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Mark 1:40-45 Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

Discussion: Have you ever told everyone about something, perhaps because you were so excited about it, but perhaps should have kept to yourself?

Mark 1	Matthew 8	Luke 5
Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy	Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy 1 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.	Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy 12 While Jesus was in one of the towns,
40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."	2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."	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."
41 Jesus was indignant.		
He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.	3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.	13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.
43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:	4 Then Jesus said to him,	14 Then Jesus ordered him,
44 "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."	"See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."	"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."
45 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.		15 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. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

In the previous session, we observed the events of a single Sabbath day and the following morning. Mark now relocates the action to somewhere outside the city of Capernaum; Jesus' increasing fame has resulted in him being continually surrounded by people asking for healing. This makes it extremely difficult for him to carry out the primary focus of his ministry, which is to tell the Good News that the kingdom of God is at hand.

Comparison

- Mark doesn't say where the encounter with the leper occurs, but Matthew reports that Jesus has left Capernaum and that the crowds are still following him "even though he went up into the mountain". Luke suggests this is happening in one of the towns although it seems unlikely that a leper would be permitted within the city limits. We could speculate that the legal requirements might have been relaxed locally or that it occurred in the outer environs of a town or city.⁹²
- Mark suggests a strong emotional response by Jesus, of being angry or indignant (**v41**); this is aimed at his suffering, *not* at the man himself.^{93,94} The NIV suggests "filled with compassion" which is not a particularly accurate translation.⁹⁵

Context

- In Biblical times, leprosy was a generic term for numerous skin conditions that caused disfigurement and which were thought to be contagious. The affected person was rendered ritually unclean by the Law (Lev.13-14). Some of these conditions were curable, but the disease we know today as leprosy (Hansen's Disease) was not, resulting in a leper being permanently excluded from normal life and worship.⁹⁶
- Lepers were required to "live alone, outside the camp", to cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev. 13:45-46) and to keep a distance of 50 paces from other people (Luke 17:12). If anyone were to touch a leper, they too would become ritually unclean.
- Other forms of ritual uncleanliness could occur; examples include contact with a dead body or creatures considered unclean in Jewish Law. These cases were seen as temporary and could be resolved (with no remaining stigma) after a certain period had elapsed.⁹⁷

Going Deeper: The traditional rites for cleansing by a priest

Priests had a legal responsibility for diagnosing and pronouncing lepers as clean or unclean as part of their priestly duty to ensure the ritual cleanliness of Israel. Having received a clean bill of health after inspection by a priest, two birds were required. One was for sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, the other released having been daubed in its blood. After a period of eight days, further sacrifices were to be brought to the priest. This was quite an involved process, with a potential journey to Jerusalem required.^{98,99}

Key Points

- The leper approaches Jesus with respect (kneeling) and faith (he is not reported to be shouting out the obligatory warnings). He knows that this Rabbi Jesus is at risk of becoming ritually unclean simply by contact with him, and understands therefore that Jesus might not wish it. However, he still fully believes that Jesus is capable of healing him “*if only he were willing*”.¹⁰⁰
- Jesus reaches out and touches the man. Instead of Jesus becoming ritually unclean through touch, it is the man who is cleansed. Jesus is reversing the situation. Not only is this a physical healing, but it will also permit the man to re-enter life to the fullest. This healing results in a complete restoration.¹⁰¹
- Jesus touches the man, perhaps in compassion but also demonstrating that he can “touch the untouchable”. He effects the healing with a simple command and all three Gospels report that it is immediate.
- Mark mentions a second emotional response by Jesus, in the strong warning given to the man (**v43**). The Greek word used means to snort; the same verb is used for the sound of a horse snorting.¹⁰² He is insisting that the man complies with the instruction he is about to give, which is to refrain from telling anyone, but instead to present himself to the priest. The secrecy around Jesus’ messiahship remains important, but Jesus shows himself to be obedient to Levitical law that requires a priest to issue the necessary certification. (Lev. 14:1-20).
- The result of the man presenting himself causes difficulty for the priest, who perceived this as an incurable disease. Consequently, this becomes a *testimony* set before the priests (**v44**), providing evidence that Jesus:

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- a) can heal even the worst of incurable diseases,
- b) can touch the untouchable while not becoming ritually unclean himself,
- c) can instigate the full restoration of a person previously declared unable to participate in society or worship, and yet
- d) remains obedient to Levitical law which he follows precisely.

While Jesus demanded the man healed of leprosy should tell no one else, it was deliberately being brought to the attention of the priests. Jesus appears to have a supernatural authority to undertake God's work, and yet be unconcerned with aspects of their ceremonial law.¹⁰³

- The reversal is two-fold. We observe that, as he heals, a touch appears not to render Jesus ritually unclean. The paradox is that this man can re-enter society, and yet Jesus finds that his increasing fame means he can no longer enter towns where he is known.¹⁰⁴ Jesus and the leper have traded places.¹⁰⁵

Summary of Mark Chapter 1

Mark has described aspects of the divine authority (*exousia*) given to Jesus, encompassing his teaching, healings, casting out demons, and now restoration from incurable diseases. Jesus wished to keep his messianic identity hidden to avoid clashes with the *Roman* authorities but insisted the leper presents himself before the local and Jerusalem priests for certification of that cleansing, which forces them to consider who this Jesus truly is.

Discuss: C.S. Lewis' Trilemma from *Mere Christianity*.¹⁰⁶ How do you respond?

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."