

"BE THOU CLEAN"

"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." Matthew 8:1-3.

Our Lord Jesus Christ descended the mountain after delivering His most famous sermon, and was followed by the crowds. God's Word was precious in those days; now, alas! the shorter the sermon, and the less scripture it contains, the better it is liked. Just as Christ and the crowd that was accompanying Him were about to enter one of the little towns, an amazing, eye-opening, and heart-moving spectacle met His eyes. A poor, unnamed leper appeared before Him.

Leprosy was the worst and most foul disease known to man. Yet it was amazing how long one could conceal the disease. Ashamed of being known as lepers, those who contracted the disease would hide it as long as possible.

Separation from all contact with one's fellowmen was required because leprosy was contagious. Isolation was required because it was unsightly. If any leper saw anybody approaching him, he had to cry out as loudly as possible, "Unclean, unclean," meaning, "Don't come near me." Anyone who touched a leper was, by that act, made ceremonially unclean, and was regarded as unfit to approach God or to associate with religious people.

Leprosy is no joke, as any one who has come in contact with it knows. All known cases are still isolated, but in the days of our Saviour's ministry on earth a leper was sent away from his family, forbidden to associate with people, forced to obtain his food where and how he could, and his death was considered as a great favor to the community. To a leper all of the comforts and joys of home life and all the sweets of friendship were only memories. He had been banished from society.

I. Cleansing Required.

This man was a leper and he knew it. He knew, even better than anybody else, in what a wretched state he was. He knew that he was in the grip of a devastating illness from which it was utterly impossible for him to cure himself. He also knew that none of his fellowmen could cure him. All considered his case as absolutely hopeless, for leprosy was incurable except by the miraculous power of God. He knew that his disease was in its last stages and he was approaching the end of a hopeless existence.

This leper was thoroughly conscious of his need of cleansing. He was aware that he was as repulsive as death. He knew that everybody loathed his presence. He was not self-deceived. He did not congratulate himself that he was getting better when in reality he was rapidly approaching death. He did not make any effort to deceive others about his condition. He did not try to cover up his sores and then endeavor to make himself out to be as clean as other people. His head was bare; he wore the garment of a leper; and from his lips there repeatedly came the mournful cry, "Unclean, unclean!"

Although this leper had long since despaired of cleansing himself, he still knew that unless cleansing was obtained that death would ensue. Without any hope of obtaining a cure from any earthly source, this man refused to face death willingly as long as a chance of life remained. It was the desperateness of his case that led him with heroic courage to expose himself to the risk of being stoned to death in order to cast himself at the feet of the Saviour. After all, what did he have to lose? He was dying anyhow, and if they should kill him they would just be putting him out of his misery. Forgetting everything else, and thinking that Christ was able to cure his leprosy, if He

so desired, this man courageously ran toward Him. As those on the fringe of the crowd saw him approaching, they made an opening for him to get to Christ, just like the Red Sea opened for Moses. They were so fearful that he might touch one of them that they quickly cleared the way for the leper to get to Christ. Believing that Christ could meet his great need, and with the hope of healing struggling in him, the leper ran to Christ, thinking that it was a case of now or never with him. He forgot to draw his mantle over his face; forgot to keep his fingers on his lips; forgot to cry, "Unclean!"; forgot all except his need of cleansing and the possibility of getting it supplied.

In that leper we have a picture of ourselves, unless we have received Christ's cleansing. Leprosy is a type of sin. Unsaved friend, do you recognize the likeness of leprosy and sin? Are you willing to acknowledge it? Sin, that terrible disease of which leprosy was but the type, has hold of you. It has corrupted your very nature. Are you conscious of your vileness? Are you willing to give up forever the futile endeavor to establish your own righteousness? Do you realize that you cannot cleanse yourself? Are you aware that no strength of your will, or no length of your struggle will shake off the grip of your sins? Do you realize that you must receive cleansing from sin if you escape the torments of hell? Have you learned that from Christ alone you can obtain salvation? This leper was ready and willing to acknowledge his need. The trouble with many who are unsaved is that they are not willing to acknowledge their need of the Saviour.

Christian friend, do you realize your sins and your failures, and how much you need the cleansing work of God in your soul? All of us are desperately in need of God's marvelous grace. Are you conscious of a battle that is going on in your soul, some failure in your Christian life, or some lack in your testimony for the Lord? What is your besetting sin? Where is it that you have been defeated time and time again? Maybe it is in some sin of the flesh, or maybe it is some insidious sin of the spirit, like pride, or jealousy, or envy. The Holy Spirit knows. Even though you may have tried repeatedly to deliver yourself from your besetting sin, you have been powerless to do so. It has been as impossible for you to cleanse yourself of your sin as it was for this leper to cleanse himself of his leprosy.

II. Cleansing Requested.

In what this man was physically we find a picture of what we are spiritually. He had the physical disease of leprosy and we have the spiritual disease of sin. In what this leper did we find an indication as to what we must do. Notice some of the things which he did.

1. He came to Jesus Christ.

This man realized that Christ Jesus was the only one who could help him. He had gotten beyond the place of trusting in men for the help which he needed. He had also gone beyond trusting in a place or places. Today many church members think that if they are to get great blessings that it must be through the preaching of some particular man, or through going to some specific place. May God help us to see that we do not have to go to any particular man or to any specific place, but that it is a matter of coming to Christ. If you have a conscious need, you should do what the leper did, namely, bring it to the feet of Christ.

2. He worshiped Jesus Christ.

The leper approached Christ with an attitude of reverence, and to Him he rendered obeisance. He readily acknowledged that Christ was the one with all power. He both recognized and confessed the lordship of Christ. When he knelt before the Lord

Jesus, it was for the specific purpose of making an absolute surrender of himself to Him, and to place himself in His hands without reservation. Believing that everything depended on the will of Christ, he submitted himself to that blessed will with implicit faith and joyful hope. Are you willing to worship Christ in this manner? Without unreserved and unconditional surrender to Christ cleansing and blessing cannot be obtained.

3. He prayed to Jesus Christ.

Approaching Christ with his sense of need and his consciousness of personal helplessness, the man "fell on his face and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." In many respects that was a model prayer. It was simple; it was short; it was direct and to the point. But, above everything else, it was a prayer grounded on a glorious faith in the power of Christ. He firmly believed that Christ was able to cleanse him of his leprosy. There was a glorious audacity about his prayer. It asked for a blessing that no earthly power could grant; it refused to measure the Christ by any earthly standards; and it refused to believe that for Christ anything was impossible. In substance he said, Lord I am diseased, I am desperate, I am longing, and I am earnestly asking Thee to cleanse me. Truly there was purpose, meaning, earnestness, and reality in his prayer. And the Lord wants the same things from us with all our problems and all of our needs. He rightfully expects us to come to Him with our needs and to make definite and purposeful requests of Him. Christian friend, can you pray like that man prayed? Do you believe that Christ can cleanse you of impure thoughts, evil desires, envy, malice, pride, and other devastating sins? Have you ceased to say, "Can God?" Have you learned to say, "God can"? If so, rejoice then, because your deliverance is at hand.

The leper discovered that Christ was not only able to meet his need, but that He was also willing to do so. Do you believe that the Lord is not only able, but that He is willing to deliver you from sin, from bondage to self, and from that which dishonors Him? God has provided for His children a life of deliverance from those things that displease and dishonor Him; a life of positive victory that glorifies Him. The glorious deliverance of this leper is but an illustration of both the ability and the willingness of Christ to deliver us from the power of the temptations of Satan, and to make us the clean, godly, and useful people that He wants us to be.

III. Cleansing Received.

Look at this scene with your soul's eyes because blessings rest upon your seeing it aright. There was the Lord Jesus in the full strength of His manhood and in the joy of His earthly ministry. And there at His feet, kneeling in humble adoration, was the leper, loathsome and repulsive; and surrounding them was the curious and disgusted crowd, filled at once with wonder at the audacity of the man and at the reception Christ was giving him. But that scene did not remain the same very long.

In that solemn moment those who were near could hear the words of self-renouncing and God-honoring faith as the leper said: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." As they watched, they saw Christ put forth His hand and lovingly touch that poor body from which all others shrank, and they heard the Saviour say: "I will; be thou clean." Immediately they saw a change come over the leper. A flush crossed the pale face; the despairing look gave way to one of radiant joy; the cringing stoop and the feeble gait, which characterized an outcast, gave way to the upright attitude and firm tread. A miracle had been wrought by the Christ: the leper had been cleansed. The clean One had touched the unclean one, and instead of contracting defilement, He imparted cleansing and gave deliverance. The faith of this leper had evoked an instant demonstration of the divine power. Christ had rewarded the man's faith and submission by giving an immediate, real, complete, and obvious cure.

Note very carefully how this cleansing was received. The leper received it as a gift. In no sense did he cleanse himself. All ground of boasting was taken away. His cleansing came directly and only from Christ. The only thing the leper could claim was the desperateness of his need. The Lord said: "Be thou clean," and instant healing and cleansing came to him as the free gift of the loving Saviour. Thank God, it is always that way!

What must we do to experience the Lord's deliverance from our sins? We must be conscious of our needs. We must recognize the fact that our Lord is able to deliver us; also, that He is willing to do so. Then, let us appeal to Him, and trust Him to do it. Christ will cleanse you from sin if you will come to Him without delay and fully trust Him. What you can neither earn nor buy, you can receive from Him without money or price. You can receive forgiveness and cleansing of your sins now, if you will accept them as gifts from Christ. Won't you receive cleansing now while we sing?