

A LEPER CLEANSED

Mark 1:40-45

Intro: In the Psalms, as we have recently seen, the Psalmist might say something like this: "Make known his deeds among the people" (Psa. 105:1), meaning the Lord's deeds. Or, as we also read in the second verse of that same Psalm, "Talk ye of all his wondrous works."

In OT times that seems to have mean preeminently talking about the Lord's works in creation, or His work in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan, or His work in defeating the Canaanites and giving the land to the people of Israel. The people were under obligation to talk about these things. They were to tell them to their children, and their children were to tell them to their children, and so on. They were not to let that message die, and, to insure that it would not die, the Bible was written.

As time went on, the Lord gave His people more and more to talk about. One of the largest sections of the Bible is made up of the four Gospels. There we have the life of our Lord, His messages, and His works. We are to know them and to talk about them.

The reasons for this are many:

- 1) We are inclined to talk about our own works, or about the works of people we admire. But to talk about the Lord's works keeps our conversation on the highest possible level.
- 2) It glorifies God.
- 3) It is strengthening to our faith.
- 4) It is the best way of ministering to others.

If we are going to talk about the works of the Lord, we cannot overlook His miracles, and especially His work of cleansing a leper. I am not going to discuss whether or not this was the disease which we know as leprosy today. Some think that it was not. But whatever it was, there was no known cure for it. Those afflicted with it died a slow, painful death. It affected the inside of the body as well as the outside. It was a very disfiguring disease and so it was very humiliating to anyone who had it. Gradually it meant the loss of hands and feet, arms and legs, ears, noses, eyes, and so on and on. It seems from the Gospels that there were numerous lepers in our Lord's day, and that He healed many of them. If He had only healed the one mentioned in the story before us in Mark 1, it would have been well worth all of us talking about it. The Lord did for that leper what no one else could possibly have done. That is what makes the works of the Lord so wonderful. When you talk about them, you are

speaking of what no mere man could possibly do.

But let us get to our text. The first point that Mark made had to do with:

I. THE LEPER (Mark 1:40).

It would seem that the first thing we can say about him is that he should not have been where he was. It might depend upon how far the disease had progressed in his case, but people with leprosy were exiled from their homes and communities because the disease could easily spread.

A second thing that we can say is that this man was desperate, and we ought to be able to understand that. Mark says that the leper came to Jesus. He said that the leper besought the Lord, kneeling down before Him, and saying, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

To beseech the Lord meant that he was imploring the Lord to heal him. He knew that this was his one and only chance to get his health back. In kneeling before the Lord we are impressed with his humility. He knew that he had no right to expect that the Lord would heal him. But he knew that the Lord could if He would.

Behind this statement we can see was some knowledge of the Lord and His power. He obviously knew that the Lord could heal. Perhaps this leper had known someone else who had been healed from his leprosy. And so it seemed to him that the job he faced was that of convincing the Lord to heal him. We do not know how this man got leprosy, but we see often in our Lord's miracles that trouble had come upon people because of sin in their lives. This was not always the case, but it was sometimes. And we all are inclined to look for reasons as to why we should suddenly experience some physical problem. There are many questions about this man that we cannot answer.

I wonder if it would be correct to say that this leper was convinced of the Lord's power, but did not understand that He was a Man of compassion, of love. There is nothing here to indicate that the leper understood Who the Lord was; he only recognized the Lord as One Who could perform the kind of a miracle which he needed.

This is about all that we can say about the leper.

Now let us look at:

II. THE LORD (Mark 1:41).

Mark tells us what went on in the Lord's heart before He did anything, or said anything. He was "moved with compassion."

This is an expression which means that our Lord was touched to the depth of His being. It means that His heart was immediately drawn to the leper and to his plight, and that He wanted to do something to help him. It means that the condition of this man did not bring out the judgment of our Lord, but His kindness, His mercy, His love. This is the verb from which we get the word which is often translated "bowels" in the NT.

How important it is for us, or anyone else, to understand all that can be known of the Lord. He is righteous. He is holy. He is God. But, as God He is also kind and loving and tender. If it were not for the mercy of God and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the Lord would never have come to the earth. And no one would ever have been healed. There would have been no salvation. But He is kind and good and merciful and gracious and loving. And the leper was to see all of this. The reason for the healing of this leper lay in the character of the Lord, not in the worthiness of the leper.

And so the Lord did what people did not usually do with a leper; He touched him. And then He said this, "I will; be thou clean." Any question that the leper had about the willingness of the Lord to heal him was now gone! He was able, and He was willing, and the leper knew then that nothing stood in the way of his return to full health.

This led to the performance of:

III. THE MIRACLE (Mark 1:42).

The Lord did not tell him to go home and that gradually he would get better. The Lord rebuked the disease and immediately he was cleansed. The disease was no longer in his body, and it probably was the case that any disfiguring which had been done to his body was also immediately repaired. This was truly an amazing miracle.

The account of the miracle in Mark's Gospel ends with three very important and very instructive verses. They contain the Lord's charge to this former leper. And then the account closes by telling us of the man's disobedience to the Lord's command.

IV. THE LORD'S CHARGES (Mark 1:43-45).

There are two charges that the Lord gave to the leper. The first was this:

A. Be quiet (v. 43, 44a).

In verse 41 our Lord told him to "be...clean"; here in verse 44 He told this former leper in so many words to be quiet. He was not to say a word about what had happened to him to a single person!

Now that would have been a very difficult thing for any of us to obey if we had been in that leper's condition, and then suddenly cleansed as he had been. And so it is not surprising to learn in verse 45 that this man did not obey the Lord.

We have no reason to think that he obeyed the second charge either. What was it?

B. Go and show himself to the priest, and do what the Law required that he do (v. 44b).

Now let us look at both of these charges to learn what we can about the reason for each of them.

First, let me mention that we all need to learn the importance of doing what the Lord tells us to do even though we may not understand God's reasons for giving such commands to us. Obviously this man had a great deal to learn. We can understand why he was anxious to tell others about what had happened to him, but he is certainly not to be excused for doing it. He was being disobedient to the Lord.

Why did the Lord not want him to start telling people what had happened to him? Let me suggest a couple of reasons.

In the first place, with the little that this man knew about the Lord, he could easily have spread the wrong kind of information. To him it was important that he had been healed, but it is clear from what he said to the Lord that his knowledge of the Lord was imperfect, and he needed to have a greater understanding of the Lord before he went out to talk to others.

He was different from Mary and Martha. They believed that the Lord could have saved Iazarus from death. What bothered them was why He didn't come when they called Him. The leper knew that the Lord could, but he was not sure that He would.

Many see, and I believe rightly so, that we have in this miracle a parable of salvation. There is no question but that leprosy in the Bible is a type of sin. And so the cleansing of the leper gives us a picture of the salvation of a sinner. This being the case, we need to learn from this that new converts are not to start preaching right away, and

maybe never. A person may be prominent in Hollywood, or politics, or business. He may be a great public speaker, but when he comes to Christ the wisest thing for him to do is to do as the Lord told this leper: "Be quiet."

Years ago there was a Hollywood actress who was going around the country as it was popular for those who had supposedly converted in those days to do, and I heard her say on radio or TV (I have forgotten which) that she had been saved twelve times! If there was ever a lady who needed to be quiet, she was one of them! She could not have been saved even twice. For her to say that she had been saved twelve times shows how lacking she was in understanding what salvation is.

C. The result of the cleansed leper's disobedience (v. 45).

Another reason that the Lord had for telling this man to be quiet was because of what eventually happened. People then were like they are today. They will go anywhere to see something spectacular take place. What the Lord wanted to come out of this miracle was proof that He was the Messiah. His main work on earth was not healing diseases; His main work was seeking and saving those who were lost. And it is easy to get sidetracked on the physical and completely miss the surpassing importance of the spiritual.

This man drew great crowds to the Lord, but Mark has nothing to say about what of eternal value was accomplished. Just because great crowds gather actually in itself means nothing. It is what takes place in people's hearts that is the important thing to God.

But what about showing himself to the priest, or priests?

The Lord gave His reason for this: "for a testimony unto them."

How many times do you think that priests had gone to the Law to find out what to do with a leper who had been cleansed? I think that because this seems to have come early in the ministry of the Lord that we are safe in saying, "Never!" You can imagine how they would frantically go to the scrolls to look for the instructions that Moses had given to them. Actually it is found in Leviticus 14. The priests may have done more later, but this was the first!

But the lesson for us to learn from this was that the leper could be a testimony to the priests, not by what he said, but by what he was--cleansed, healed, made like new. And in turn this was to make the priests ask the question, "What kind of

a man can do something like this?"

Cf. what the Apostle John had to say about the meaning of our Lord's miracles in John 20:30, 31. (Quote.) The miracles were signs, marks of identification, which showed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and that He had come in fulfillment of OT prophecy. This is what the Lord wanted people to understand.

It will always be true that what we say has to be backed up with what we are or people will never believe what we say. And until a babe in Christ learns about his salvation, let him know that he can do far more good by showing people what he is, that he is a new creature, changed, than all that he could ever hope to accomplish by what he has to say. He may draw large crowds by talking about the miracle, but think of what could have been done if the message had gotten through to the hearts of the priests.

Think about this when you read what is recorded in Acts 6:7:
And the word of God increased;
and the number of the disciples multiplied
in Jerusalem greatly;
**and a great company of the priests
were obedient to the faith.**

Concl: God's way is always best because God's way always leads to the accomplishment of God's purposes. And so let us learn from this miracle not only about the power and grace of our Lord, but also the importance of doing exactly what He tells us to do.