

Covered, Cleansed and Cleared

Luke 5.12-14

The miracles of our Lord served three functions. First, they identified Him as the one sent from God in fulfillment of the Scriptures. In Luke 4.14-21, the Lord was in His home town of Nazareth on the Sabbath. They handed Him the scroll of Isaiah, and after reading what we would call Isaiah 61.1-2, He said, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Secondly, our Lord's miracles served to authenticate His message. From our perspective, we would never think of questioning the Lord's word. We would say, "It is the Lord, of course it is true." But there was nothing about Jesus's physical appearance that would lead anyone to consider Him to any more than another Rabbi except that He had a unique message. As Isaiah said, "There is no beauty or majesty that we should desire Him." So, God empowered Him to do miraculous works which a person could not do apart from God's approval. He, Himself said in John 10.37-38, "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." This confirmation of His message was even extended to His disciples, for on the night of His betrayal, he said to them, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

But there is a third reason for the miracles our Lord did and that is that in each of the miracles He did, we find patterns that illustrate the

gospel. How he healed people shows us how He saves people. His ability to calm the seas, heal diseases and deformities, cast out demons and even raise the dead all give us windows in the natural world through which we can peer into the spiritual world.

Here, in Luke 5.12-14 we have a good example of this in the Lord's healing of a leper.

While Jesus was in one of the towns, 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." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

Then Jesus ordered him, "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."

There are three important gospel principles illustrated in this man's healing and each begins with the latter "C". The leper was Covered, Cleansed and Cleared.

The first point that is illustrated is that the Lord saves none other than those who perceive themselves as nothing other than sin. As this leper was covered with leprosy, so the one who comes to Christ is covered with sin. In order to understand the Bible's use of the word "leprosy" we must understand that it refers to many skin diseases and quite possibly did not include what we call leprosy today. So, we cannot be certain just what sort of disease this man had.

But, we do know what the law said about such diseases and why Luke makes a point of saying that the man was covered with it. We find the reason for it in Leviticus 13.12-13.

“If the disease breaks out all over their skin and, so far as the priest can see, it covers all the skin of the affected person from head to foot, the priest is to examine them, and if the disease has covered their whole body, he shall pronounce them clean. Since it has all turned white, they are clean.

The only way for a person to be declared clean under the law was to be healed of the disease or to be covered with it. There was nothing to be done for the person whose skin was only partially covered with disease. He was unclean and could not be made clean by anything anyone could do. This may sound strange, but it teaches us an important point of gospel truth: the only ones who can be declared clean are those who have no sin and those who are covered with sin.

Nearly everyone in the world sees themselves as a mixture of good and bad. This is true if we are using man's standard for good and bad. And, on that scale, it is wise to maximize your good and minimize your evil. But, it is spiritually deadly to see yourself as a mixture of good and bad in the sight of God. Yet this is what most people do. Many go so far as to think that God's judgment will be some sort of weighing of good and bad to see if a person's good outweighs their bad with one's eternal destiny being determined by which is heavier.

But, when it comes to sin and righteousness, God recognizes only two conditions: absolutely perfect or absolutely sinful. You might be asking, "Is he saying that, using God's standard of judgment, there is no difference between the murderer and the heroic rescuer. There is

no difference between the abortionist and the abortion protestor? No difference between the homosexual activist and the preacher that denounces his conduct. No difference between Hitler and the Jews he slaughtered?"

That is exactly what I am saying. But it matters little that I am saying it. This is what the Scriptures teach. Paul wrote, "There is no difference, for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In the Day of Judgment, there shall be some who come before the Lord as murderers, perverts, liars - we will see the likes of empire builders who slaughtered by the millions. We will see those mid-eastern butchers of our day who kill in the name of their god. We will see the abortionists. And we will see thieves, both the nasty burglar type and the suit and tie financiers who robbed people of their money through tricky financial laws. Yes, we shall see all manner of the sorts of people that appall us with their conduct and whom we are convinced are now headed to hell. And we shall hear the Lord say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from me you evildoers." And we will give our Amen to the Lord's judgment as they are dragged away to eternal punishment.

And then shall be brought before Him many who were addressed as "Reverend" or "Father" in this world - people who were known for their powerful sermons and miraculous works. They will be those who were, indeed, revered and highly esteemed among men. And they will come before the Lord. And they be surprised at the look of disgust and anger in his face. And they shall lay before Him their wonderful work. They shall cry out to Him, "Lord, Lord, . . ." and list those things which they thought would curry his favor. And the Lord shall say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity."

And they and many who watch that scene will be stunned. But, had they listened to the Lord while on earth, they would have known that with Him, it is all good or all bad. But, because they would not acknowledge their all-badness and sought his favor by what scraps of goodness they thought they had, they appeared before Him claiming to be part good and part bad - and there is neither grace nor remedy for such people.

This man was covered with a skin disease, and as such, he came before the Lord and found him a willing Savior.

I cannot help but be impressed with the way this man approached the Lord. He did not come thinking the Lord owed Him anything. He did not argue for the power of his own will in the matter. He did not act as though his coming to the Lord brought upon the Lord any obligation to fulfill his request. He came as someone with nowhere else to go, convinced of the power of Jesus to cure his leprosy. His faith extended as far as what he had heard, that Jesus COULD heal - He had the POWER to do it. But, he had no PROMISE of healing from the Lord so he laid no claim. He simply acknowledged Christ ability and Christ's right to reject him or heal him. "If you are willing, you can make me clean.

Then our Lord revealed His heart as it is toward everyone covered with the leprosy of sin, "I am willing. Be clean." And immediately, the man was cleansed of his disease. The will and power of Christ is all it took. And the will and power of Christ is all it takes for you! And we have more to go on than this leper did for we have this story to show us the Lord is not only able but is also willing. He has power

to cleanse anyone, but He has a will to cleanse only those utterly covered with their sin.

Then the Lord commanded him to offer the required sacrifices of the law for his cleansing. Why? Even though the will and power of Christ are all that is necessary to make a person clean, the sins from which a person is cleansed must still be atoned for. That is what the sacrifices signified. This man was cleansed - cured - but he still needed a legal cleansing. What he had experienced through the sheer grace and mercy of Christ must be legally accounted for at the Temple. Here is a bit of a picture of how God could justify Abraham back in antiquity even before Christ's blood was shed: at the appointed time, there would be offered for him a sacrifice that would atone for those sins from which Abraham had been justified.

But, we stand on the other side of this sacrifice, historically speaking. Christ has died and on that basis, we may say that all for whom Christ made that sacrifice are legally cleared from all their sins. But what was done in the court of heaven must also be experienced on earth. That will done in heaven must also be done here on earth. The cleansing on Calvary must be carried in the heart of all God's elect.

Actually, according to law, a man covered in skin disease was clean and he offered a sacrifice only to make it official and was thus free to live among his brethren and appear at the Temple. The problem was, the man still had the disease. God's salvation goes beyond a mere declaration that one is clean. God makes us clean. He clears our record of every crime against His kingdom and He clears our persons of the disease which made us commit the crimes. He begins this with the New Birth when, by the touch of God the Holy Spirit, our spirits are made whole, utterly cleansed of their foul leprosy of unbelief. But

do we not feel those foul, "leprous" inclinations of evil still in our flesh and do we not long to be cleansed from them?

Our Lord could have said to this man, "What do you need from me? You are covered with leprosy so, under the law you are clean. Go offer the required sacrifices and you will no longer be considered unclean. You will be restored to the full rights of Jewish citizenship."

But then we hear the leper say, "O, wretched leper that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of leprosy?"

And we hear our Lord say, "I will. Be clean!"

Those of us who have trusted Christ have already experienced the beginning of this cleansing. And, in time to come, when He returns for us or, through death, we go to Him, His word to us will be, "Be clean." And so shall we be utterly cleansed from the very presence of sin. No more prohibition from worshipping God at His true Temple, and no more of that foul disease that hinders us from doing as we would like to. His word, "Be clean," shall be completely fulfilled in us!

Glory to God in the highest!

(The following is a portion I was unable to include in the broadcast due to time constraints)

There is also a lesson in the place and purpose of ceremonies. Our Lord told the man to go to the priest and offer a sacrifice for cleansing

as a testimony to them. The sacrifice did not cleanse him for Christ had already done that. Even though Christ told the leper to offer these sacrifices "for you cleansing" he needed no cleansing for Christ had already cleansed him. The sacrifices offered by the former leper were for a TESTIMONY of cleansing in the sight of those priests.

And in similar fashion, neither of the ceremonies Christ commanded can actually make a man clean. They are testimonies of what Christ has already done. Baptism never washed away anyone's sins even though Acts 2.38 seems to say it does. Baptism does not wash away sins any more than those sacrifices cleansed the leper. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away sin! But, when we are baptized, we are setting forth the sacrifice of Christ as a testimony that we have been cleansed.

And the principle is the same in the Lord's Table.