

“Crucial Compassion”
Mark 1:40–45
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This is a terrific passage that will teach us about our Lord Jesus Christ. To give us a little background on the text I will start at verse 39. Mark 1:39–45 says [39] *And he (Jesus) went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

[40] *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.”* [41] *Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”* [42] *And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* [43] *And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, [44] and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”* [45] *But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*

Here ends the reading of God’s Word and may God use it to continue to bless us as we study it together.

My wife, Leslie, and I returned from vacation yesterday. We were in the hills of North Carolina around Asheville. As I was loading the suitcases in the car yesterday morning, our 4 year old grandson Knox came by watching me pack the car and said “Hi Mark” and then walked back in. In our family granddaddy is known as ‘Dindee’ which is what they call me. So I was shocked when Knox said ‘Hi Mark.’ I smiled, went inside and told his mother, our oldest daughter, that Knox had just called me ‘Mark’ and she burst out laughing. Then she looked across the room to Knox and said ‘Knox why did you refer to your Dindee as Mark?’ He looked bewildered and said ‘Well, that’s what Meme calls him.’ Meme is my wife Leslie. I thought about that when I thought about this passage. Knox is learning what it means to be a grandson. It was fine. I do hope he sticks with Dindee rather than Mark but he is still learning how a grandson relates to a granddad and I’m learning how a granddad relates to a grandson and that will hopefully go on for many years.

I thought about my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ because each of us who know Christ have a relationship with Him and that grows and spreads over the years. Through those years we learn more and more about Him and the attributes of Him. It’s a wonderful thing to realize that is a relationship that will continue into eternity. As we live with Him into eternity we will get to know Him better and better for that will be an ongoing process that will never end but it begins now and it’s in passages like this where we may learn things about the Lord that may surprise us, please us and perhaps perplex us. Nonetheless this is a passage that is very instructive about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me start by giving a little bit of the background. In the first century, when Jesus lived, disease was rampant and medical care for all practical purposes was non-existent so diseases could not be dealt with properly. One of the most feared diseases in that day was called leprosy. Leprosy probably represented a term for a cluster of skin type diseases that were very infectious and contagious. So this back then was a general term but it also included our term for leprosy which is Hansen’s disease. When one skin problem was identified as leprosy it ushered in a pedal state of existence because a person with leprosy would suffer from the physical

ravages of the disease. They would have blemishes, scaling, ugliness, odor, deformities and sometimes great pain. It would be a crippling that was impossible humanly to cure.

Likewise, there were not only the problems with the physical ravages of the disease but the ceremonial impurity within Jewish culture. In Leviticus 13:45–46 it says [45] *“The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ [46] He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.”* This guideline was obviously given to limit the contagious nature of leprosy but it was also a command that was very much abused by the people. It led to a great deal of discrimination and persecution.

Of the 61 defilements that were spoken of in that day in Judaism the worst was touching a dead body and the second worst defilement was leprosy. In fact, a Rabbi in the Talmud said he would not even eat an egg bought in a street where a leper had passed by. Lepers went through a great deal of isolation, loneliness and suffering and this was a context in which Jesus ministered. His interaction with the leper therefore was very instructive. In this study I want to look at both sides of the exchange, first from the leper’s point of view and then from Jesus’ point of view.

We can learn a lot from a leper. There is a commercial on TV that promotes the use of seatbelts and the slogan in the ad says ‘You can learn a lot from a dummy’ referring to the crash dummies they use to test cars. In this case you can learn a lot from a leper because this man knew his need. In fact in the Luke 5 version of this story it says that this man was covered with leprosy and he would recall it every time he saw his reflection, felt the pain, experienced rejection or every time he had to warn others of his presence. In other words, this man’s need drove him to Jesus with three things that are very important in this passage.

First this man’s need drove him to Jesus with faith. He came to Jesus with faith. Momentum and inertia were against him. He had nothing to offer Jesus and every reason to expect rejection yet he came. Perhaps he had heard that saying that Jesus had given in order to seek Him out and we see it in Matthew 11:28–30 which says [28] *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* So the leper boldly came to Him. He learned a great lesson for us, for there is no problem or sin so great that it should block us from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s been said that either we will come to Jesus or our sin will keep us away. This man was not going to allow his affliction to keep him away so he came in faith to Jesus.

Secondly, this man’s need drove him to Jesus with humility. In Mark 1:40a it says [40a] *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling...* The same account in Luke 5:12a says [12] *While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him...* This leper begged Jesus to heal him. He knew his own unworthiness, his need for mercy, he didn’t come on his own terms and had no real sense of entitlement for Jesus owed him nothing and yet he came in worship bowing down to Him.

I think about that when I come into worship. It is such an honor to come and praise the Lord Jesus and bow down before Him. Sometimes we’re so jaded by our access into worship with God. We do it week after week after week and we forget what it cost our Lord and Savior to allow us to come openly and freely worship the Lord each week at this church. I am delighted in what our country provides in our freedom to do so but how much more in the ability to do so provided by my Savior Jesus Christ.

Tim Keller said ‘Worship is pulling our affections off our idols and putting them on God.’ This man’s idol was his leprosy. It was what defined him, his identity and it consumed his life. In his coming to Jesus he cast aside his care about that to be in His presence. We all have idols in our life or things that define us, some good and some bad yet all can be a distraction and this is a good pattern for us for we need to cast those things aside like this man did and come into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, this man’s need drove him to Jesus with confession. This man publically confessed as he said to Jesus ‘if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ There was probably a good group of people that were around Jesus and this leper proclaimed his faith as he came to Him. Now this leper didn’t know if Jesus would heal him but he knew that Jesus could heal him and he came. This is a great pattern for us to follow. This man knew it was worth a shot so he came in confession to Jesus. Perhaps this is a good mirror of the verse in Hebrews 4. Hebrews 4:16 says *[16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* This leper is a wonderful picture of an approach to Christ where he cast aside his own obsession with his own sinfulness, was willing to understand he was not worthy to come and yet he came boldly before Jesus Christ.

It also contrasts because we see not only the leper’s perspective but Jesus’ perspective and in a sense it’s a shocking picture that we see or a shocking Savior so to speak. Jesus completely understood the social and religious attitudes towards those who had leprosy. Everyone would expect Jesus to move back when a man with leprosy steps into His presence, but Jesus doesn’t do that. Unbelievably, Jesus steps forward to meet him. That was unprecedented for Jesus was surrounded by diseases, pain and unbelievable needs yet His heart never hardened for someone like this leper. He didn’t just feel sorry for the man but He entered into his life and that’s the nature of the Incarnation of Christ, to enter into a sinful world and not just stay perched in heaven.

One wonders, because Jesus rejected concern for his Self-preservation for He was fully human so could He contract diseases of this world? The Bible never says He couldn’t and one would expect that a fully human Savior would be vulnerable yet Jesus rejected that. Jesus rejected the social attitudes that said He should stay away. He rejected the spiritual and ministerial expedience that might say ‘the religious leaders will hate me all the more if I do this.’ Jesus didn’t let any of that get in the way for Jesus was motivated by two things.

One, Jesus was motivated by love for His heavenly Father. Jesus was not just motivated by the needs of this world but by the need for obedience to His Father. We are reminded of this when we read John 4:34 which says *[34] Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”* Jesus said in John 17:4, *[4] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.* The Apostle Paul picks up that same obsession to be pleasing to God in his relationship with Christ when he was speaking in Acts 20 to the elders in Ephesus when he said in Acts 20:24, *[24] But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

I wonder what would happen in a church like ours if suddenly our chief motive in all that we do, even in worship is simply to please the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t think we’d care nearly as much as to what kind of hymns we’re singing or the temperature in the room or the people who were sitting around us or about the load of problems of the day, if we realize what an honor it is to directly worship the Lord Jesus Christ. We would no longer care about pleasing others or gaining a blessing or doing something out of a sense of duty. Lord, thank You that You actually

hear my worship as I come to You. Jesus' motive was to please the Father as we should be to please Him.

Secondly, Jesus was motivated by love for this man who suffered deeply. Jesus not only did something shocking when He moved toward this man but He actually reached out and touched this man. Mark 1:41a says *[41a] Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him...* Jesus touched the scaly skin, the deformities, the flesh that smelled and that was significant for two reasons – one was for the leper and one was for Jesus.

One reason was it was an unheard of act of compassion. You can almost hear the crowd gasp as Jesus stretched out His hand to touch him. Jesus could have declared from a distance that this man be healed but Jesus knew this man needed more than healing. This man needed to know the One who did the healing. That is what is true of all of us in all our circumstances. We don't need to be fixed, we need to know Jesus. Our family and friends don't need to have their lives blessed, they need to know Jesus. Ultimately this man's problem was not his leprosy even though everyone looked at him that way. His problem was a lack of Christ in his life and he was going to get Christ that day. Jesus reached out, moved toward him and then He touched him. It is an unbelievable statement of compassion on the part of Jesus.

Secondly, this was a significant moment for Jesus. It was a chance for Him to show expression for what true religion is all about because religion is not simply a matter of ceremonial regulations and rituals. It is partly that but not entirely or mainly that. In fact, it's much more a matter from God's perspective of mercy and sacrifice. We see this in churches and individuals who move away from Scripture perhaps because they have been taught they can't trust the Bible and so they no longer read it and their religion doesn't go away but it's replaced by a hyper ritualistic religion that is sometimes very legalistic. They gradually believe that if they just go through the ritual then they are okay where they just do the prayers or show up to do the ritual part.

It's a terrible lie because Jesus demands not sacrifice but mercy. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 twice in the Gospels (Matthew 9:13, 12:7) where it says *[6] For I desire steadfast love (mercy) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.* This man wasn't healed because of the touch of Jesus, he was healed because of the will of Jesus. Jesus said 'I am willing, be clean' (Mark 1:41). Don't miss the fact that this was Jesus' word that did this. Jesus didn't apply any medication. He simply said "I will" and "You are clean." His word is what healed this man. It is an amazing picture because by His word lepers are cleansed, the lame walk, the blind see, and the demons flee. Opposition is silenced and judgment will come. By His word the lost are saved.

It's a supernatural work of grace that is powerful. This is what we have at our disposal as we witness to or minister to or share with others the Gospel of grace which is the supernatural power of God to change people. Jesus spoke and things happened. We never need to be squeamish about who we represent, who can speak and creation blossoms, who can speak and judgment will come. This shows even more what we learn about Jesus. It's almost terrifying. The One we serve can speak and miracles can happen but we rejoice in His power and authority. He speaks and revival comes and that's what we pray.

As I look at this passage I come away with some questions because Jesus concludes this miracle with a very unusual command. Jesus tells this man not to tell anyone but to go and present himself to the priests and this is what Jesus is referring to. As a poor person he would take two small birds and the priest would let one of the birds go free and then kill the other bird to sprinkle the healed person with the blood from the dead bird. Then the priest would

pronounce him clean. My question is why the secrecy? Why tell this man to be quiet and go to the priest.

In the modern church today we would have that healed man up on the stage giving his testimony because it would pack out a sanctuary. Jesus didn't want to do that. There are different theories as to why Jesus would want to keep this secret. Some believe Jesus didn't want the crowds to follow Him just because He was a miracle worker. I'm sure that was partially true because that wasn't the focus of His ministry. Some think Jesus didn't want to intimidate or overthrow the Roman or religious authorities of the day. I don't think that is what is going on here though according to the text.

Mark 1:44 says [44] *and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, **for a proof to them.**"* Jesus wanted them to see an unmistakable testimony of His power and love and that He was sent by the heavenly Father. This man was to go to the priest so that would tie the miracle directly to Jesus and see its Messianic implications, its focus on mercy, love and grace. Jesus is attacking the skepticism of these priests by sending that man to him but the man doesn't go.

That leads me to another question, what was Jesus thinking? Didn't He know this man would not go to the priests? I'm sure He did. If I had been that man, the first thing I probably would have done was to go tell my family and friends. I certainly might tell the skeptics who kicked dirt on me in my village. It might be that he later on went and told the priests for we don't entirely know what all happened with him but of course Jesus knew. Therefore it begs the question, why didn't He just skip this man? Because this man was healed the crowds got so tight that Jesus was no longer able to preach in the cities, towns and villages of Galilee. In other words, that part of His strategy was no longer applicable.

Mark 1:38–39 says [38] *And he (Jesus) said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."* [39] *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.* This man's disobedience blocked that and caused a change in Jesus' ministry strategy. Didn't Jesus know this would hurt His strategy? Sure, I think He knew that but this leads me to my next question.

Why did Jesus heal this man? He didn't heal everybody. In the book of Acts we find that John and Peter went into the temple and a lame man approached them looking for alms. Acts 3:6 says [6] *But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"* That man had been sitting at that gate for 40 years. There were plenty of times Jesus had gone in and out of that gate to heal that man.

Jesus didn't heal everybody so why not skip this man? We learn from the text exactly why. Mark 1:41 says [41] ***Moved with pity**, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."* Jesus was moved by compassion. He saw this poor man bound up by disease, shunned by society, hated by all, needing deliverance and salvation, and acted. Compassion is that significant kindness extended to another, especially when he or she has no right to expect it and has no way to repay it. It is an astounding trait of Jesus and His heavenly Father. We see this in the parable of the prodigal son for we see that picture of God when the prodigal returns. Luke 11:20 says [20] *But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.* That son didn't deserve to be taken back. This is the compassion of God.

We find that Jesus is repeatedly compassionate with the crowds and we see this in Mark 6:34 when it says [34] *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.*

We see another instance in Mark 8 where this crowd had been with Jesus for two or three days and He says in Mark 8:2, [2] *“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.”* This resulted in the feeding of the 4,000. We see the compassion Jesus had on a widow in Nain in Luke 7:12–13 where it says [12] *“As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. [13] And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”* Jesus healed her son. Jesus was filled with compassion.

Compassion is something that is often lost among us believers. We think of our rituals, our religious practices, what we do, we read the Bible, and pray as we should but so often compassion for the lost or those who can't reciprocate is lost in what we do. I don't think it's any accident that the compassion of Christ is what so attracted people and certainly the miracles but a religious Leader that does things out of love, grace and kindness creates a revival because He was compassionate. I sometimes wonder if I was more compassionate how many doors might open for ministry and opportunity to share the Gospel and not because someone could do something for me or repay but just because of the compassion of Christ compels me to reach out to be kind, gracious and loving.

In this text we see that compassion became the fuel for an amazing revival among the people so that “Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to Him.” That's a revival for you right there. It is an awesome picture of the response of God. As we think of this compassion and how it applies to us I want to leave you with three takeaways.

First, compassion is hard to refute. People can oppose our politics. They may reject our morality. They may ridicule our religious scruples but they have no answer for our compassion. That breaks down barriers when nothing else does. Why did she bring me that bowl of soup? Why did he stop and help me? Why did they sit down and comfort me when I was sad? Nobody else at work has even thought about that. Why did they seek to help in some way when I was in need? That is bewildering to people. Our compassion is hard to explain. Jesus sternly warned the leper after he was healed what to do and the man promptly ignored Him. Jesus knew this would happen but it didn't stop Him from showing His compassion.

Secondly, we find that His compassion is freely given. Jesus didn't something that I wouldn't. If I was Jesus I would have warned the man first. I would have said ‘I'm going to heal you but you better promise you're going to go to the priests, give yourself and take that offering like you're supposed to do. Will you? Are you sure? Ok then I'll heal you.’ Jesus healed him first because that is what compassion does. Jesus didn't wait to make sure it was a give and take situation and the man ended up doing what Jesus didn't want him to do, but He had compassion anyway. This man was made in the image of God and that was sufficient to prompt Jesus to reach out and seek to free him from the binds of Satan. That qualified him to be a recipient of Jesus' compassion.

Thirdly, compassion is needed by me. Remember this leper is you and me. Jesus doesn't need me or my talents and skills. There are many more that able to benefit the Kingdom better than me but He has reached out to me, knowing that in the future I'm liable to disappoint Him and knowing that sin is not entirely erased from my life. Yet He reaches out to bring me to Himself because that is what a compassionate God does. I have no room to be proud or nothing to commend myself but He saved me nonetheless and that should be a great incentive to me to be compassionate to others, because Jesus was compassionate to me. Who in your life needs a little

compassion? They may not be able to bless you or pay you back. They may not be able to help your social standing. So who in your life could you reach out to simply because you know the compassion of Christ and you seek to bestow it on someone else?

A few years ago I was convicted of this when I was pastor in Georgia. Most of the time we held our session meetings on Sunday morning before Sunday school and it would start at 7:30 and end by 9:30. We couldn't go over because some would be teaching Sunday school. Right after we started this one session meeting on a Sunday morning my phone rang and I looked to see that it was my mother calling. It was very unusual for her to call that early on Sunday morning. I excused myself from the meeting and said to her 'Mom, what's going on, are you okay?' She said 'I'm fine. I just wanted to let you know that Saddam Husain had been captured.' That just happened to be what was making headlines at the time. Husain had been dethroned of power, on the run, captured, eventually tried and executed.

My mom had been thinking a lot about that and wanted to call and tell me what had just happened. I responded by saying 'I guess he is finally going to get his 'come uppins'' and my mom's next words will never leave me. She said 'Mark, I was praying that he would come to Jesus.' I felt convicted for my lack of compassion here for this man and I remember going back into that session meeting with my 'tail between my legs' confessing to them my conviction just then with my mom. My mom's impulse was compassion. Husain didn't deserve Jesus but neither do I. He didn't deserve salvation but I am there entirely because of God's grace.

If you are reading this and you don't know Jesus I want to invite you to take advantage of His compassion. He died on the cross to bear your sins so that you have the opportunity of having your slate wiped clean as you come to Him. As you trust Him, turn from your sins and embrace Him as Savior and Lord He clothes you with His righteousness so that on that Day when you stand before God, as undeserving as we are, and if God says to you 'why should I let you in heaven' it's only because of the righteousness of Christ where He has paid the penalty of your sin, clothed in His righteousness that you deserve to be let in. So when people look at you now they no longer see the crud and despair but they see Jesus Christ in you. I pray that would be a great incentive for all of us to those we come in contact with. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for Your grace and mercy in each one of our lives. What a marvelous story You have given us in Your Word! What a picture of Your compassion and grace! We thank You so much for giving us the opportunity of coming before You and I pray Lord that we might continue to serve You faithfully as You give us the opportunities. May we do it because of what You have done for us. Perhaps someone will respond and come to Christ but may we not be so agenda driven that we're not just loving and caring for all that You put in our path because You were caring of us. We thank You and ask Your blessing on us, in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Power Point

I. LESSONS FROM A LEPER.

This man's need drove him to Jesus with...

A. Faith ("came to Him");

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, you will

find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

B. Humility (“imploring Him, and kneeling”);

C. Confession (“If you are willing, You can...”).

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

II. SHOCKING SAVIOR.

Jesus was motivated by love...

A. For His Father who created this man.

John 4:34, “My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”

John 17:4 “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.”

Acts 20:24 “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me...”

B. For this man who suffered deeply...

III. LOGICAL QUESTIONS.

A. “Why the secrecy?”

Best – “for a proof to them” - unmistakable testimony of Jesus’ power, love and that He was sent by the Father.

B. “What was Jesus thinking?”

C. “Why did Jesus do it?”

Best – “moved with pity” (compassion)

IV. THREE TAKEAWAYS...

A. “Compassion is hard to refute.”

B. “Compassion is freely given.”

C. “Compassion is needed by me.”

Remember, this leper is you and me.