

WHEN JESUS HEALS THE UNTOUCHABLES

Mark 1:40-45 (ESV) ⁴⁰ And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” ⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³ And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ 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.” ⁴⁵ 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.

Introduction: Story of Justine Sacco, a woman who became a modern-day leper—an outcast, stigmatized, and shamed. She was cast upon the garbage heap of society. In today’s passage, Jesus is dealing with a true untouchable—a man who’d been confined to the rubbish heap of society because of a wasting disease.

I. **The Leper’s Plea** — v. 40

A. The Leper’s Problem

- Leprosy was an umbrella term that encompassed a number of skin diseases (See Leviticus 13-14).
- Lepers were isolated.
- Lepers were unclean.
- Lepers were like living corpses.
- Leprosy symbolized sin and defilement.
- Leprosy was an outward visible sign of inward corruption.

B. The Leper’s Plea — “If you will, you can make me clean.”

II. **The Lord’s Pity** — vv. 41-45

A. A Healing Word and Touch — vv. 41-42

- Jesus could've spoken a word and the man would've been healed. But he reaches out his hand and touches the untouchable one.
- We often see Jesus touching the needy in the Gospel of Mark: (1) When Christ healed Peter’s mother-in-law, he took her by the hand and raised her up [1:31]. (2) He laid his hand on this leper [1:41]. (3) When he healed Jairus’ daughter, he took her by the hand

and said, “Arise” [5:41]. (4) “He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them” [6:5].

- Sinclair Ferguson says that by touching the leper, Jesus was really saying, “I am prepared to become, by choice, what you are by nature—a man under the judgment of the law—in order to share with you what I have—freedom and life.”

B. A Stern Charge — vv. 43-45

- Why would Jesus want to keep his identity a secret?
- The law cannot cleanse the leper. It could condemn him but not cleanse him.
- Jesus takes the weighty burden of this man’s disease, while creating an extra burden for himself.

Conclusion: The story begins with Jesus on the inside and the leper on the outside—excluded, shunned, shamed, and rejected. The story ends with Jesus on the outside—in the desolate places—while the leper has been restored to his community.