



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG39: The Miracles of Jesus (4/6) *A Leper Made Clean*

Mark 1:40-45

Home Group Study Notes

24th October 2010 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and
other resources that might be helpful.*



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Think of a time that you felt excluded in any way, perhaps as new person in the office staff room or without a friend in the playground, how did it make you feel?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, Mark 1:40-45, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

1: Jesus' compassion never ended with just words, it always moved him to do something. He said "*I am willing*" and the man was healed just like the others in our series so far. Today, healings seem less certain, more random. Do you believe that Jesus is able and willing to deal with the issues that you bring Him? Are there examples of when He has and when you feel he hasn't?

2: We are bombarded by requests for help from appeals and charities to friends, families and even church. Those words of Jesus; "*I am willing*," challenged me and made feel uncomfortable when I think about all the times I am *not* willing to do something perhaps because I am too busy, too tired or else I think someone else will do it!! Is He challenging you? Do you find it easy to get the balance right between always being willing to help and not overloading yourself?

3: Is it easier to believe that Jesus will heal you and make you clean from all your sins than it is that he will heal you of an illness, if so why?

Of course as appears to be usual, the man disobeys, he takes his healing and tells everyone - and you can't really blame him. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. "*Yet the people still came to him from everywhere*" Its strange that the people that Jesus told to keep quiet about what he had done for them went immediately out and did the opposite and told everyone who would listen, on the other hand he has told us to go out and tell everyone what he's done for us, and we also do the opposite, although this time we tell no one, whose disobedience would upset him more I wonder?

Conclusion.

Once more in this story we see how to bring our needs to Jesus, reverently, humbly and worshipping Him as Lord, believing that not only does he have the power to heal but that he is also willing to heal. He also asks a question that lots of us have, - we know theoretically that Jesus is able to heal but we're not quite sure that he has the power, or desire to heal the really big diseases we face, - cancer, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, Alzheimer's, and so on. We are much more likely to get excited about and place our hope in the latest breakthrough in medical science. When we pray, we hope He will heal but we're not going to count on it and so our hope doesn't ever really become the kind of faith like the leper had.

We put barriers in our way, we say to ourselves, "*ah, but did God actually tell me he was going to heal that... have I done everything I can to please God and put myself in a right relationship with Him.... have I prayed in accordance with the latest model.... said the right words... covered every possible angle,*" and so we get a bit lost. This man did none of these things, he simply came, he had heard of Jesus, about what he was saying and doing and so he came, acknowledging who he was and what he was able to do. He was desperate, bold and reckless and Jesus loved him for it. He shows us that when we come in this way, Jesus gladly receives us and no one is turned away when they come in faith like this leper did.

The destructive power of this disease also gives us a very realistic picture of the effect that sin has on our lives, it eats away at us, goes deep into our beings, and gradually destroys who we are and who God intended us to be. This man's grotesque outward appearance serves as an illustration of what our spirits look like to God, - diseased and corrupt as a result of our sin and this man simply looked on the outside what we look like in our spirits before we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As Christians we are people that have been made clean and raised from spiritual death by the saving power of Jesus Christ. This story is testimony to the amazing power that Jesus has to make us clean, to raise us from the dead, to take our ugliness and make it something beautiful and to change us from once expelled people, into his children.

When we come to Jesus in the way that this humble leper came, regardless of our condition or how great our need is, we are coming to the One who cares and whose compassion knows no limit, no one is incurable, no one is untouchable. Jesus turns no one away who comes to him in sincere faith.

So let's heed the advice given to us by the author to the Hebrews when he says: "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

Never were there two men standing face to face in more unnatural circumstances, the man before his creator, one in the ruined wreck of a bodyand the other...King of Life Himself trapped in human form. Such a meeting and one where Jesus was furious at the effects of sin in the world. He was filled with compassion that moved him to action, this man was not living as God had intended him to. Jesus looked on the ugliness before him but he didn't turn away or recoil, He was moved deep in his heart, and he reached out and he touched the man. It may well have been years since he last felt the touch of someone's hand on him.

If you have read any Philip Yancey books you may be familiar with Dr Paul Brand, a Christian missionary who conducted some of the most influential research on the disease and Yancey often quotes him. He says, *"More than any other person in the world the person with leprosy needs to be treated by somebody who will reach out his hand . . . and touch him. . . . Oh, I have seen men break down into tears at that time because they have found someone who would touch them."* Jesus touched the man. He says *"I am willing, be clean."* God is not only able to do anything, but He is also willing, willing to meet the needs of the most despised and rejected of men. Perhaps this incident of the healing of the leper more than any other in the whole of the Bible shows us that Jesus' love is beyond words ...Jesus didn't need to touch the man, we know from other healings when Jesus couldn't physically be present to touch someone that he just had to say a word and people were healed or delivered, but here he wanted to show beyond doubt that he cared, and so he reached out his hand and touched the untouchable.

In an instant the man was physically healed and spiritually cleansed. He was now whole! His ulcerated hands and feet were suddenly whole and toes and fingers grew out of the once shrivelled stubs, his hair and even his eyebrows grew back, a nose appeared and his skin became soft and smooth, he stood up tall and danced with delight Can you imagine the effect on anyone watching all this, can you hear that man cry, *"I'm clean, no longer unclean, I'm clean."*

Tell No One.

Jesus tells the man to keep quiet about what has happened, but instructed him to go to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for his cleansing. Jesus doesn't usually have much time for the priests but in this incident he is upholding Mosaic Law. Jesus was always careful to stay true to God's law and it was decreed in Lev 14 that lepers who no longer display symptoms must be declared clean by a priest. There are also specific sacrifices that must be offered (Leviticus 14). Only once this had been done could the leper be welcomed back into society.

By telling the priest, the man's healing would be legitimized and shown to be genuine and complete. He would also be testifying to the priests and others what God was doing... He was doing the impossible and healing a leper and in such times there were more chances of a dead man being raised to life than a leper being healed, in other words, it simply did not happen. This along with all the other miracles of Jesus pointed to the new work of salvation that God was doing, that the Messianic Age had arrived, and the Kingdom of God was at hand!

By asking the man to keep quiet Jesus was probably trying to keep his identity as the Messiah hidden. He wanted people to absorb his teaching and understand that He was different to what they hoped their Messiah would be like. He most likely wanted to prevent being mobbed and protect His ministry from being hindered. His reputation as a healer already brought crowds and if word got out that he was healing lepers, or the incurables, he would lose his ability to travel freely without being mobbed and do what he was sent to do because although Jesus always wanted to heal people of their physical ailments, that wasn't His primary calling, it was to *"to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10).

4: It's a horrible thought that before Jesus made us clean by forgiving our sins we could imagine that on the inside we looked something like this man did on the outside. Does this image prompt you to be more committed to the time you spend in prayer for people that you know who have not yet accepted Christ as Saviour?

5: This man was desperate and so he came before Jesus probably barring His way, Jesus was not going to be able to ignore him, but he came in a worshipful attitude, bowing and acknowledging that it was in Jesus power to heal him. It all sounds very simple. Do you think that we lost the simplicity of faith that this man displays?

6: Dr Brand tells us that the leper longs for human contact, that need is obviously not exclusive to lepers. Is there anyone that you know who lives alone or is struggling presently who you feel God is prompting you to come alongside and provide the friendship or help they need?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG39: The Miracles of Jesus (4/6) *A Leper Made Clean*

Mark 1:40-45

Home Group Sermon Notes

24th October 2010 - Pauline Woolnough

What is Leprosy?

Leprosy is caused by a bacteria, *Mycobacterium leprae*, similar to that which causes tuberculosis, today it is known as Hansen Disease and is curable with strong antibiotics but the effectiveness of the treatment is dependant on an early diagnosis. In biblical times leprosy was considered incurable and anyone diagnosed with it was banned from society. Matthew and Mark simply refer to this man as a leper but Luke the Physician says he is "covered with leprosy" indicating that his disease was far advanced.

William Barclay says this about leprosy. *"There never has been any disease which so separated a man from his fellow-men as leprosy did."* He goes on to describe different forms of the disease. *"It might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge; the eyebrows fall out; the eyes become staring; the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years, and it ends with mental decay, coma and ultimately death. Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches."*

One of the most vivid images I have of the portrayal of people suffering from leprosy is from the film Jesus Christ Superstar. Jesus is walking through a mountainous region and dark shadowy figures wearing rags squeeze out of the cracks in the cliffs, they reach out to him and lumber towards him zombie like because a leprous man would be the closest thing we could think of to "the walking dead".

Dead Man Walking.

Leviticus 13:45-46 says *"The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp"* and Leviticus 13:1-3 states: *"... (3) The priest shall examine him, and pronounce him ceremoniously unclean."* These verses tell us that leprosy had both physical and religious effects upon a person. By being expelled from the camp the leper was banished from society, he was dead to his friends and family, and he was excluded from God's presence among His people. By declaring a leper ceremonially and socially "unclean" the disease was seen as an illustration of the curse of sin and a sign of God's disfavour and touching someone with leprosy defiled a Jew almost as much as touching a dead person.

As if all this wasn't enough God even cursed some people with leprosy as a direct consequence of sin, e.g. Moses' sister Miriam was struck with leprosy because of her rebellion against God's authority through Moses. (Numbers 12:10). (for other examples see also 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 and 2 Kings 5:27). This man had no life and up until the day he met Jesus, he had no hope. This study is becoming a bit like a horror story but I wanted you to realise just how awful this man's situation was, it couldn't have been worse.

A Meeting of Opposites.

Matthew has this incident happening directly after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is preaching around the towns in Galilee and news of his teaching and healings would have spread. Luke 5:12, tells us that this man is in one of the towns, he's *actually* inside the town, he wasn't supposed to be there, but he sneaks in because he is so desperate that he is willing to break the rules and come into the village to find Jesus. He knew that Jesus had healed many incurable diseases so if he could cure other illnesses, why not leprosy, but like the woman who reached out to touch the hem of Jesus garment, simply coming to Jesus for healing was a risk in itself. He risked being beaten or having stones thrown at him if he didn't strictly observe the rules to keep his distance from people, but to him it was worth the risk. He was willing to risk any punishment, however severe for the chance of being healed, and so he finds himself face to face with Jesus, the walking dead meets with the Lord of Life Himself...never was there such contrast in a meeting!

The Leper's Faith.

The man must have heard that Jesus had healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases and even freed those possessed by demons, leprosy however was different but he put aside any reasons that might have kept him away. He put aside any fears of being beaten by angry crowds, he put aside the feelings of shame and humiliation that he lived with every minute of every day and he put aside any doubts that leprosy might be too big for Jesus and just got himself before Him. He came with a genuine sense of reverence. He knew he wasn't worthy, that fact had been made plain to him day after day for years but he came all the same and he worshipped Jesus. In Matthew he uses the word (proskuneō) which literally describes the act of "kissing toward" meaning to do "reverence" or "homage" to someone - perhaps kissing the hand or foot.

In Luke 5.12 he falls to the ground face down calling Jesus "Lord" and although Lord may have been a term generally used for master he was unlikely to risk coming before a mere man in his situation and beg for healing, he'd need to have been mad, so we can conclude that this man believed Jesus was the Son of God and he worshiped Him as such. He acknowledged Jesus' power, he said, *"Lord . . . You **can** make me clean"*. Note that the man didn't ask Jesus to heal him, he wanted to be made clean. Only God could heal but so great was his faith that by acknowledging this, he was saying that he believed it was in Jesus' power and authority to completely heal him and make him "clean" - not only physically, but also ceremonially before God and man.

Finally the leprous man left the matter to Jesus' will. He said, *"Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."* He states his belief that Jesus could do what Elijah could do -- heal a leper. He's saying it isn't a matter of ability, rather, it is a matter of will. He knows that Jesus is able to heal him, but is he *willing* to? We sometimes see this kind of prayer as a cop out, as if by praying in this way means that we have a lack of faith but to really leave things to God's will requires that we trust him totally and believe that whatever the outcome it is God's will and therefore the very best outcome for us. He knew that Jesus had the right to refuse and so he makes no demands he simply puts himself before Jesus, boldly, but reverently and acknowledged His power; he went with humility leaving the matter of his healing to his sovereign will and mercy.