

## And He touched Me

**Mark 1:40-42** "...A man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees, *"If you are willing, you can make me clean."* Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. *"I am willing,"* He said. *"Be clean!"* Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured." Jesus touched the untouchable, despite 1500 years of religious tradition. The Mosaic law made it very clear. Lepers could not come near anyone. And if anyone came near them, they were to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" so people would stay away. Lepers lived outside the towns and villages all by themselves, all alone. They were untouchable, but Jesus "dared to touch the untouchable." As that leper approached Him, perhaps in the early morning half-light, Jesus would have known he was a leper just from the smell. Lepers were not allowed to bathe, and therefore, their appearance was unmistakable. Even so, Jesus didn't turn away. When that leper approached our Lord and begged, *"If you are willing, you can make me clean,"* Jesus didn't scold him for not shouting, "Unclean!" No. Jesus reached out and **touched** him. It was probably the first touch this man had received in years! Full of compassion, Jesus **touched** the untouchable and cured the incurable.

Then, in accordance with religious tradition, Jesus sent the man back to the priest. Mark 1:43-44 ...Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ***"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."*** (NIV) This is what the Mosaic Law required. When a leper was cured of his disease, the first thing the law required him to do was go to a priest, who would then certify him clean and welcome him back into the community. That's what Jesus told the cured leper to do. Bear in mind, Jesus didn't ignore the traditions of His day. He just didn't let them keep Him from reaching out to people in need. **He touched the untouchable and cured the incurable.**

Leprosy was incurable. It is a disease that causes round red sores on a person's skin and can cause blindness and rotting of the nose bone. It makes a person look terrifying. It is not very contagious, but it could spread after close contact over a very long time. God told Moses how to care for lepers. He made them live apart from the city in a separate area. Today, this is called a quarantined area. Notice, God blessed His people with an advanced form of medical care. Thousands of years ago! The leper had **faith** that Jesus could heal him and he begged Jesus to do so. Jesus was filled with great care and concern. We are not told specifically, but I'm guessing that Jesus went out of His way to the leper colony to visit the sick. Christians today are going to those with AIDS and other diseases to care for them just as Jesus did here. Then Jesus did something no one else was willing to do. He touched the leper with His hand. Other people would not even get close, much less actually touch, a leper. They were all afraid of catching the disease. Can you imagine how wonderful it must have been for the poor leper to feel the touch of another person? Jesus said, ***"I am willing, be clean."*** Instantly the leprosy left the man. He was completely healed by the spoken words of Jesus!

Jesus didn't have to touch him, but he did anyway because he knew how much it would mean to the leper. This not only strengthened the faith of the leper, but was also a witness to all who came into contact with him. The man was so excited about being healed that he quickly spread the news to everyone in the surrounding area. He was happy to tell others how much Jesus had done for him! The question is, "Are

you?" Do you let everyone know when Jesus blesses you? Whenever we get sick or have a disease, let's remember that Jesus **can** heal anything. Pray for healing. And remember to thank Jesus for healing you. Just as the leper was excited about his healing, we should be excited to tell others the great things God has done for us. He wants to **touch** you, no matter what you've done or where you've come from, Jesus cares enough to extend a healing hand.

Let's now return again to the story in Mark. Note, the leper comes to Jesus and Jesus does not run away. Like a mother welcoming her crying, mud-covered child, Jesus allows the leper to approach him. Then what does the leper ask? Does he say, "Heal my disease?" No, he asks, "**Make me clean!**" We miss a great deal if we think of this request as the equivalent to "Heal my disease." The leper is saying:

- "I want to worship God!"
- "I want to be a part of God's people - in relationship to Him!"
- "I want to touch others, to be in relationship with God's people!"

That is what the leper is asking. Of course he wants physical healing. But becoming **clean** is much more than becoming healed! The leper falls on his knees before Jesus, and begs him, pleads with him, saying, "**If you are willing...**" These actions tell us that he knows four important facts:

- (1) He knows he is unworthy. Indeed, he has had this truth drummed into him day after day, hour after hour, for many years. Even looking at himself in the reflection of a pool of water, he sees how despicable he looks. Oh, he knows he is unworthy.
- (2) He knows he can't heal himself or make himself clean. He probably has never even heard of a leper being cured. For years he has lived with no hope at all.
- (3) He knows that Jesus can! Note his statement of faith: "*You can make me clean!*" How he comes to this knowledge, we don't know. He believes with all his heart that Jesus is the one person in all the world who can cleanse him.
- (4) He knows that Jesus has the right to refuse. "*If you are willing...*" He makes no demands. He has no basis for a request, other than Christ's mercy.

So what does Jesus do? Look again at verse 41: "*He stretched out His hand, and **touched him**, and said to him, **'I am willing; be cleansed.'**" Jesus **touches** him! When was the last time someone touched this man? When was the last time anyone put his hand on this gross distortion of a human body? What was the result of Jesus' touch? Verse 42: "**And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.**"*

Note, there are two results: Jesus heals the disease and he cleanses the leper. These are two separate results, not two ways of saying the same thing. The NIV misses the point here, by translating the verse "*the leprosy left him and he was cured.*" If you have an NIV, I suggest that you write 'cleansed' where it says 'cured'. The Greek is perfectly clear on this. And throughout the Bible healing and cleansing are two separate acts. Many may of you need healing, but others need to be cleansed! The important thing is to ask Jesus to TOUCH you!