



## Part 46: The Cleansing Power of Jesus

Matthew 8:1-4

### I. Group Identity & Boundary Markers

Just about all groups have boundary markers for who is in and who is out. Most religions have boundary markers that try to identify who is in the group and who is outside it.

The Ancient Israelites had circumcision as their primary sign along with food laws and ceremonial rituals. They were called to be a people set apart from the world – holy unto the Lord.

The people of Jesus have the same call although the boundary markers have changed.

*“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:15*

*(quoting Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2)*

The crucial thing is to keep the focus in the right place on the right boundary marker rather than adding barriers to what the Lord has established.

### II. The Shamed Outcast

Today’s story is about a man, who was on the outside looking in. He was excluded from participating in the Lord’s covenant community because he was considered “unclean.”

The word “leprosy” could describe any number of contagious skin diseases including the deadly Hansen’s disease. The Old Testament gave instructions about how to quarantine if you had one of these skin diseases.

*“The person with such an infectious disease must...cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has an infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.” Leviticus 13:45-46*

Note: this was a health regulation to minimize the spread of disease. But those with this condition were faced with a life of isolation and often shame when interpreted as God’s rejection (throw rocks). These people were supposed to shout “unclean” as they moved outside their communities. It was called a “living death.”

We can only imagine how desperate this man must have been. He is doing something completely unacceptable socially by approaching Jesus in a crowd. The crowds would have been both afraid and furious.

Here is a desperate man. Here is a lonely man, who has been on the outside looking in for a long time. Here is a man living in the stigma and shame of being an outcast in every way – socially and religiously.

*“A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’” Matthew 8:2*

This man has heard of Jesus’ healing miracles. He has heard of his reputation as a teacher. He almost certainly thinks he’s a great prophet. Jesus is clearly a man of authority and power. There is no question about it.

The great question for this man is whether Jesus is also a man of compassion and love. What kind of heart does Jesus have?

### **III. Our Willing Savior & King**

*“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.” Mathew 8:3*

Jesus does the unthinkable! He touches the man. Instead of Jesus being made unclean, he makes the man clean and whole! Uncleanness works backward with Jesus! He can take the disease and uncleanness of this man and give him his health and cleanness.

Jesus instructs him to follow the law of Moses in Leviticus 14 to see the priests to be restored to the community. The priests would pronounce them healed and clean and restored.

Jesus didn't condemn this man or throw rocks at him. It was his heart of mercy and compassion that moved him towards this man not away from him. He does the same with all of us who are afraid of his condemnation.

#### **IV. Made Clean & Restored**

Sometimes Jesus' healings point to deeper spiritual realities. We are all unclean before a pure and holy God. We are all outcasts from his covenant community apart from the cleansing power of Jesus.

*"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the **washing of rebirth and renewal** by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..." Titus 3:4-6*

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9*

Question: What is the boundary marker for those belonging to Jesus and his community? It is faith in the authority and power of King Jesus to make us clean and whole before his Holy Father.

The only barrier is self-sufficiency and our unwillingness to kneel before Jesus and say:

*"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

*"I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"*