

February 15, 2009

If You Are Willing...

Mark 1:40-45

*"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 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." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. 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."*

*Mark 1:40-45(NIV)*

"A man with leprosy came to him..." Most of us have never seen leprosy up close and personal. Unfortunately, I have. It is a chronic disease that leads to loss of sensation with eventual paralysis. It causes the muscles to waste away accompanied by ugly deformities and mutilation. Because it is such a hideous disease, many cultures cast lepers out. They become untouchables.

The man that comes begging before Jesus is such an untouchable. He's been separated from his family, his faith community and his friends by this disease. He is considered unclean and made an outcast. His law, the Law of Moses, declares him impure, and that whoever would touch him would also be impure.

This leper falls to his knees before Jesus and begs, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." He believes Jesus has power over his pitiable state. Then Jesus reaches out his hand and touches the leper says, "I am willing," and the man is cured.

So here's the question: Why did Jesus touch him? It was forbidden. Yet the scripture makes a point of this act of compassion: Jesus reaches out to touch the untouchable. He touches him in his untouchability and makes him clean. Then, by instructing the man to go to the priests, Jesus provides the way for the man to re-enter society once again while, at the same time, providing a testimony to the priesthood that God's hand is at work in their midst.

It's just like Jesus to use this intense moment to teach a valuable lesson: anyone can approach Jesus, no matter the condition, for Jesus is not under the hand of the Law, but the Law is in the hands of Jesus. So if anyone has the taint of leprosy in his soul, or feels the paralysis of guilt in her heart, he can say, "Lord, if you are willing..."

- If you are willing to come to him, the Lord is willing to receive you.
- If you are willing to humble yourself before Him in your need, your misfortune, your victimization, your alienation, the Lord is willing to show a compassion born out of a righteous indignation for all that would harm and oppress His people.

- If you are willing to make your request, to offer your prayer, the Lord is willing to reach out to you and touch you with his warmth, his presence, his help and power, according to the will of God.
- If you are willing to obey him as a testimony to his mercy and grace, then the Lord is willing to...

Wait! The story breaks down at this point. The leper doesn't obey. This man who was once lost to his family but now found, unclean but now clean, once deformed but now whole, is strongly warned by Jesus to tell no one; instead, he begins to tell everyone that Jesus is willing to touch the untouchable. He just can't contain his excitement, for he has experienced a conversion: his life has changed so that it no longer points to self but to Jesus.

Not all of us have or will experience a conversion so dramatic, but all of us should exhibit in our own coming to Jesus an excitement and gratitude that points to Him as our Lord and Savior.