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Leper's Healing

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Leper's Healing

Abstract

"This healing episode raises interesting questions about action and motivation, and provides little resolution. So why does Jesus choose to miraculously heal this man?"

Posting about Jesus' compassion toward outcasts from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-lepers-healing/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

The Leper's Healing

 [inallthings.org/the-lepers-healing/](https://allthings.org/the-lepers-healing/)

Kayt Frisch

“And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”
– Mark 1:40-45 (ESV)

In the gospel of Mark, the miracle of healing the leper comes in the middle of a string of healing miracles: healing the man with the unclean spirit, healing many, and healing a paralytic. In the gospel of Matthew, it comes near many of the same stories, but it follows directly on the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast to some of the surrounding stories, we are told nothing about the man being healed, other than that he was a leper, the words he used to make his request, and his response to healing. In comparison with the surrounding miracles, two things seem to stand out in this story.

The first is how the leper petitions Jesus: “If you will, you can make me clean.” Not “I hate being a social outcast, please pity me.” Not “I want to be clean so that I can...” but “If you will...”. The language in this request is evocative of one of the best known passages in Matthew’s preceding chapters: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...” (Matt 6:9b-10, NIV). Is that perhaps why Jesus then is filled with an emotion that is translated (among other things) as compassion (NASB), pity (ESV), or indignation (NIV) and heals the leper? Because the leper recognizes and acknowledges that it is about what God wills?

The second thing is the leper’s response: he did the opposite of what Jesus told him to do (that is “say nothing” and “go show yourself to the priest”). The text suggests that the man didn’t even go through the ritual cleansing – he just went out and started sharing what Jesus had done for him. Perhaps this action seems to us to be a natural response. After all, modern Christianity eschews Old Testament sacrifice and (some churches) encourage bubbling over with Jesus, so that you can’t help but share. At the same time, the man directly disobeys Jesus’ instructions, and Mark implies that that disobedience leads to pressure on Jesus’ ministry: “...so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town...”. Why did the former leper act this way? Did he not have a family to return to? If so, why did he choose to stir people up instead of becoming one of Jesus’ followers? Did he hope to provoke Jesus into a different kind of ministry, to push him to be the Messiah?

This healing episode raises interesting questions about action and motivation, and provides little resolution. So why does Jesus choose to miraculously heal this man? The common thread with many other healing miracles as recorded in the gospels seems to be Jesus’ emotional response (though the emotions are often different). Is that perhaps the key? That Jesus consistently shows concern for the outcasts of society, no matter how they will respond?