, that was not the measure of success. Now we tend to measure things in that way and consider ourselves successful if we have large numbers attending our services. And to an extent, that does reflect something about the ministry. It does reflect something about the vitality of a church. There's nothing particularly virtuous in small crowds.

Mr. Spurgeon, when he was head of The Pastor's College in London, received a letter in which he was asked, "Can you send us a preacher who will fill our church?" And Mr. Spurgeon replied, "No. That is not a preacher's job, to fill a church. I'll send you a man to fill the pulpit. You fill the church." And what he meant by that was when a church is enjoying spiritual vitality and when the members of that church are being led by the power of the Holy Spirit and are active in the power of the Spirit, then they go throughout their community and they have an influence on that community, which influences the numbers within a congregation, as does the preaching of the Word from the pulpit.

But still, crowds are not the point. Just when you'd think that the Lord would seek the crowds, He doesn't because His interest was not in numbers, but in truth and in changed hearts. And that's what the Lord was looking for, and that's what each of us should be looking for: establishing the truth and through the truth seeing a change in character, a change in the hearts of men.

At the same time, while our Lord refused popular acclaim and shunned the crowds, He received a lone, wretched leper who came to Him in faith. And this man, He touched and changed. All of this, I think, tells us something of who the Lord is, what He considered to be important, and what He does for those who draw near to Him. Now, the Lord has exorcised a demon from a man in the synagogue in Capernaum and healed Peter's mother-in-law in Peter's house. And it didn't take long for news to spread because by evening after the sun had set, there was a crowd of people gathered at the door of Peter's house.

According to Jewish reckoning, the day begins at sunset. And the significance of Mark mentioning that here is to show that the people had waited until the Sabbath had ended so that they could bring their sick, carrying their burdens, carrying their beds and such as that, without violating the rabbinical law regarding the Sabbath. And so with the onset of evening and the beginning of the first day of the week, a large crowd of people came. Mark writes in verse 33 that, “the whole city had gathered at the door.” Not literally, of course. This is an example of some of the vivid expressions that are so characteristic of Mark’s gospel.

We might say that the house was mobbed with people. That’s the sense of what he’s saying here. And mobbed with people in great need, people with sickness, people with demons. Mark draws a distinction between general sickness and demon possession and that distinction is clear from the fact that the demons, in distinction from the disease, clearly show personality. They were speaking. They were identifying Him as probably the one in the synagogue earlier had done, probably saying the same thing as that had said, that He is the Holy One of God.” It’s as though they see their master, and even though they’re opposed to Him, even though they seek to frustrate and thwart His ministry, nevertheless, they are compelled to acknowledge Him. And yet, Mark writes that He was not permitting them to speak. They knew who He was. They were revealing who He was, but He was forbidding them to speak.

He would be the one that disclosed His identity to the nation, not the demons. And He would do it in His time. Before doing that, He would reveal the kind of Messiah that He was through His miracles and His teaching. He would reveal it progressively. And from Mark and his account, He reveals it principally through His activities, through His actions, through His deeds. And one thing that becomes very clear from that which our Lord did, from the display of His miracles, is that He is not only a King with power, but He is a King with compassion. Many people came to Him and He cared for them all. His power to heal never ran out. None were disappointed due to a lack of faith on their part. All were healed so that when the Lord was finished, Capernaum, as Barnhouse said, was the healthiest place on the face of the earth. And all of this at the end of a long day, at an inconvenient time.

They come in the evening. They come at the time when our Lord would want to sit and rest. He had had a day of teaching in the synagogue, performing miracles. He cast out that demon. He then healed Peter's mother-in-law. And now when it's time to rest, the house is mobbed. And He works probably into the hours of the morning healing. But then this underscores again the Lord's compassion.

He was a man without much of a private life. He sacrificed His time. He sacrificed His rest for others. And He did so willingly. Wouldn't begrudge them this. He willingly sacrificed all of that to be of service to people in need. But in spite of a hectic schedule, He did manage to find time to get alone and pray. After the strain of a long day, Mark writes in verse 35 that the Lord got up early in the morning, "while it was still dark," found a lonely place, and prayed there. Now, that's important. It's important first that the Lord prayed, which draws us into the mystery of His humanity. So it's important on that hand, but it's also important that He prayed early. Important first because of its theological significance, and secondly it's important as a matter of practical example.

That the Lord prayed is a testimony to His humanity. Though He is the eternal Son of God and His Father has borne clear testimony to that at His baptism, nevertheless, He is fully human. And that's essential for Him to be the Savior. In order to represent men, He had to be a man. He had to have a human nature. Only one who is human can suffer in the place of men and women, of humans. That in order for His death to be of eternal significance and value, it had to be the death of the God-man. And we see His human nature here because it's in His human nature, it's as a man that He prayed, that He sought His Father's face, that He sought His leading and His fellowship. All that our Lord did was done in perfect obedience.

John 5:19, He speaks to this. He says, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." And it was through His constant fellowship with His Father, it was through the reading of the Scriptures, through His knowledge of the Word of God, but it was also through His prayer life and the fellowship that He had with His Father in prayer that, as a man, He learned the will of His Father and He did it.

Well, that's the theological significance, but that brings us to the practical example that it says because if the perfect Son of Man needed to pray, and He didn't simply do it as a convenience, He did it out of necessity, if He needed to pray, what about you and me? If He in His strength and His unity with the Father, and He was in perfect unity with His Father, if He needed to pray, what does that say about us in our weakness, in our ignorance, in our lack of unity with the Father? How much more do we need to pray? And yet, so often, we fail to do that for a lack of time or because we put it off until the end of the day, and then when the end of the day comes, we're too tired to do it. Well, the Lord didn't find that as an excuse. After a hard night of labor, He found the time by getting up early in the morning and praying because He recognized the value of prayer, the necessity of prayer. Donald Grey Barnhouse writes of people who say, "I don't have time to pray today," and he makes the point that they've misunderstood the whole nature of prayer, and to fail to spend time in prayer is like saying on the eve of a long automobile trip, "I have so far to go that I don't have time to put oil in the engine." And the time that one puts into putting one's car in order is essential if that trip is going to be successful and if one's going to go very far on that trip.

Well, the same is true of prayer. We need to be men and women of prayer if we are to progress in the Christian life and enjoy the success of the Christian life, we must be men and women of prayer. Martin Luther understood that and Luther said, "I have so much to do that I must spend the first three hours of each day in prayer." I'm not suggesting that that's the standard for each of us and we need to pray three hours every day, but I think it underscores the point in support of what our Lord did that we need to be a people who are consistent in our prayer life. Our Lord was. And His prayer may have been as long as Luther's, some three hours. He must have been praying for a long time because Peter and the others interrupted Him to tell Him that a large crowd had gathered at the house and everyone was looking for Him. So some time has elapsed from the early morning when it was still dark until it's daylight, and crowds had gathered, and they'd been there long enough to become restless and to begin to look for Him. So time has elapsed and so they come and tell Him that everyone was looking for Him.

There may be something of a reproach in that statement because Peter and the others felt that He was missing a big opportunity. His popularity was increasing and they thought that He needed to seize the moment. He needed to work the crowds, to increase this popularity so that it would spread throughout the land. They were much impressed by the crowds, as I think any of us would have been, were we to have seen those. And they viewed the success of our Lord in terms of a popular reception by the nation. But while they looked on the crowds, He looked on the heart of men. And I think that's the way we must understand our Lord's response here. He knew the response of the people was shallow, that I was superficial, that they were coming to Him because they wanted something from Him of a material nature. They were generally interested in a miracle worker, not a spiritual deliverer. They were more interested in His healing power than in His preaching of repentance.

But preaching was His main concern. As He says in verse 38, “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby – ” in other words the crowds may be gathering, but we're going to leave those crowds. We're going to depart from here and go elsewhere “ – in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.” The Lord obviously regarded preaching more highly than miracles. Calvin describes the Lord's miracles as appendages to the Word. And that's very interesting in light of modern developments. With the rise of the pentecostal and charismatic movements in this century and now with the third wave or the vineyard movement with its emphasis on signs and wonders, our Lord's words have special importance.

John Wimber, for example, the founder of the Vineyard movement advocates what he calls “power evangelism” in a book by that title. It's evangelism in which the truth of the gospel is demonstrated by miracles, by signs and wonders. “Power evangelism,” he writes, “is evangelism that is preceded and undergirded by supernatural demonstrations of God's presence.” And he lists some of these signs and wonders as words of knowledge, which are supernatural insights that God gives into secrets that people hide within their heart or into circumstances that are about to occur; healing; prophecy; and deliverance from evil spirits. And adds that through these, resistance to the gospel is overcome by the demonstration of God's power in supernatural events and receptivity to Christ's claims is usually very high.



But what we learn from our Lord is that preaching, not miracles, not great displays of power, is what is necessary. And the Scriptures are clear. It's the message of the gospel, the message of Christ's atonement that brings salvation. I don't mean by that that the gospel saves people. It is the atonement that saves. When Christ declared from the cross, "It is finished," He was declaring that He has accomplished once and for all the work of salvation, that He has secured for everyone who believes in Him eternal life. He had finished the work on the cross. The gospel is the declaration of that good news and all who receive it by faith enter into that salvation.

That's what's essential, the preaching of the Word of God. And I think we see that in a variety, in a number of places in the Scriptures. One example is Romans 10:17, where Paul says, "Faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Now, there's no doubt that the miraculous generates enthusiasm and on a number of occasions God used miracles to draw people to our Lord and draw them in faith. God uses it that way. But it does not necessarily produce a receptivity to Christ's claims.

One thing our Lord's miracles clearly prove is that they don't overcome resistance to the gospel. Our Lord perceived from the very beginning the selfish interest in these crowds and in the end, after performing many, many miracles of all kinds: healing, raising the dead on more than one occasion; after all of that, He was rejected by the people of Galilee. Read John chapter 6 and you see that. After that great miracle in which He feeds the multitude and it is seen that they want material blessings and that's really all, they reject Him. And then, at the end of His ministry, the nation as a whole rejects Him in Jerusalem and He's crucified. And He performed great miracles, and yet was rejected.

But also, I think that the gospels prove what John MacArthur writes in his criticism of this modern fascination with and craving for miracles that we see all around us. "As a result," he writes, "the gospel becomes an incidental issue and the focus of faith become signs and wonders, not the Savior Himself." That was true in our Lord's day, and He recognized that. And so He set out on a Galilean tour. He left Capernaum for the towns nearby and we know from Josephus that there were many

towns in Galilee. He writes, “the cities lie very thick and very many villages that are here and are everywhere are so full of people because of the richness of their soil.” So there are many villages, many towns filled with people throughout this region of Galilee, and our Lord set off “throughout Galilee, preaching and casting out demons.”

And while He was doing this, a leper approached Him and asked for mercy. Luke the physician describes him as a man full of leprosy. Leprosy is a hideous disease. It is a dehumanizing disease. William Barclay has written a rather extended and graphic description of leprosy. I suppose if you’re going to describe it, it can’t help but be graphic because it is such a terrible affliction. But he writes this to give us some perspective on what this man had endured and the seemingly hopeless situation in which he lived.

“It might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge. The eyebrows fall out. The eyes become staring. The vocal cords become ulcerated and the voice becomes hoarse and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly, the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years and it ends in mental decay, coma, and ultimately death.”

Well, that’s one form of that kind of leprosy. He goes on to describe another variation of it. “Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body. The nerve trunks are affected. The muscles waste away. The tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes until, in the end, a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off.” The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from 20 to 30 years. It is a kind of terrible, progressive death in which man dies by inches.

The medical term for that kind of leprosy is Hansen’s disease, but the word “leprosy” in the Old Testament was broader than that. There were a variety of kinds of leprosy that covered various kinds of skin disorders. Psoriasis, for example, would probably fall into that category. And so with that in mind, it must have been a very prevalent disease in all of its varieties and forms. And one of the worst parts of it was the alienation that it brought on the sufferer. In the law in Leviticus 13, there is this requirement of those afflicted with leprosy. A person with such an infectious disease

must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone. He must live outside the camp.

Outside the camp. That’s where the leper lived. Couldn’t join in the religious festivals. He couldn’t go up to Jerusalem. He had to stay out of Jerusalem. Couldn’t draw near to the temple. He was to live outside the camp. The leper could not touch anyone because if he or she did, that person would also become unclean. And so if a man or a woman was a person with a family, had to be separated from his wife, couldn’t embrace his children. He or she was banished from society and from all contact with the community of God’s people.

There’s a spiritual dimension to this, as well, because in the Bible, leprosy is an illustration of sin. I think you can see the correspondence between the two. Leprosy affected the whole body and sin affects the whole man. Leprosy reduces the sufferer to a kind of walking death and separates him or her from the community. And that, too, is sin’s effect.

Paul tells the Ephesians, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins, separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Well, that’s what we were. That’s what we all are by nature. We are a people that are like this leper. We are separated from Christ. We are separated from the community of God. We are a people without hope. We are the living dead, as it were.

And so this leper approaches our Lord, a man who because of this disease, was by virtue of the law, cast out, forbidden to come near anyone, forbidden to touch anyone. But instead of keeping his distance, this leper approached the Lord, he fell on his knees, and in his raspy, weakened voice, pleaded, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” He didn’t doubt the Lord’s power, you’ll notice. He knew that He could do that. In fact, when Matthew records that he fell on his knees, he uses a different word. He uses the word that is translated “bowed down” but it’s the same

word for worship and could be translated, “He worshiped Him.” So he came in faith. He didn’t come doubting the Lord’s power. He only doubted the Lord’s willingness.

Now, it may be that he came with a proper perspective on prayer because this is essentially what he’s doing. He’s praying to our Lord. He may have come with the knowledge that God can do it, but God works according to His will, and it may not be His will to heal. And if so, that’s a proper perspective to prayer. But more likely I think his problem was a problem that we all have, and that is that it’s much easier to believe in God’s power than it is in His mercy. I think we all would say, “Yes, God can do anything.” But we’re not always confident that He wants to do the best for us. We really doubt that God wants our best and that if we just live by faith – we tend to doubt this – that if we just live by faith, if we just be obedient, we would enjoy the best life. But because we doubt God’s goodness so often, we doubt His mercy. We tend to take things in our own hands. We tend to live by our own wisdom and devices. We doubt His mercy.

But His mercy is equal to His power. In verse 41, we read that He was “moved with compassion – ” and He “ – stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ ” I don’t know what must have struck this leper with the greatest force, the cleansing, the words that our Lord said, or the fact that He touched him because this was an amazing response by our Lord of itself, but particularly it was amazing in view of the attitude toward lepers in that day. The people of this time were not particularly sympathetic toward lepers.

They were not really encouraged to be sympathetic from the law. The law said, “Cast them out.” And there are accounts of rabbis who treated lepers rather harshly. One rabbi boasted in this day that he flung stones at lepers to keep they away. Other rabbis hid themselves and they would take out running at the sight of a leper, even though the leper may be quite a distance away. That was what was expected from our Lord and that was the kind of response people were looking for.

But He doesn’t throw rocks at this man. He doesn’t begin to back up as he approaches Him. Our Lord, when He sees him, was so moved by this man’s tragic condition that He did the unexpected. He often did the unexpected and the unacceptable from conventional standards when the unexpected and the unacceptable

were the right thing to do. He taught women, for example, and treated them with the same respect and dignity that was accorded to men, something that was not done in that day. He showed special attention to children when children were not given special attention.

And here He reaches out and puts His hand on a disfigured, repulsive leper. An act that, according to the law, would have incurred uncleanness for our Lord. And so we might ask, “Why did He do that? He really didn’t need to do that. He didn’t need to touch him. He could have healed him by His word, and just spoken, and this man would have been cleansed.” But He doesn’t do that. Various suggestions have been made. One is that it may have been a way of showing that the Lord is the Lord of His own law and that He had come to bring the ceremonial law to an end. He had come to do that. He’d come to fulfill the whole law and to bring it to its completion. This is what He says in Matthew 5:17. Didn’t come to destroy the law, came to fulfill it.

But also, in touching that man, the Lord made a connection with his suffering and with his pain. It was as though He was signifying that He had come to identify with this leper, that He had come to take his uncleanness on Himself and to take upon Himself the sin and the misery of the fall, which is so graphically illustrated in this man’s condition and through the cross, through His substitutionary work on the cross, through the work of a representative in God’s judgment, representative for sinful men and women. He would remove sin and remove the effects of the fall. In the cross, He obtained cleansing from sin, obtained cleansing from guilt for all who believe in Him, but He also did obtain physical healing of the creation.

In the cross, He has accomplished all that’s necessary to remove the curse from the natural realm. And as a result of that, we sometimes hear that there is healing in the atonement. And people who make that statement often are meaning by that that by the cross, Christ has secured physical healing for us in this present life. And Isaiah 53:5 does teach, does state that with His stripes, we are healed. That, however, doesn’t mean that the healing of all disease and the removal of all sorrow and suffering is for today. The atonement has secured much that is reserved for the future.

The second coming, for example, is in the atonement. But we're still waiting for it. The redemption of the body in the resurrection is in the atonement, but Paul writes in Romans 8:23, “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait for *the* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” Second Corinthians 5:2 we read here, “indeed we groan and long to put on our heavenly dwelling.”

Now, if the apostle Paul groaned physically because of the afflictions that he had, and he had the gift of healing, and he speaks to us generally and says we groan. Well, then it would seem that physical suffering is part of this present situation. It's the norm for this present time. That's part of God's plan. Redemption of the body is in the future and I believe that as we look at miracles such as this cleansing of the leper that we have a foretaste, a portent of what's coming when there will be physical healing, there will be a redemption of the body. It pictures that. I don't think this sets the norm and the standard for life today.

Now, we don't like the groaning, but very often it can be used of God in drawing us close to the Lord and making us more like Christ and in reminding us of the fact that this world is not our home. Our inheritance is not here, so we're not to live for this present world. We're to be living for what is to come and we're to be living a life in which we continually are placing our hope and our faith in the Lord.

But, having said that, in the present, the Lord is not indifferent toward our suffering. He's not indifferent toward our groaning. And in touching this leper, He was not only making a connection with his pain and his suffering, but ours, as well. And showing His mercy and His compassion for people in need. He has compassion on the sick. He has compassion on the sinner. He has compassion on both alike. And He chose to take upon Himself our flesh in order that He might suffer in our place so that He might remove both according to His plan and His time.

Now, leprosy was such a dreaded and persistent disease that the rabbis believed that it was as difficult to cleanse a leper as it was to raise the dead. But when the Lord touched this man, we read that “Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.” He was whole like Naaman who washed in the Jordan seven times and his

flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. And that’s what happened here. The healing was complete. It was instant.

And that is a good standard by which to measure all claims of healing today. If the church today has the same power at work within it as was at work within Christ and the apostles, then we should be able to do the same things that they did, cleanse lepers, heal people who are terminally ill. But I don’t see that happening. Certainly, God can heal today and we should pray for the sick and we should pray with the hope that He will heal them. But He will do that in His way, in His time, according to His will. Not according to ours. And so we trust in that. We should pray. We should seek that. But trust the Lord to do what He believes is best.

But the miracles of our Lord and His apostles were done for a specific purpose. Not, I think, to measure what’s right and good for our physical condition today, but for the purpose of accrediting the messenger and his message. That’s clear from Luke chapter 7, when the Lord verified to John the Baptist that He was the Messiah. We’ll come to that. At least we’ll come to his situation in prison later on in this gospel. But you’ll remember what took place. John was arrested and he was put in prison, in Herod’s prison in Makarios, down near the Dead Sea. John had come as a forerunner of Christ. He’d come announcing the King of Israel. He had come expecting the kingdom. And instead of that, he’s arrested. He’s put in this dungeon. And instead of seeing the glory of the kingdom, he sees four walls of a dreary dungeon and waits for his own execution.

And so he wondered, “Is this One that I have introduced to the nation, is He truly the King? Is He the One that we are to be looking for? Or are we to be looking for another?” And our Lord responds by sending this message back to John. “the blind receive sight, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, *the* poor have the gospel preached to them.” Doesn’t say, “I am the Messiah.” He gives this message, a sort of oblique message, and indirect message, but it was very clear what He was saying. He was saying that the miracles that were prophesied in the Old Testament – you can read Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 35 and see some of these – those miracles that were prophesied that would be done by the Messiah are being done by Me. That’s what He was saying. They accredit the messenger and the

message and John understood that what He was saying was He was fulfilling that, and they prove that He is the One that that nation was to be looking for.

So these miracles were that which said He is the King, He is the Messiah, and so it seems a little strange to read the instruction that He gives to this leper following his healing. Read in verses 43 and 44, “And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He 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 testimony to them.’ ” What the Lord was doing was seeking to avoid unwanted publicity. We would think that He would want to broadcast who He was and what He’d done, but no. He doesn’t do that because He knew the hearts of the people. He knew the spirit of the crowds. And He knew that a report of the healing would only add to His growing reputation as a wonder worker. And He wanted to avoid that. And so He wanted to keep the matter secret. And to underscore the urgency of the silence, verse 43 states that He “sternly warned” the man.

Now it wasn’t an absolute prohibition on speaking. He wouldn’t perhaps have been permanent, would eventually have told people of what had occurred. We would assume that. But what our Lord wanted was for the priests to be the first to hear about what had happened so that it would be, as He says, “for a testimony to them.” And that’s what the law required. The law required that when a leper was healed that a ceremony be performed for his restoration into the community. It was an elaborate ceremony as described in Leviticus chapter 14, a ceremony involving two birds, one that is slain over running water and then the other, the living bird, is dipped in the blood of the sacrificed bird, and then it is set free. It’s a picture of our Lord’s sacrifice and the cleansing freedom that it produces for the sinner, for all who draw close to Him in faith.

It was a ritual that few priests had ever performed because leprosy was an incurable disease. Only twice in the Old Testament is the healing of a leper recorded. And nothing like this had been heard of since the days of Naaman. And so it would have been a very powerful testimony for the priests. And so the man, who had been full of leprosy, set off full of joy. So joyful that He couldn’t keep the Lord’s command of silence. Verse 45 states that he “proclaimed it freely and spread the



news – ” so that the crowds became so great that the Lord couldn’t enter into the cities. He had to remain in the unpopulated areas, and the people were coming out to Him.

Our enthusiasm, our emotion should always be governed by the instruction of the Lord. Because this man listened to his heart rather than his head, so to speak, the Lord’s ministry was met with some obstacles. And that’s one of the things that the Lord was seeking to avoid. And yet, we can’t be too hard on this man. He couldn’t contain himself for his joy. And would that we all shared this man’s enthusiasm for the faith, shared this man’s enthusiasm for what the Lord has done for us. We should be a people that are going out throughout the community filled with joy that we can’t contain and telling people about what Christ has done for us, because in forgiving our sins and gaining for us eternal life, He’s done far more for us, infinitely more for us than was done for this man in the physical sense.

What we have obtained through Christ is eternal in value. Never fade away. And we, too, have the healing of all of our afflictions in God’s time. We look forward to a day when we will have resurrection bodies that are beyond our comprehension. We have all of that. So we should be filled with joy and enthusiasm, and our enthusiasm or our lack of enthusiasm, or our lack of joy, or our amount of joy is a good measure of our spiritual vitality and the power of the Holy Spirit that’s at work within our lives. We need to have that. That’s a gift of the Spirit. That’s something we should seek and it must come from Him. But we have every reason to be joyful as we reflect upon what He’s done for us.

But maybe you’re here this morning and you’ve never experienced that cleansing, and you don’t have the enthusiasm that we see in this man, but you have a longing. You have a longing for the cleansing of sin, the removal of guilt, the freedom and light that you haven’t found in this life and what you won’t find in this life outside of Jesus Christ. Cleansing, forgiveness, life, true life is only in Jesus Christ. And you have that simply by believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior, as the One who died in the place of sinners, who bore your sins on the cross, who took your leprosy, as it were, your spiritual uncleanness upon Himself that you might be delivered from it. You’ve not believed in Him, you can have that as your experience.

That can be the reality of your life through faith alone. May God help you to do that. May He help you to believe if you've never believed, and in so doing enter into a life of freedom, a life of cleansing, a life of joy. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Father, we thank You for all that You've given us. And You've given us much more than we can comprehend. We have been made clean of sin and guilt and even though we do groan in these bodies, the day is coming when that will change and we will be blessed physically beyond our comprehension in the redemption of these bodies. In the meantime, Father, we pray that You would fill us with the enthusiasm and the joy that we see in this man. We pray that You'd fill us with obedience, a life of faith, and that we might serve You well and effectively. We pray that we might bring honor to Your name and glory to Your Son and bring many to faith in Christ. We pray these things in His name, for His sake, Amen.