

# Clean (Luke 5:12-16)

## 1. The Context of Leprosy (Lev. 13-14)

### Physical:

- Leprosy was a prolonged skin condition in the Old Testament that barred an individual from communal life and corporate worship in the nation of Israel. It rendered a Jewish male or female “unclean.”
- By the time of the first century, Scribes counted as many as seventy-two different “afflictions” that were defined as leprosy. This dermatological infection included a “rash, swelling, or shiny spot on the skin” that persists and spreads on the human body.
- In modern medical terms, it would be identified today as psoriasis, lupus, ringworm, favus, scalp conditions, certain boils, and even burns (13:24).
- Hanson’s disease (referred to as the “painless hell”) is also included, as this disease attacks the central nervous system, numbing the cooler external areas of the body (hands, feet, nose, and ears).
- Any Jew who developed white or yellow discoloration on the skin was to report to the priest. The latter examined the patient: a man or woman with this skin condition was to be reviewed every seven days for three consecutive cycles if the disease did not worsen (Lev. 13:1-44).
- Once a man or woman is declared “unclean” by the priest, they must depart from the community for fear of defiling others and the ark of the covenant (Lev. 15:31), which was in their midst.

### Social:

- This social and cultural standing for the leper was worse than the illness, which meant living an isolated life in social ostracism. Once the priest declared the person a leper, they were to depart the community, live alone, wear torn clothes, hair unloosed, and a cloth mask, crying “unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13:45).
- This uncleanness separated men from their families, jobs, and community. Unable to work, they depended on the goodwill of family members to provide clothing and food at drop-off points. Nearly all lepers were beggars.
- While they lived alone, sometimes they congregated in “leper camps” outside the villages and cities (2 Kgs. 7:3; Lk. 17:12).
- Lepers lived in a permanent state of quarantine. The Talmud and Mishnah established additional protocols for the Jewish nation to discourage close contact with lepers.

## 2. The Condition of the Leper (v.12)

- Luke informs the reader that the leper “saw Jesus” (v.12), while Mark discloses that the leper “came to Jesus.” How did he find Jesus?
  - The leper may have heard the reports circulating Judea and Galilee (4:36-37, 40) and witnessed Jesus’ miracles from a distance. Regardless, the leper came to Jesus.
- In coming to Jesus, the leper violates quarantine orders and breaks every cultural and social stigma attached to his disease.
- This man was “covered” or “complete” with leprosy, which indicates that he has suffered under this condition for a long time; whatever disease or infection he had was from his head to the soles of his feet.
- In finding Jesus, the leper fell on his face and pleaded, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”
  - The leper acknowledges Jesus’ omnipotence but is unsure of His willingness.
- The leper asks for more than just a miracle; he asks to be cleansed, not just healed.

- A similar account with Naaman (2 Kgs. 5:3-14) is instructive. Naaman is advised to seek a prophet so he can be cured. As a Syrian (Gentile), he was not under the Mosaic Law, which includes purity and ceremonial laws. Naaman needed and experienced another cleansing (v.15-18).
- Additionally, lepers were often viewed as immoral sinners because Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah had been judged with leprosy (Num. 12:6-10; 2 Kgs. 5:25-27; 2 Chron. 26:19).

- People are healed of other diseases and illnesses (4:40). The leper asks to be cleansed.
- The leper asserts that Jesus can cleanse him.
  - He is not asking Jesus to pronounce him “clean,” for that is the Levitical requirement of a priest. He is coming to Jesus to be cleansed.
- This man is asking for more than just physical healing. He is demonstrating the poverty of spirit. In humility, he thrusts himself on the willingness (not just power) of Jesus to cleanse him. What will Jesus do with this “outcast” and unclean man?

## 3. The Compassion of Jesus (v.13)

- Luke omitted that Jesus was “filled with compassion” (Mark 1:41).
- Jesus touched the man. He outstretched His hand.
  - In the Old Testament, God stretches out His hand (Ex. 3:20; 7:5; Deut. 4:34; 9:29; Ps. 136:12), which demonstrates His deliverance, protection, and acts of wonder.
  - Even though Lev. 13 does not prohibit touching a leper, the law demands separation from the leper and others (Lev. 14:46; *Mishnah Nega'im* 3:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:6-12) since uncleanness was regarded as communicable.
- Immediately the leprosy left him, like the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law (4:39).
- If any extremities were missing (Hanson’s disease), they were replaced in a miraculous display of tenderness and power.
- The leper demonstrates the programmatic characteristics that Peter modeled (v.8). Humility and poverty of spirit, casting himself on the mercy of God.

## 4. The Command to the Leper (v.14-15)

Jesus gave the cleansed leper two directions:

- A. Follow the prescription of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 14:1-32). Why?
  - The man was to demonstrate to the priests what the law cannot do (cleanse).
  - The shadows of the Old Testament ceremonial laws were still in operation. They would become obsolete and completed in Christ following His ascension.
- B. To tell no one about the miracle. Why?
  - It is still early in His earthly ministry, and Jesus does not want to prematurely bring any unnecessary attention to Himself, as the people may try to expedite His Messiahship and kingship.

The man disobeyed and told everyone about what Jesus did (Mk. 1:45).

Leprosy is a kind of “parable” of the pervasiveness of sin in every sinner, as sin makes men and women unclean (Isa. 1:6; 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1; Rev. 21:27). The leper was cast out of the camp not just because of hygienic and communal concerns, but because the ark within the camp represents the dwelling of God in their midst (Lev. 15:31).

God had tabernacled among us in human flesh (John 1:14). In touching the man, Jesus did not become unclean but instead made the man clean. Spiritual healing came as God in the flesh went “outside the camp” to cleanse spiritual lepers. God in Christ did what the law could not do: cleanse the defiled.