

IF YOU CHOOSE

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA

On February 16, 2003

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Keep children in mind. Seekers. Old. Young. Liberal. Conservative. Young adults. Singles.

*40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' 'Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' *Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.*

"After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, -"saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' 4'But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

In some movies there is a cinematic technique where you first view a scene at the ordinary speed that it took place, then we are shown the same scene in slow motion that let's viewers capture details missed when shown at full speed). We see things that we hadn't noticed.

This is a story of a leper, therefore an outsider who comes to Jesus. We're reminded of Naaman the leper who came to Elijah in the OT times. The OT law (Leviticus) gives lengthy regulations as to how to deal with lepers. They are to be excluded from the community and to live apart (ghettoized). They may be admitted only after giving proof that they've been healed, cleansed and have made the proper sacrifices.

Why would a leper risk approaching a "clean" man? The leper puts into danger, not only himself for breaking the law, but also Jesus whom he might defile.

Three actions of the leper:

"he comes" to Jesus — reminds us of when Jesus says, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest..." "Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out." Just as I am without one plea - will welcome, cleanse...

"begging him" (7rapakcaow) - who are some others who "beg" Jesus to do something?

"kneeling" (yovonE-rov) — who else kneels?

"he said" — the content of the leper's begging. A dog may beg without saying anything. Perhaps the leper's bodily attitude expressed begging (like cup his hands and holding them out). Now he adds content to his begging.

He says, "If you are willing (AEkris)" what does the Bible say about God's will and Christ's will. "He is not willing that any should perish", "Not my will, but yours, be done." "I do the will of my father."

"you are able" — The leper doesn't question the ability of Jesus to heal- but does question his willingness. We are instructed by Jesus to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

"to cleanse me (KocOapio`Oryri) — cleanse has literal as well as metaphorical meaning. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of all sins." Cf to baptism, the washing of the water with the word.

The response of Jesus.

Jesus has compassion (GraccrtvirsOgis) — compassion is often mentioned as a characteristic of Jesus (and of God). Jesus shows us the compassion of God. The word "compassion" literally has a "gutsy" meaning like "his insides were torn up" at the begging leper who approached him. This may be the first use of the word "compassion" in Mark. So far Jesus has cast out an unclean spirit, healed a woman of fever (fevers are usually temporary), and now cleanses a man's leprosy (not to speak of the other healings of groups).

Not only does Jesus have compassion, he stretches out his hand and touches him (ex-mi. vas -Env xcipa amou worm) - the OT law forbid contact between a leper and a healthy man. If a leper comes in physical contact with a healthy person — the healthy person is considered to be contaminated and to be treated as if he himself had leprosy.

And Jesus says to him, "I will, be cleansed." - Jesus is the Word (Genesis, John) of God. Just as God says, "Let there be light", Jesus says, "be cleansed." His word brings to pass his will

The actions of Jesus parallel the actions of the leper.

The leper comes to Jesus Jesus has compassion

The leper begs — Jesus stretches out his hand

The leper kneels — Jesus touches him

The leper speaks — Jesus speaks

"And straightway, immediately, the leprosy left him" — there are no signs. Ears and nose and feet restored. Flesh is clean and unblemished.

"And he was cleansed"

But the second act of the play begins. In the aftermath of the healing, what Jesus feels, does, and says seems strange.

"And he (Jesus) groaned with the notion of coercion springing out of displeasure, anger, indignation, antagonism; he expresses indignant displeasure (sur3pliariacquEvos) and sent him away (Egf3or.X.Ev). Two strong words are used (capiur)acku&vos) and (ssi3a2k.sv). Where else are they used in Mark?

Mark 14:5 "they scolded her" — why would Jesus scold the man or get all hot and bothered?

Why would Jesus compel the man to leave — after all, Jesus said, "whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out." "the spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness", "cast out unclean spirit", "send crowd away", "Jesus put them all outside", "drive out those who bought and sold", "threw him out of the vineyard".

And he said to him, "Tell no one anything" the Markan secrecy. "but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what was proscribed by Moses, as a witness to them."

But the cleansed leper went out and began to "preach", "herald" many things and the word got around, so that no longer was he able openly in a city to enter, but outside in wilderness places was he. And they came to him from all sides, quarters."