

# Christ: The Fountain of Cleansing

Luke 5:12–13

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## Introduction

Robert Murray M'Cheyne is famously remembered for his counsel to “Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself,” he said, “take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely.” Indeed, He is. And that is why it is such a joy to gather together as the people of God, as the assembly of the Lord, as the flock of the Good Shepherd, to magnify the Lord Jesus, to behold His loveliness, and to exalt His name together.

The title of this message is “Christ: The Fountain of Cleansing.” And our text will be Luke chapter 5, verses 12 and 13. And leading up to chapter 5, we find Luke presenting testimony after testimony—evidence upon evidence—that Jesus of Nazareth really was Israel’s promised Messiah, the long-awaited Savior of the world, the Second and Last Adam, who would undo the curse of sin that the first Adam had brought upon the creation—the Seed of the Woman who would crush the head of the Serpent and destroy his works that God had promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15.

He begins with the accounts of not one, but two miraculous births announced by angels—the birth of John the forerunner of Messiah, and of Jesus Himself. There’s the testimony of Mary and Zacharias: that this child would be the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham and David. In chapter 2, the glory of Yahweh lights up the night sky as an angel of the Lord announces that the Savior has been born. Simeon and Anna see the baby and declare that they have seen salvation—that redemption has come to Jerusalem. In chapter 3, John calls the people to prepare the way of the Lord: “The Promised Seed has come!” The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus at His baptism, testifying that this Jesus was God’s Anointed One. The Father Himself declares audibly from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well-pleased.” Then Luke gives Jesus’ genealogy, tracing His lineage all the way back to Adam, showing that Jesus was truly human, and setting the stage for His temptation. And we see that in chapter 4, as Luke presents Jesus as the Second and Last Adam, withstanding and defeating Satan in his three temptations in the wilderness, contrasting that with how the first Adam succumbed to Satan’s three temptations in the Garden. Jesus conquers precisely where Adam fails, showing Himself qualified to undertake His public ministry.

But Luke continues into chapter 4, demonstrating that Jesus not only has the credentials to be Messiah, but that He has the power and the authority of God Himself. In verses 31 to 37, Jesus demonstrates His power over Satan and the kingdom of darkness by casting a demon out of a

possessed man. In verses 38 and 39, He demonstrates His power over disease, by instantly healing Peter's mother-in-law from a debilitating fever. Verse 40 says, "All those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him," and He was healing them. And then in chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, He demonstrates His lordship over creation itself by miraculously supplying the abundant catch of fish after Peter and the fisherman worked all night and caught nothing.

This Jesus is God! This Jesus is Messiah! This Jesus is Savior! He is the Second Adam! already having emerged victorious over the temptations of Satan, and now plundering Satan's kingdom by His power and His compassion! He's making it plain that He is there to reverse the curse of sin that brought decay, and disease, and spiritual bondage.

And in our text, Jesus continues showcasing His divine power over disease by cleansing a leper. Let's read Luke chapter 5, verses 12 and 13. "While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately the leprosy left him."

And while in one sense this looks like just another scene of Jesus' divine power to overcome the effects of sin, there's more to it than that. In Scripture, this disease of leprosy stands out among all the ailments and diseases of a fallen creation. Leprosy was singled out by God to be a picture or a parable of human sin. John MacArthur calls it an "irresistible analogy" of sin. You see, you and I are all spiritual lepers. The leprosy of sin has infected us all to the core of our being; all our faculties—our minds, our hearts, our wills, our consciences—have all been diseased by spiritual leprosy. And so we all stand in need of cleansing from the great Fountain of Cleansing that is the blood of Jesus Christ. And therefore we must come to Him for cleansing! And we must come to Him in precisely the way this leper comes. And when we do, this text teaches us that we will find Christ to be just as this leper found Him: full of compassion and mighty to save. J. C. Ryle wrote, "We have in this wonderful history a lively emblem of Christ's power to heal our souls" (*Luke*, 105). Spurgeon said, "Now is the Son of Man glorious in His power to save."

And so as we walk slowly through this miraculous scene, I want you to see yourselves for the spiritual lepers that you are, and I want you to see the Lord Jesus Christ for the glorious, compassionate, mighty Savior that He is—the Fountain of Cleansing for the leprosy of your soul. If you're an unbeliever—if you haven't yet come to a saving knowledge of Christ—I want you to come to Him for cleansing! And if you have already washed your sins away in the fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins, I want you to see and celebrate His glory with me, and rejoice over how One so lovely and so holy comes so willingly and eagerly and graciously to cleanse and to heal ones so vile, repulsive, and undeserving, as we are.

## I. The Sinner's Contamination (v. 12a)

Let's look first at **the sinner's contamination**. Number one: **the sinner's contamination**. Verse 12: "While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man *covered with leprosy*."

What was this leprosy? In the original language, the term has the basic meaning of "scaly." It was actually a general term for any number of skin conditions, including what we might today identify as psoriasis, ringworm, and cutaneous lupus. But the most severe disease denoted by the term "leprosy" was what is now known as Hansen's Disease—what we normally think of as leprosy—where bacteria damage the nervous system to the point that people can't feel any pain. It was long supposed that leprosy was some sort of flesh-eating bacteria that caused a person's extremities to fall off. It was common to see lepers with missing toes or nubs for fingers and assume that the disease just ate away at the flesh. But it's been discovered that those extremities don't fall off; they rub off. Due to the loss of feeling from the nerve damage, victims of leprosy wear their body parts away. A stubbed toe becomes a broken toe that you continue to walk on until the bone is exposed and the wound infected. Accidentally placing a hand on a hot surface causes no pain, and so severe burns result. Noses and ears wear away just from being rubbed and scratched over and over again. It was common to see lepers with open sores, oozing ulcers, and raw flesh.

Leprosy was an issue known in the ancient world, and certainly in Israel. In Luke 4:27, Jesus says that "there were *many* lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet." It was common enough that there were prescriptions in the ceremonial law for how to deal with it. The law devotes two long chapters—Leviticus 13 and 14—to teaching the priests how to identify leprosy and what to do with those who were infected. They functioned something like ancient dermatologists. Leviticus 13:3 says that if there's a mark on the skin, and the hair turns white, and if there's an infection that seems to be deeper than the skin, then it's leprosy and the man is unclean. But if the bright spot doesn't seem to be beneath the surface, he must isolate for seven days and be reexamined. If it's not spreading, then he can be released; if it is spreading then he's unclean.

Now, why was leprosy such a big deal? Well, because Yahweh was dwelling in the camp of Israel! In Exodus 40, the shekinah glory of God fills the Tabernacle, as God signifies that He is dwelling with His people. Holiness was in their midst! And yet leprosy was **defiling**. It was ceremonial uncleanness. And uncleanness cannot dwell alongside perfect purity. And so in Numbers 5:2–3, God says, "Command the sons of Israel that they *send away from the camp* everyone with leprosy, everyone having a discharge, and everyone who is unclean because of contact with a dead person. You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them *outside the camp* so that they do not *defile* their camp *where I dwell* in their midst." God was in the camp!

And because leprosy is **defiling**—because it is unclean—that meant that the leper could not be in the camp. Leviticus 13:45–46: “As for the person who has the leprous infection, his clothes shall be torn and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and call out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall *live alone*; he shall live *outside the camp*.” This was a **defiling** disease. Many described it as a living death. In fact, in Numbers 12:12, when God strikes Miriam with leprosy, Moses prays for her and asks that God “not let her be *like one dead*, whose flesh is half eaten away!” Spurgeon said, “This disease turns a man into a mass of loathsomeness, a walking pile of pests. Leprosy is nothing better than a horrible and lingering death.”

And so because leprosy was this defiling, living death, it was also an **isolating** disease. So much so that if a leper went anywhere, he had to announce his uncleanness with a loud voice, so that nobody would be defiled by his uncleanness. Leprosy was lonely. Second Chronicles 26:21 says that the leper had to “live in a separate house,” “for he was *cut off* from the house of the Lord.” In Luke 17:12, Luke introduces a group of lepers by saying “ten men with leprosy *who stood at a distance*” met Jesus. They would have *had* to stand at a distance. The rabbis taught that you couldn’t come within six feet of a leper, and if the wind was blowing that day, it was 150 feet. The leper’s life was a lonely life. Away from his wife. Away from his children. A stranger to the comforts and pleasures of any sort of companionship. In some cases struggling to remember what it felt like to touch another human being. He was an outcast. A castaway.

Not only was leprosy defiling and isolating. It was also eminently **shameful**. You heard it in Leviticus 13. He had to tear his clothes, shave his head, cover his mouth, and shout that he was unclean lest he defile anyone else. A leper’s uncleanness became his identity. “Hi, my name is, ‘Unclean!’” One rabbi in the Talmud advocated throwing stones at lepers to force them to keep their distance, as if they were a pack of wild dogs. Their humanity was totally stripped from them; they were a disease, an infection. And nothing more.

Beyond the shame, leprosy also brought with it the stigma of the **curse of God**. The Israelites believed that lepers were being punished by God. And the Old Testament does record several instances of God wielding leprosy as a judgment against sin. We mentioned Numbers 12, where God strikes Miriam with leprosy because she and Aaron spoke against Moses, Yahweh’s prophet. Second Chronicles 26 tells us that “Yahweh had smitten” King Uzziah with leprosy because he had usurped the role of the priests. And so it came to be believed that lepers were under the judgment of God, and so it was permissible—even right—to treat them with contempt.

More than that, leprosy was regarded as **incurable**, a hopeless disease. The King of Aram hears that Elisha the prophet can heal lepers. And so he sends his military commander, Naaman, to the king of Israel to be cured of his leprosy. And 2 Kings 5:7 says, “But when the king of Israel read

the letter, he tore his clothes and said, ‘*Am I God, to kill and to keep alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?*’ Leprosy was regarded as so **incurable** that one would have to be God Himself to cure it! He says, “Am I God, to kill and to keep alive?” Cleansing a leper was on the order of raising the dead!

In fact, in all of the prescriptions for the priests in Leviticus 13 and 14, there’s nothing about how to treat the disease. If there was leprosy, the man was unclean and cut off. If it was uncertain, he quarantined for a week to see if it got better or worse. But there is no talk of any remedy. The law provides **no cure** for leprosy. You could imagine this man going to the priests to be examined, and them coming to him with a grave expression, and saying, “We are so sorry, but there is nothing we can do. You are a condemned man. You are unclean.” And he would have begged them, “No! Please! Is there nothing to be done? I’ll do anything!” And they would have apologized again and said, “No, there is nothing to be done. The law of God provides only for your condemnation.”

And I hope, as we consider the awful corruption of leprosy, that you can see yourself in this leper. I hope you can hear how appropriate a picture leprosy is of the corruption of *sin* that afflicts each and every one of us by nature.

Like leprosy, sin is **defiling**. Isaiah 64:6: “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” Like leprosy, sin’s defilement is **totalizing**. Our entire constitution is infected with sin. Isaiah 1:5–6 speaks of sinners and says, “The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, and raw wounds.” Our understanding is darkened (Eph 4:18), our hearts are made of stone (Ezek 11:19), our affections are corrupt (Mark 7:21–23), our conscience is defiled (Tit 1:15), and our wills are enslaved to sin (Rom 6:16). Life in sin is a **living death**, as Paul speaks of the unbelieving as *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).

Like leprosy, sin **isolates**. It makes us unfit for fellowship with God. If physical uncleanness could not dwell alongside the manifestation of God’s presence in Israel, how much more does our spiritual uncleanness alienate us from the very presence of God Himself? Isaiah 59:2 says, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” We must be forever cast out of God’s presence, so as not to defile His dwelling place. And sin also makes us unfit for fellowship with the *people* of God. In 1 Corinthians 5:13, Paul cites the Old Testament law and commands the church, “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” The spiritual leper is an outcast with God and His people. We are to be expelled from the fellowship of the righteous.

And the **shame** of our sin, if we could truly see it as God sees it, is unbearable. We *are* a spiritual mass of loathsomeness, as Spurgeon said, a walking pile of pests. Our sin is an abomination; it is abhorrent and repulsive—a stench in the nostrils of Holiness. Anyone with any dignity about

them would be right to demand that we warn them of the uncleanness of our presence, so that we might not contaminate them. If we saw the loathsomeness of our sin rightly, we would acknowledge that we deserve to be kept at bay with stones, as they did to lepers.

Like leprosy, those infected with the disease of sin are under a **divine curse**, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, to perform them” (Gal 3:10). And like leprosy, our sin is **incurable**. Jeremiah 13:23: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is incurable.”

Dear friends, this man’s misery is *our* misery, if only we have eyes to see. We have broken the law of the Holy One of Israel. We have belittled His glory. We have preferred filth over beauty. We are abominable, unclean, loathsome to our very core, full of shame. Nobody should want anything to do with us, least of all the thrice Holy God of the universe. We are outcasts, only for the depths of hell itself. And if we have any sense of ourselves at all, we cry out, “Oh! eternal punishment! Death in my sins! Bearing my own guilt! No! Please! Is there nothing to be done? I’ll do anything to make peace with God!” And the answer is: no, there is nothing to be done. The law of God provides only for your condemnation. We can do nothing to rid leprosy from our bodies; still less can our filthy rags rid the sinfulness from our souls.

## II. The Sinner’s Contrition (v. 12b)

But then this leper sees Jesus. The law provides only for your condemnation. But “what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son.” We’ve seen the sinner’s contamination. Let’s look now at **the sinner’s contrition**. Verse 12: “And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face. and implored Him.” The parallel passage in Mark 1:40 says, “A leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him.”

This is total brokenness. Total humiliation. This man knows who he is. He takes the posture of total humility. He falls on his knees, and then on his face. He acknowledges his uncleanness. He knows he is undeserving, and so he takes the posture of humility, of reverence, even of worship. This man doesn’t try to soft sell his condition. He doesn’t say, “Well yeah, sure, I’ve got a little leprosy, but on the whole I think I’m a pretty healthy person!” We certainly hear much of that sort of thing today, as sinners flatter themselves that their sinfulness isn’t as foul and vile as the Bible says it is. “Well yeah, sure, I’m not perfect. I’m human. I mean, we all make mistakes. But on the whole I think I’m a pretty good person! God knows my heart! I think he’ll see my sincerity and be pleased with me.”

This man says nothing like that. He knows that that is nonsense. He is *covered* with leprosy, the text says, and so he comes with the broken spirit and **contrite** heart that Psalm 51:17 says the

Lord does not despise. He comes in full confession and acknowledgment of his uncleanness—just as the truly repentant sinner must come to Christ. Not making excuses for his sin, but openly confessing that he is totally corrupted, recognizing that he has no hope for forgiveness apart from the mercy of God, and so falls down on his face, bowed in abject humility, begging God for undeserved grace.

### III. The Sinner's Confidence (v. 12c)

But notice: the sinner's contrition is not only marked by humility; it's marked by desperation. Because this is not supposed to happen. Lepers aren't supposed to be anywhere near a crowd of people. He should be quarantined at home, or at least he should be crying out, "Unclean!" keeping his distance. He shouldn't be approaching anyone, let alone a rabbi!

But what drives such holy recklessness? That brings us, in the **third** place, to **the sinner's confidence**. Verse 12 again: "He fell on his face and implored Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'" This man knows he's an outcast. He knows he belongs nowhere near Jesus. But he feels the pain of his defilement, his isolation, his shame so acutely—he recognizes the utter hopelessness of his uncleanness so intensely—that he is desperate. He has this sense of holy abandon, so much so that he throws caution and custom to the wind and falls on his face and begs Jesus, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean!" "You can end my shame! You can purify my uncleanness! You can cleanse my filth!"

And we see this holy desperation often in the Gospels, don't we? The woman had a hemorrhage of blood for twelve years and had endured much at the hands of many physicians—she spent all she had and had only gotten worse. And she thought to herself, "I know I'm not supposed to touch Him, but I'm convinced if I can just touch His clothes, He can heal me!" The Syrophenician woman says, "Yes, Lord, I know I'm a dog and I don't deserve have the children's bread. But Lord, even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from the children's table." Blind Bartimaeus sits begging along the road to Jericho, when he hears that Jesus was passing by. And he cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And they say, "Shut up, Bartimaeus! He's not here for you! Quit bothering Him!" And the text says, "But he kept crying out all the more."

Do you see? People who are truly sensible of their need—those whose afflictions have bowed them to the dust—have this holy desperation, this holy abandon that says, "I know I'm not supposed to! I know I've got no claim to His mercy! But I've *got* to go to Him! I've got to bring Him my uncleanness!" And dear sinner, you and I must come the same way. Perhaps you've been taught to think that the filth of your uncleanness ought to *keep* you from coming to Jesus. No! If you come to Him in humble contrition, bowed to the dust, and moved by a holy

desperation fueled by the **confidence** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God our Savior, let every custom and every caution be thrown to the wind! Come to Christ for cleansing!

“Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” How precious is this confession of **the sinner’s confident** faith! Some interpreters note that this is a third-class conditional, and they conclude that the man is doubtful of Jesus’ willingness to heal him. But I wouldn’t call this doubt as much as modesty. He recognizes that Jesus is sovereign over the execution of His own power. He realizes that he has no claim upon the mercy of the Son of God. He doesn’t go to Jesus demanding, “Lord, if you’re loving and just at all, you *must* make me clean!” No. He says, “Lord, You owe me nothing. I am, after all, an unclean leper. But I know You can do as You please. If You’re willing, I know that it is within Your power to heal me.”

#### **IV. The Savior’s Cleanness (v. 13a)**

How does the Lord respond? Let’s look, **fourth**, at **the Savior’s Cleanness**. Verse 13: “And He stretched out His hand and *touched* him.” And this is truly astounding. Everybody else in that crowd would have seen that leper coming—maybe even smelled that leper coming—and they would have taken ten steps back. If not for the sheer repulsiveness of the man’s condition, at the very least because the law of God forbade anyone from touching a leper, lest they be defiled. Leviticus 5:3: “If [a person] touches human uncleanness, ... [even if] it is hidden from him, ... he will be guilty.” Not a single person in Israel—and certainly no rabbi—would have ever gotten within striking distance of a leper!.

But Jesus doesn’t draw back! Jesus stretches out His hand and *touches* this man! Everybody in the crowd would have gasped. “He’s defiling Himself!” they would have said. But *was* He defiling Himself? No! Everyone else touches the leper and is defiled by his uncleanness. But such is Jesus’ holiness and purity and **cleanness**, that Jesus touches the leper, and the *leper* becomes *clean*! The leper’s uncleanness does not contaminate Jesus’ purity; Jesus’ purity is so boundless and bottomless that His purity “contaminates” the leper’s uncleanness! Jesus “infects” this man with the contagion of heaven, and the touch of **the Savior’s cleanness** overcomes the sinner’s defilement.

Dear friends, something greater than the ceremonial cleansing laws is here! This Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. It’s not as though Jesus had no regard for the laws of purification. It’s not as if He was lawless, or treated the law of God with contempt. No, He loved the law of God. But the Son of Man had come! And the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. And so don’t marvel when the Son of Man heals on the Sabbath! The Sabbath only ever existed to point to the rest that sinners could find by trusting in Messiah for righteousness! And the leprosy laws and purification laws only ever existed to point to the final cleansing that sinners could find by trusting in the Man they were looking at at that moment.



Jesus is the fulfillment of the law! He has *come* to touch the unclean! When Jesus manifests His divine glory in the miraculous catch of fish earlier in Luke 5, Peter is gripped with the reality of his own sinfulness before this One who he's coming to understand is Holy God. And he says, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" "I don't deserve to be anywhere near you! And You don't deserve to *have* to be anywhere near me!" But Jesus is not repelled by uncleanness—not from one like this leper, who is ravaged by the effects of the fall, who is humbled by it, and who begs for mercy because of it. No, Jesus is repelled more by the arrogant leper who doesn't feel his shame, who doesn't come for cleansing, but who trusts in his own power to cleanse himself.

But to the despairing sinner aware of his inability? Jesus draws near to that one. Even in his defilement. "Go away from me, Lord! I don't want my sin to defile You!" "No, friend. You don't understand. I've come for the unclean. I've come to embrace the outcast. I've come to touch the loathsome. I've come to cleanse the unclean." Dear friend, do you feel a keen sense of the pain and shame of your sin? That's good! You ought to feel that shame! But don't let it keep you *from* Jesus! Let the pain and shame of your sin drive you *to* Jesus! Because the **cleanness** of His righteousness overcomes the uncleanness of your sin.

And He accomplishes that by doing so much more than *touching* you in your defilement. He takes your defilement *upon Himself*, and then takes up residence *inside* you! God the Son traverses that infinite chasm between heaven and earth, between divine and human, by assuming to Himself a full and genuine human nature. He lives the perfect life of obedience that you were commanded to live but failed to live. And then He goes to the cross to bear your uncleanness in His own body. "He bore our sins in his body on the cross." "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

This Savior does not just zap your spiritual leprosy away from the safe spiritual harbors of heaven. No, He has skin in the game! Literally! He comes up close. He embraces you, sinner, and your sin, into His very arms. He lays you upon His very shoulders. And He Himself suffers the law's awful penalty for your uncleanness in such a way that He, and you as well, united to Him, come out **clean** on the other side! O what a Savior we have! who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession

#### **V. The Savior's Compassion (v. 13b)**

But I want you to notice: Jesus didn't need to touch this man to heal him. All throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus exercise His divine power to perform miracles with a word. "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just *say the word*, and my servant will be healed" (Matt 8:5–13). "Peace! Be still!" "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

(Mark 4:41). “Lazarus, come forth!” (John 11:43). When this leper comes to Jesus, begging Him to be cleansed, Jesus could have healed this man from a safe distance, with the command of His voice. Why does He touch him?

Well, that brings us to our **fifth** point: **the Savior’s compassion**. Luke doesn’t mention it here, but the parallel account in Mark 1:41 says, “*Moved with compassion*, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him.” No one would have touched this man for quite some time. His case of leprosy was obviously very advanced; Luke says the man was “*covered* with leprosy”—literally, “*full* of leprosy.” It’s likely that years had passed since anyone had touched him, and the starvation for human contact would have been palpable. And Jesus—whom this man regards as Lord, before whom this man falls on his face, the One whom this man believes can make him clean if only He was willing—Jesus, the fountain of all cleanness Himself, initiates the human contact that this man would have ached for. The sinner was “*full* of leprosy,” but the **Savior** was *full* of **compassion**!

And He expresses that **compassion** not only with a touch, but also with this glorious reply: “I am willing; be cleansed.” O, what a treasure chest! O, what a gold mine of comfort and consolation these precious words are to broken and unclean sinners! “I *am* willing!” “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean! I am absolutely convinced of Your *power*! You can end my shame! You can purify my uncleanness! But I am not entirely sure of Your heart toward me. After all, I have no claim upon You. I’m an unclean leper. I don’t deserve Your mercy. I deserve to be discarded for my uncleanness. But oh, Lord, if You might be willing, if You might find it in Your heart to have pity upon my misery, I know You can make me clean.” And without a moment’s hesitation, Jesus touches the untouchable, and says, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

O what tenderness must have been in Jesus’ face! in His voice! How full His heart must have been to bring the blessing of heaven—the healing power of the kingdom of God—into this man’s miserable condition! Here was an image-bearer of God, ruined by the curse of sin, now casting himself upon the mercy of the Savior for cleansing. Jesus didn’t utter these words with casual indifference: “Yeah, sure pal. Be cleansed.” No! How eager and how delighted Jesus must have been to heal this man! Think of yourselves, how you hear of some horrible report of a friend, or a family member, afflicted with some terrible disease, how you feel it in the pit of your stomach. You think, “Oh, if only I could wave a hand and heal them of their affliction! If only I could do what all the charlatans of the Charismatic Movement claim to be able to do! I’d empty the children’s hospitals! I’d empty every wheelchair I could find!” Dear friend, if that kind of compassion lies within your heart, and you’re as sinful as you are, imagine what **compassion** welled up in **the Savior’s** heart as He looked upon this miserable creature, and smiled, and said, “I am willing!”

This is the Savior, who saw the grief in Mary's eyes, filled with tears, and was deeply moved in spirit—who wept with the sisters at Lazarus' tomb. This is the Savior, who sees the widow of Nain weeping for the death of her only son, and felt **compassion** for her, raised the man from the dead, and, the text says, "Jesus gave him back to his mother." The young girl lies dead in a house of weeping and wailing mourners. And Jesus says, "Why are you weeping? She's just asleep." And taking her tenderly by the hand, He says in a voice that must have been ever so gentle, "Little girl, I say to you, get up" (Mark 5:41). And He gives that sweet girl back to her family.

Dear friends, you have no need to doubt this Savior's willingness to rescue you from your uncleanness. He *is* willing! He is full of **compassion** for sinners. And if you will come to Him the way this leper came to Him—humiliated, desperate, ashamed of your sin but confident in His power to save—O, He will receive you! You may be full of sin, but He is full of **compassion** for sinners!

## VI. The Savior's Capacity (v. 13c)

And that brings us to our final point in verse 13, number **six, the Savior's capacity**. Jesus says, "I am willing. Be cleansed." And Luke says, "And *immediately* the leprosy left him."

The leprosy had come upon this man in stages—first a rash, then an open sore, then ulcers, until he finally became the mass of loathsomeness that he was when he came to Jesus. But Jesus gives the word, "Be cleansed," and it left immediately. What a sight this must have been! To see shriveled, scaly, corroded skin immediately soften! To see the white scabs and red scars turn to healthy flesh! To see fingers and toes grow back! To see ears and a nose grow back! This was a divine miracle!

How feeble and ill-founded would our faith be, if our Savior had all the compassion in the world on poor sinners, and wished all the best that could be wished, but was powerless to do anything about it! Oh, but our Christ! He is not just benevolent. He is not just compassionate. He is willing *and* able! He speaks, and the winds and the waves are stilled! He commands, and the demons come out! He calls, and Lazarus comes forth from the grave! "Little girl, I say to you, get up," and "Immediately the girl got up and began to walk." "Young man, I say to you, arise!" and "The dead man sat up and began to speak." "I am willing; be cleansed," and the leper—who was regarded as a dead man, whom no one could heal but God alone, is immediately cleansed!

Jesus is God! He is the Lord of creation! And He is the Lord of the *New Creation*, who is making all things new! Charles Spurgeon said, "The, 'I will,' of an emperor may have great power of his dominions, but the, 'I will,' of Christ drives death and hell before Him! It conquers disease, removes despair, and floods the world with mercy! The Lord's, 'I will,' can put away your leprosy of sin and make you perfectly whole!" And that's the point. The Savior who can remove

with a word the leprosy of the body is the same Savior who can remove the leprosy of the soul. Yes, the leprosy of our sin has infected us to the very core of our being. But **the Savior's capacity** is such that He merely gives the word, and your spiritual death will be turned to spiritual life. J. C. Ryle wrote that "No heart-disease is so deep-seated but he is able to cure it. No plague of soul is so virulent but our great Physician can heal it. Let us never despair of anyone's salvation, so long as he lives."

### Conclusion

Well, where does that leave us? It leaves us with two words of application. First to **the unbeliever**—to the spiritual leper, to you who still labor under the burdens of the foulness and filth of sin—I call you to come to this Christ, this *Fountain of Cleansing*, for your salvation. Despite what you may think—despite what you may be willing to admit to yourself—you are full of leprosy. Perhaps not on the surface of your flesh; you may be the picture of health and beauty on the outside. But if you could see your heart as God sees it, you would see yourself covered with the most loathsome spiritual leprosy, down to the very depths of your soul. Your heart is corroded with the defiling disease of sin.

And you think, "OK, I confess that I'm sinful. But I'll reform myself. Tell me what to do to effect my cleansing." But no, friend, God's law does not make any provision for cleansing, only for your condemnation. All of your efforts will prove fruitless. All of your religious devotion will only make you more unclean, because all your righteous deeds are filthy rags.

"Well if that's the case," you say, "then I have no hope! I must perish forever in the filth of my sin!" No, dear friend. The same law that condemns you was given to point you to the One who has come and fulfilled the law, to the One who was never unclean. And what has this Savior done? The leprosy of your sin required your isolation—your banishment from the presence of God and the fellowship of His people. Leviticus 13:46 says the leper "shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." Friend, Jesus went into Gethsemane *alone*. The One who once heard the Father's voice from heaven, saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased," called upon His Father in the Garden and heard silence. He was abandoned by His disciples during His trial; "I do not know the man!" In the mystery of mysteries, He was abandoned even by His Father, as He cried out those wretched words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus "suffered outside the gate." The next verse says he suffered, "outside the camp." Do you see it? You deserved to be banished for your leprosy, but Jesus endured that banishment in the place of His people, that we might be accepted and welcomed and restored!

And because of that perfectly sufficient sacrifice, Jesus still does not shrink back from vile sinners. He is still moved with compassion. He still stretches out His hand to the unclean. He still

as it were looks sinners in the eye, smiles, and says, “I am willing.” He still speaks, and all creation obeys. “The waves and winds still know His voice, who ruled them while He dwelt below.”

He has obeyed where you have failed. He has died in the place of sinners. He has risen to demonstrate victory. And He calls you this day to repent of sin and to trust in Him alone for righteousness. And for everyone who does, He says, “Be cleansed,” and immediately their spiritual leprosy leaves them. Oh, come to Christ! What could stop you? What could keep you from such a kind and compassionate and glorious Savior? Bring your sin to the One willing and able to cleanse you!

And then I have a second word of application, to **my brothers and sisters** who are saved—you who know your leprosy to have been cleansed, but who, like me, so often return to your uncleanness. How often do we who have been freed return to our bondage! And yet here is reason to come to Christ the Fountain of cleansing again and again and again! Each day! As we sin afresh, we must betake ourselves to Christ afresh! And friend, He receives you! He came near to you when you were *full* of leprosy! How much more now that you bring only the remnants of sin! How much more does He say, “I am willing,” after the definitive cleansing has already taken place!

You say, “No, you don’t understand. I’ve come so many times, confessing the same sin over and over! How could He ever take me back? How could He ever have hope that I’m truly repentant this time?” Dear friend, this is the Savior who welcomes sinners, who came not to call the righteous but sinners, who came not for the healthy who have no need of a physician, but for the sick! The Savior who did the greater for us—by taking our leprosy upon Himself, and bearing the full fury of God’s wrath against us—will not fail to do the lesser for us, and cleanse us of the remnants of sin’s presence, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession!

Brothers and sisters: Go to Him, every morning, in full acknowledgment of your leprosy, and tell Him, “Lord, here I am again. I’ve defiled myself again. I’ve shamed myself again. But Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” And as you look to the pages of Scripture, look up as it were into His smiling face and His outstretched arm, and hear Him say, in triumphant majesty, “My dear child! How precious you are to Me! There! I see My blood on the doorposts of your heart! There! I see the robe of My own obedience draped across your shoulders! I am not ashamed to call you My brethren. I am willing! Be cleansed!” Dear people, could you refuse Him? Could you walk away from one so lovely?

That kind of boundless compassion—rooted not in sentimentalism but in His own blood-stained cross—that makes me want to root out every vestige of remaining sin in my life. What a motivation to holiness is such a compassionate Savior! Can He be so tender with you, day after

day, sin after sin, prayer after prayer, and you still live in the sin He's cleansed you from? No, you can't. You have been driven by His own loveliness to make war on your sin. You have been delightfully compelled to put to death the deeds of the body, because you cannot wallow in the leprosy that Christ has cleansed you from.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. Like the thief on the cross, there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.