

## The Living Dead

Luke 5:12-16

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Rev. Greg L. Price

Is Jesus Christ a harsh, distant, and unsympathetic judge to those who come to Him? Do we need Mary (the mother of Christ) or any saint or angel in heaven as one who will sympathize with us in our sin and weaknesses and plead our case unto Christ because Christ is unapproachable? Away with all notions that Christ is not sufficiently sympathetic, caring, or approachable. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Certainly, the Lord Jesus Christ is holy and judges all who rely upon their own good works and righteousness to gain the approval of God, and all who are obstinate in their sins. And certainly the Lord Jesus Christ is a faithful husband who burns with a righteous jealousy to have His bride wholly committed to Himself rather than to other lovers. But dear ones, the Lord Jesus Christ does not need the help of any one in heaven or upon earth in order to become more sympathetic, more caring, or more compassionate with your weaknesses and sins. As we shall see today from our text, the loving sympathy of the Lord is not a mere feeling or attitude that is unable to help us, but rather the loving sympathy of the Lord is infinitely powerful and effectual in reaching down to help us, even in the most desperate circumstances, touching us, cleansing us, and exalting us to enjoy blessed communion with Him.

Let us consider the following main points from our text this Lord’s Day:  
(1) Christ First Prays Before Ministering To Needy People (Luke 4:42-44);

and (2) Christ Reaches Out To Touch An Unclean Leper (Luke 5:12-16).

**I. Christ First Prays Before Ministering To Needy People (Luke 4:42-44).**

A. Before the Lord began this next segment of His ministry in preaching throughout the cities and synagogues of Galilee, He took steps to prepare Himself. How did the Lord prepare Himself? Chiefly by means of prayer and personal communion with His heavenly Father. The previous day had been a very eventful Sabbath in the ministry of the Lord (Luke 4:31-41). While Christ was preaching in the synagogue of Capernaum, a man possessed by a demon disrupted the sermon. However, the Lord turned this apparent disruption and hindrance into an object lesson, demonstrating His victory over Satan by casting the demon out of this poor man. Then, returning to Peter's home for the Sabbath meal, the Lord demonstrated that He had come to bear the burdens of His people by healing Peter's mother-in-law and all the sick who came to Him in Capernaum.

B. Now as we consider Luke 4:42, we see that the following day Christ went by Himself into a desert place. For what reason? We find the answer in Mark 1:35. The Lord awoke early the next morning while it was yet dark in order to prepare Himself for the next day's ministry. Of what did His preparation consist? Prayer—time spent in fellowship and communion with His Father in heaven. There are things that Christ could do without in ministering to others: for example, three meals a day, rest immediately when He grew weary, the faithful support and encouragement of family and friends, a regular salary, or an academic degree from rabbinical school, but one thing without which He could not do was prayer. The Son of God considered communion with His Father to

be of such a necessity and of such a delight that He did not begin His day without it.

1. Dear ones, if Christ the Son of God, who was the almighty Creator and who was sinless did not begin His day without prayer, how foolish we are (we who are so weak and frail, and are so very inclined to sin in breaking God's commandments) to think we can serve the Lord and fulfill His calling in our lives without spending time with our Father in prayer as we begin our day and as we end our day (as did the Lord in Luke 22:39). I submit to you that there really is no way for us who call ourselves Christians to bear fruit for Christ, to see others come to Christ through our testimony, to endure the trials and afflictions in this life, and to overcome the sins that prevail in our lives without earnest, fervent prayer and communion with our God each day—pouring our hearts out to Him in praise and thanksgiving, and in confession of sin and humble requests for His grace in our lives for needs.

2. Dear ones, as Christians, we should esteem prayer and His Word more important than our necessary food (“I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” Job 23:12). How important is your time spent with your beloved Savior, dear Christian? If we do not enjoy communion with the Lord in prayer here upon the earth, if we have no desire, no hungering or thirsting to spend time with the Lord in prayer now, how can we look forward to heaven? Why would we want to spend eternity in heaven? For what is it that makes heaven, heaven? Is it not unhindered communion and fellowship with our glorious Savior? In heaven there will be no more temptations, sin, misery, or afflictions to restrict our fellowship with our Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us. If you must sincerely confess that the desire to spend time with the Lord in prayer is not present in your life, do you care that such a holy desire is not present? What are you doing about it? Are you earnestly beseeching the Lord that He might grant you that hungering and thirsting in your soul? Or are you just going about your business,

waiting for God to throw you on your knees, open your mouth, and put a prayer in your mouth? Although a Christian may have struggles with to make prayer in the morning and evening a daily part of his life, a Christian will yet desire in his heart to be more faithful in all such duties (especially prayer).

3. And if prayer is necessary preparation for the Christian's calling in general (in being a light to draw people to Christ and to expose the darkness in the world), how much more it is necessary for Ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is perhaps not a greater temptation in the life of the Minister than to neglect prayer and to excuse himself, due to his very busy schedule (after all, he's doing the Lord's work and this justifies his lack of time spent in prayer and communion with the Lord). However, I submit that the more demanding the schedule (whether yours or mine), the more we need God's grace through the time spent in prayer unto our blessed Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ prepared Himself for the day ahead of Him by prayer, and so must we who trust Christ, love Christ, and follow Christ. Do we really believe we are sufficient in ourselves for all the things we may face in the course of the day? Do we not realize that there is a very real battle for our souls (and the souls of others) that Satan wages against us? How can we avoid the temptations of intellectual and spiritual pride, hypocrisy in saying one thing but practicing something else, anger, bitterness, discontentment, lust, and straying from God's commandments without earnest, fervent prayer unto the Lord? How can we be filled with the Spirit and grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance according to Galatians 5:22-23) without an earnest, fervent crying out to the Lord for His grace? Dear ones, if we would be a blessing (rather than a burden) to God and to others in the calling God has given to us (whatever that calling may presently be), we must be men, women, and children of fervent and sincere prayer. Only after Christ had spent time in prayer was He ready to

minister to and serve others with compassion, with righteousness, and with power.

## **II. Christ Reaches Out To Touch An Unclean Leper (Luke 5:12-15).**

A. Having prepared Himself by means of prayer, the Lord now goes forth to minister the Gospel of salvation. And as He was preaching throughout all the cities of Galilee, a certain man that was “full of leprosy” approaches the Lord Jesus, falls on his face before Christ, and pleads with Him, “Lord, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Luke 5:12).

1. Before we can fully appreciate how the Lord ministered to this man, we must ask, “What was leprosy?” Leprosy was one of the most dreaded diseases of the ancient world (and still is in certain parts of the world). There are primarily two different types of leprosy.

a. First, there is tuberculoid leprosy. This is the milder version of the two types. It is limited more to the skin surface, and advances more slowly. It is often confined to discolored, insensitive areas on the skin. Even in this type of leprosy, damage to nerves may be significant.

b. Second, there is lepromatous leprosy. This is the more severe version of the two types. In lepromatous leprosy, nodules form, frequently on the face of the affected person. The nodules that form tend to ulcerate, and to cause any or all of the following results: destruction of the structures of the nose and ears; exposure of the bones of the skull; and creation of openings through the cheek into the mouth. In many cases, the nodules attack the eyes. Occasionally, the person suffering from this type of leprosy experiences difficulty in chewing and swallowing of food. His voice becomes hoarse (or even lost) once the larynx is affected. A lot of cases involve primarily the nerve trunks, which tend to become swollen and hardened. At first, the person experiences

irritation and pain; later, there is loss of sensation in spots. More often the nerves are paralyzed, with inability to walk or to move the forearm. Some biblical scholars surmise that this form of leprosy may have been the disease (the boils) with which Job was stricken (Source: <http://voices.yahoo.com/leprosy-hansens-disease-tuberculoid-lepromatous-4947916.html>).

c. When we read in Luke 5:12 that this poor man that approached Christ was “full of leprosy”, it would seem that he had the more extreme form of leprosy described above. Here was a man who was suffering physically, the sight of whom was grotesque, and who was cut off from all social contact with family and friends due to his leprosy (as we shall see).

2. This man was the living dead—not simply because of the horrible effects upon the body, but also because of the social alienation it brought with it. Because of the contagious nature of leprosy and because of the need to contain it from spreading to others, God’s Law stipulated that those infected with leprosy were to be quarantined from the rest of society. The only separation more drastic than leprosy was death itself. For that reason, leprosy was a living death. The leper could not live with his/her family. The leper was to dwell alone outside the camp of the people (Leviticus 13:46). Moreover, the leper was to warn any that might approach that he/she was a leper by crying out, “Unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45). The only social fellowship that lepers had was with that of other lepers. Leprosy was indeed a dreadful picture of death and separation.

3. But why was the leper to cry out, “Unclean, unclean”, rather than “Sick, sick”? I would submit to you that there was much more to the isolation of the leper than the mere contagious nature of the disease.

a. Did you notice what the leper asked Christ to do for him? Did he say, “If thou wilt, thou canst heal me?” No, he said, “Lord, If

thou wilt, thou canst make me clean”, or “cleansing me.” Considering all other bodily illnesses that the Lord healed, it is only leprosy that is said to be cleansed, rather than healed (Matthew 10:8). Why? I would submit to you that it was particularly leprosy of all other diseases that God appointed to be a picture of spiritual death and separation from God and from God’s people. Leprosy was a graphic picture of our moral ugliness and deformity before God due to our sin committed against Him in transgressing His good and holy commandments and the separation from God that our sin brings.

b. Leprosy was a living parable of the state of our soul inherited from our parents (beginning with Adam and Eve): all of us by nature are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins, polluted and corrupted before a most holy yet most gracious God, even while physically alive. Ultimately, leprosy was a foreshadowing of that final separation that would befall all of those who will be cut off from God at the Day of Judgment and cast into everlasting torment.

c. Because leprosy pointed **from** its own diseased and distorted body which made one the living dead, **to** sin that has diseased and distorted the soul which makes the unforgiven sinner the living dead, lepers according to God’s Law were to be cleansed and not merely healed, just as sinners need to be cleansed of their sin (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Psalm 51:7; 1 John 1:9). The point is not that lepers were necessarily greater sinners than those who had other physical afflictions. But the Lord chose this particular disease (because of its deforming nature) as an object lesson for all to see, what sin does to us all—sin makes mankind the living dead before God.

d. Dear ones, leprosy was in ancient times a humanly incurable physical disease, even as sin is a humanly incurable moral disease. There was no hope for the leper, apart from God’s supernatural power and grace in cleansing the leper. So likewise mankind is infected with the dreaded disease of sin and is condemned to die (not simply to

die physically, but to die eternally in hell) apart from God's supernatural power and grace that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Here then we see before our eyes a living portrayal of the desperate need of man and the sovereign grace of Christ in cleansing man of his spiritual leprosy that condemns us all.

4. Now turning from the leprosy that plagued this man, note the faith this leper had in the Lord Jesus. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Luke 5:12). He believed that Christ was able to cleanse him. He did not question the power or authority of Christ to cleanse him of his leprosy, but simply fell upon the mercy of Christ alone to cleanse him. Dear ones, just as leprosy made the leper utterly detestable in the sight of people, so sin has made us utterly detestable and unacceptable in the sight of God. There is absolutely nothing in us to commend us to God in our wretched estate of spiritual leprosy. In that estate of spiritual leprosy, mankind only has fellowship with fellow lepers who are likewise doomed to death. There is no hope of being cleansed of this spiritual leprosy by the efforts of mere man. The Bible teaches that as spiritual lepers there is no hope to be cleansed apart from Jesus Christ. This, dear ones, is our hopeless estate in our spiritual leprosy. But such spiritual lepers who acknowledge and confess their spiritual leprosy and sin, and confess their need of Christ are those whom Christ came to cleanse (Mark 2:17).

B. The words of our Lord in Mark 1:41 (the parallel passage) are unfathomable: "And Jesus, **moved with compassion**, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean." The leper had said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The Lord Jesus moved with compassion and filled with pity, reaches out and touches the untouchable leper, and declares, "I will, be thou clean." It is the love of the Lord that moved Him to cleanse the leper. His mercy was aroused by the desperate need of this leper, and His mercy was shown in touching one who was declared to be untouchable (Leviticus 5:3). As our Great

High Priest, Christ touched us and identified with us and became like us, so as to be touched with our infirmities. Christ voluntarily became as it were the chief leper in bearing all our leprosy (2 Corinthians 5:21).

C. Immediately the leper was cleansed according to Luke 5:13. Whereupon the Lord sent him away to the priest (as was taught in the Law of Moses) in order that he might be declared clean and that he might bear testimony unto them concerning the One who had cleansed him. In his zeal, he did not follow the Lord's command, but spread the word abroad. We may understand his excitement, but that was no reason not to follow the commandment of the Lord. Zeal in the Christian life does not replace knowledge and obedience to God's revealed will.

D. If there is any one within the sound of my voice that would acknowledge himself or herself to be a spiritual leper before Christ, utterly unable to help himself or herself, and would desire to be cleansed and forgiven of all sin immediately (even as the leper was cleansed by Christ), you need only cry out to Him in faith trusting alone in Christ alone to cleanse you as did that leper. If you come to Christ, believing in His power and mercy to save you, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean", He will be moved with compassion, will touch you, and well say "I will, be thou clean." Christ came into the world to save sinners (spiritual lepers), even the chief of sinners (even those who have the most severe case of leprosy). None are excluded. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). How do you buy without money and without price? Simply by faith, trusting in Christ alone, in His mercy and power to save and to cleanse you from all your sin and to impute to you His own glorious righteousness.

Those of you who have been cleansed by the grace of God, how should you live? As lepers who are still under the dominion of leprosy? God forbid. That which should characterize a cleansed leper is thankfulness, as we see in the one leper who returned to give thanks to the Lord for his cleansing (Luke 17:17-18).

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