

Compassion 04 – Sunday 23rd May

We are reaching an exciting part this series for me; we had an introduction, we looked at the compassion of God in the Old Testament and last week we saw that Jesus was a 'people person'. Now I want to spend some time looking at what Jesus did.

We all know He is compassionate; we know His 'works' flow from His compassion. I hope to examine some of His individual acts of compassion, and see what we can learn from them.

Today we will spend time looking at His encounter with the leper.

Matthew 8 v 1 to 4

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

This is a short yet powerful account, and can also be read in the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

Mark 4 v 40 to 45

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;

And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Luke 5 v 12 to 14

And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

It is an encounter that has been speaking to me for weeks now since I started thinking about preaching a series on compassion. Mark 1 therefore is possibly a better Gospel to read as we are talking about compassion.

Mark 1 v 40 to 42

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

He was moved with compassion the writer of Mark says. On the top layer, the surface layer, this is simple to understand; a sick man comes to Jesus and Jesus heals him.

Now that is awesome, and that is miraculous. Here we see a man with an incurable disease and that man is cured, healed and made whole, and that must have been wonderful for the man. We see a man in need, asking if Jesus will help him. Jesus says yes and helps him, He meets that need. Thinking about our definition from week 1, this is a classic compassion encounter.

The man has need, Jesus sees his need, loves and cares for him, and meets his need by healing him. It looks like a simple encounter, with a simple message; Jesus healed, He has not changed, so He still heals today. But there is so much more going on here, there are deeper meanings to explore.

The Greek is very interesting in this case. For most healings in the Gospels, the writers used a few Greek root words. We know *sozo* (to be saved, healed, made whole prospered etc), and others meaning to cure and to relieve of disease. This word used in this encounter is different.

Yes, we talk of the leper being healed, but Greek points something quite different. The word is *KATH-AR-ID-ZO*, and means to cleanse, literally and figuratively, to cleanse, to purge, to purify. When the leper comes Jesus, you will have noticed that he does not actually ask to be healed, he says can you cleanse me.

In the society of the day, lepers were not so much seen as being sick, not so much as suffering from a disease. They were said to be unclean, that is why they were shunned and put away from all society. They lived in colonies or on their own, away from all society.

They were unclean, so they were shunned, hated, and put away. You can read for yourself about leprosy under the Law in Leviticus 13. Here is a small section of interest for us today.

Leviticus 13 v 44 to 46

He is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head.

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.

All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.

Anyone with leprosy was unclean, they even had to shout that out if they were near people. They had to dwell alone or in notorious leper colonies. According to Numbers 19 v 22, if you touched an unclean person, you also became unclean. That is why they were outcasts from society, had to leave home and leave their family and friends. Jesus should not have touched this man; He should have had nothing to do with him.

Leprosy was (and still is) a horrendous disease, generating terrible disfigurement, where victims were hounded out of society, shunned and shut away, with no human contact. The terrible thing I think is that it did not kill quickly; people had to live with it and cope with it and the severe consequences.

I spoke last week about issues some of us were having in lockdown because of the lack contact, of not being allowed to associate with other people. We are seeing an epidemic of mental health problems right now in our country.

Imagine if I told you that you were to be in lockdown until you die, and could never see your friends or family again. That you could never hug your parents, your spouse, or your children. Imagine what that would do to your mental health. To never touch another human being, and to never be touched by a fellow human ever again. To never kiss your grandchild again, to have no contact with your family or friends ever again.

That was what this man lying prostrate in front of Jesus had before him for rest of his life.

Think on that, and then read this encounter again; it should put it in a new light for you. This man was not just sick, but alone and ostracised from society and humanity.

The Word says the man worshiped Jesus. The Greek here is to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand, to prostrate self in homage. The man is begging Jesus, he is pleading, "if it is your will, you can make me clean". The man was obviously desperate, and Jesus was his last hope.

Doing what he did could have, (in fact should have under the Law), led to him being stoned to death. He is almost saying, "life is not worth living anyway, I may as well try this, come out and try and see if Jesus can help". If he was stoned so what, his life was not worth living anyway.

But what if Jesus was willing? So he took a risk, and it was worth it!

And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him. He did this before He spoke, before He healed him. Is this a picture for us, telling us that the touch was more important than the actual healing? In this account is the human touch more vital than the physical healing?

Jesus should not have touched this man, so why did He? Because He was moved with compassion.

This encounter is also a picture of His work on the cross, it is a beautiful piece of typology.

We know that all through the Old Covenant (which includes the Gospels remember), we can see pictures of the finished work of Jesus. This encounter is a wonderful piece of typology, a picture of His finished work.

In that society leprosy was seen as a sin disease, it was classed as a sin issue. The thought prevailed that sin caused this disease. If you had leprosy, you were an obvious sinner; you had some major sin in your life causing this disease and you were labelled as a sinner and as unclean.

Lepers were unclean, contaminated by sin as it were, so if you touched a leper you took on that uncleanness; we saw that in the Leviticus passage we read. This leper is helpless in state he is in, he cannot help himself. He would stay as a leper for ever, unclean and polluted, not able to get himself out of that state.

But Jesus came along and touched Him, and identified with that state. He took it on as it were, as remember He should have been classed as unclean, also tainted by that sin issue of the man. And the leper was made clean, he was purged and purified and made clean.

The leper is a picture of mankind in his state of sin, unable to free self from his sin nature. And then Jesus came along, and took that sin on Himself on the cross.

Isaiah 53 v 4 and 5

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

2 Cor 5 v 21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

He was made sin, He took on our sin, and mankind was forgiven and reconciled, so that they could be saved and made righteous. AMEN.

Leper being cleansed thru Jesus is a picture of His finished work, His redemptive work for all mankind. And that flowed from compassion as well, His compassion and the compassion of the Father. The compassion shown to the leper is a picture of compassion for mankind.

Both were in need, both were unable to save themselves, both needed a Saviour. Jesus was the answer for both needs, and He was full of love and care and compassion, and He met the needs Himself. What a beautiful picture; we were the lepers. Now we have met Jesus, have been cleaned and purged and purified, and in His eyes, we are now perfect, holy, and righteous.

And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him. Jesus was doing more here than healing the man, more than 'simply' removing the leprosy. He was returning some humanity to the man, He was giving Him back life, and life in abundance.

As I meditated on this encounter, I saw more in this man's plea than a need for physical healing. This was a plea more to do with his place in society rather than health. He specifically asks to be made clean, not healed! Was the man asking to cease being unclean rather than healed of a disease? Was his isolation from family and friends worse than the illness? Was the lack of contact, fellowship, and intimacy worse than the actual physical disease?

Jesus touching him was the start of his return to society, to physical contact, to his life. We cannot live alone; we have seen that last fifteen months during lockdown. Jesus came to bring life and life in abundance (John 10 v 10), and He is doing that to this man by ending his isolation.

I have been trying to see this encounter in my head for three weeks now, trying to imagine what went on as Jesus came down the mountain. The man is lying on ground in worship, at the feet of Jesus. The Word says that Jesus put forth hand and touched him. What would Jesus have had to do in order to touch him?

Jesus would have had to get down on ground, get down his level and go to him. Jesus would at least have had to get onto His knees so that He could touch the man. I then saw the man surprised and shocked to be touched, then in wonder as he was healed, or made clean as he wanted.

I watched a couple of videos while preparing for this sermon, each one spoke to me about the compassion of Jesus. Please watch these links and then spend time meditating yourself; I would be very interested to know what you see.

**The Chosen; Jesus heals the leper
New Creation Church animation**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL8DThlIZAY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKmq7L0d0wY>

And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him. The Greek for touched is HAP-TOM-AHEE. It does mean to touch, but Strong's says it is properly to attach oneself to. Sean sent me some notes over recently, saying the word means to fasten oneself to, adhere to, cling to.

I love that, Jesus' touch was not a fleeting touch with a fingertip. It was clingy, He was not letting go, it was long, and heart felt. I see Him gripping the man, with the touch more like a hug. And remember this is a picture of our relationship with the Lord. His love for you is clingy, He wants to fasten onto you, and not let you go.

And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him. I have not been able to get that phrase out of my head for three weeks now. And there is another important picture for us here. This is a picture of action, of movement, of getting something done. It is a picture of Jesus actually doing something.

And that's a challenge to us to move, to do acts of compassion.

Remember if there is no corresponding action along with love and care, it is just pity or sympathy or empathy. It is not compassion without an action to meet the need.

If we see a need and don't put forth our hand it is not compassion; I would go so far as to say not it is not love. Funding Ademma's hospital fees was you putting forth your hand. Supplying food to the orphans and widows in India is you putting forth your hand. You saw a need, loved, and cared for those people, and you met their need. That is compassion.

And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him. Does anyone remember when Princess Diana was on tour in New York? She went to an Aids hospital in Harlem and hugged some of the kids. She touched them, helping to reduce the stigma of that disease. But she did more than reduce stigma with that touch. She was a compassionate woman and knew that human contact was almost as important as the medical treatment.

She also went to an Aids clinic here in the UK and shook hands with the patients. She also went to a leprosy clinic in Calcutta and held the hands of the children with leprosy. These were all acts to help reduce stigma of those diseases, but also the actions of a person who knew the value of human contact. She knew the importance of human touch to the dignity of a person. They were beautiful acts of compassion, simply by putting forth her hand and touching them.

We can learn so much from this account of Jesus 'healing' the leper. Up until now that was what this account was for me, simply Jesus healing another person. Now I know that this is awesome, that is miraculous and supernatural. But I see now that this is a picture of so much more for us.

It is showing the importance of human contact, of the fellowship of touch. It is showing God's love for us thru finished work of Jesus. It is showing us His love is clingy, how He wants to fasten on to us and never let us go. It is showing us compassion requires action, requires us to move.

And we get all of that from that one little expression in the Word; And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him.

AMEN