

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LORD AND THE LEPER.

A Sermon

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.”—Mark i. 40, 41, 42.

BELOVED, we saw in the reading, that our Lord had been engaged in special prayer. He had gone alone on the mountain-side to have communion with God. Simon and the rest search for him, and he comes away in the early morning with the burrs from the hill-side upon his garments, the smell of the field upon him, even of a field that the Lord God had blessed; he comes forth among the people, charged with power which he had received in communion with the Father; and now we may expect to see wonders. And we do see them; for devils fear and fly when he speaks the word; and by-and-by, there comes to him one, an extraordinary being, condemned to live apart from the rest of men, lest he should spread defilement all around. A leper comes to him, and kneels before him, and expresses his confident faith in him, that he can make him whole. Now is the Son of Man glorious in his power to save.

The Lord Jesus Christ at this day has all power in heaven and in earth. He is charged with a divine energy to bless all who come to him for healing. Oh, that we may see to-day some great wonder of his power and grace! Oh, for one of the days of the Son of Man here and now! To that end it is absolutely needful that we should find a case for his spiritual power to work upon. Is there not one here in whom his grace may prove its omnipotence? Not you, ye good, ye self-righteous! You yield him no space to work in. You that are whole have no need of a physician: in you there is no opportunity for him to display his miraculous force. But yonder are the men we seek for. Forlorn, and lost, full of evil, and self-condemned, you are the characters we seek. You that feel as if you were possessed with evil spirits, and you that are leprous with sin, you are the persons in whom Jesus will find ample room and verge enough for the display of his holy skill. Of you I might say, as he once said of the man born blind: you are here that the works of God may be

manifest in you. You, with your guilt and your depravity, you furnish the empty vessels into which his grace may be poured, the sick souls upon whom he may display his matchless power to bless and save. Be hopeful, then, ye sinful ones! Look up this morning for the Lord's approach, and expect that even in you he will work great marvels. This leper shall be a picture—yea, I hope a mirror—in whom you will see yourselves. I do pray that as I go over the details of this miracle many here may put themselves in the leper's place, and do just as the leper did, and receive, just as the leper received, cleansing from the hand of Christ. O Spirit of the living God, the thousands of our Israel now entreat thee to work, that Jesus, the Son of God, may be glorified here and now!

I. I will begin my rehearsal of the gospel narrative by remarking, first, that **THIS LEPER'S FAITH MADE HIM EAGER TO BE HEALED**. He was a leper; I will not stay just now to describe what horrors are compacted into that single word; but he believed that Jesus could cleanse him, and his belief stirred him to an anxious desire to be healed at once.

Alas! we have to deal with spiritual lepers eaten up with the foul disease of sin; but *some of them do not believe that they ever can be healed*, and the consequence is that despair makes them sin most greedily. "I may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," is the inward impression of many a sinner when he fears that there is no mercy and no help for him. Because there is no hope, therefore they plunge deeper and yet deeper into the slough of iniquity. Oh, that you might be delivered from that false idea! Mercy still rules the hour. There is hope while Jesus sends his gospel to you, and bids you repent. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins": this is a sweet sentence of a true creed. I believe also in the renewal of men's hearts; for the Lord can give new hearts and right spirits to the evil and unthankful. I would that you believed it; for if you did, I trust it would quicken you into seeking that your sins might be forgiven and your minds might be renewed. Do you believe it? Then come to Jesus and receive the blessings of free grace.

We have a number of lepers who come in among us whose disease is white upon their brows, and visible to all beholders, and yet *they are indifferent*: they do not mourn their wickedness, nor wish to be cleansed from it. They sit among God's people, and they listen to the doctrine of a new birth, and the news of pardon, and they hear the teaching as though it had nothing to do with them. If now and then they half wish that salvation would come to them, it is too languid a wish to last. They have not yet so perceived their disease and their danger as to pray to be delivered from them. They sleep on upon the bed of sloth, and care neither for heaven nor hell. Indifference to spiritual things is the sin of the age. Men are stolid of heart about eternal realities. An awful apathy is upon the multitude. The leper in our text was not so foolish as this. He eagerly desired to be delivered from his dreadful malady: with heart and soul he pined to be cleansed from its terrible defilement. Oh that it were so with you! May the Lord make you feel how depraved your heart is, and how diseased with sin are all the faculties of your soul! Alas, dear friends,

there are some that even love their leprosy! Is it not a sad thing to have to speak thus? Surely, madness is in men's hearts. Men do not wish to be saved from doing evil. They love the ways and wages of iniquity. They would like to go to heaven, but they must have their drunken frolics on the road; they would very well like to be saved from hell, but not from the sin which is the cause of it. Their notion of salvation is not to be saved from the love of evil, and to be made pure and clean; but that is God's meaning when he speaks of salvation. How can they hope to be the slaves of sin, and yet at the same time be free? Our first necessity is to be saved from sinning. The very name of Jesus tells us *that*: he is called Jesus because "he shall save his people from their sins." These persons do not care for a salvation which would mean self-denial and the giving up of ungodly lusts. O wretched lepers, that count their leprosy to be a beauty, and take pleasure in sin which in the sight of God is far more loathsome than the worst disease of the body! Oh, that Christ Jesus would come and change their views of things until they were of the same mind as God towards sin; and you know he calls it "that abominable thing which I hate." Oh, if men could see their love to wrong things to be a disease more sickening than leprosy, they would fain be saved, and saved at once! Holy Spirit, convince of sin, that sinners may be eager to be cleansed!

Lepers were obliged to consort together: lepers associated with lepers, and they must have made up a dreadful confraternity. How glad they would have been to escape from it! But I know spiritual lepers who *love the company of their fellow lepers*. Yes, and the more leprous a man becomes, the more do they admire him. A bold sinner is often the idol of his comrades. Though foul in his life, others cling to him for that very reason. Such persons like to learn some new bit of wickedness, they are eager to be initiated into a yet darker form of impure pleasure. Oh, how they long to hear that last lascivious song, to read that last impure novel! It seems to be the desire of many to know as much evil as they can. They flock together, and take a dreadful pleasure in talk and action which is the horror of all pure minds. Strange lepers, that heap up leprosy as a treasure! Even those who do not go into gross open sin, yet are pleased with infidel notions and sceptical opinions, which are a wretched form of mental leprosy. O horrible malady, which makes men doubt the word of the living God!

Lepers were not allowed to associate with healthy persons except under severe restrictions. Thus were they separated from their nearest and dearest friends. What a sorrow! Alas! I know persons thus separated, who *do not wish to associate with the godly*; to them holy company is dull and wearisome; they do not feel free and easy in such society, and therefore they avoid it as much as decency allows. How can they hope to live with saints for ever, when they shun them now as dull and moping acquaintances?

O my hearers, I have come hither this morning in the hope that God would bless the word to some poor sinner who feels he is a sinner, and would fain be cleansed: such is the leper I am seeking with my whole heart. I pray God to bless the word to those who wish to escape from evil company, who would no longer sit in the assembly of the

mockers, nor run in the paths of the unholy. To those who have grown weary of their sinful companions, and would escape from them, lest they should be bound up in bundles with them to burn at the last great day—to such I speak at this time with a loving desire for their salvation. I hope my word will come with divine application to some poor heart here that is crying, “I wish I might be numbered with the people of God. I wish I were fit to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. Oh, that my dreadful sinfulness were conquered, so that I could have fellowship with the godly, and be myself one of them!” I hope my Lord has brought to this place just such lost ones, that he may find them. I am looking out for them with tearful eyes. But my feeble eyes cannot read inward character; and it is well that the loving Saviour, who discerns the secrets of all hearts, and reads all inward desires, is looking from the watch-towers of heaven, that he may discover those who are coming to him, even though as yet they are a great way off. Oh that sinners may now beg and pray to be rescued from their sins! May those who have become habituated to evil long to break off their evil habits! Happy will the preacher be if he finds himself surrounded with penitents who hate their sins, and guilty ones who cry to be forgiven, and to be so changed that they shall go and sin no more.

II. In the second place, let us remark that THIS LEPER'S FAITH WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM BELIEVE THAT HE COULD BE HEALED OF HIS HIDEOUS DISEASE. *Leprosy was an unutterably loathsome disease.* As it exists even now, it is described by those who have seen it in such a way that I will not harrow your feelings by repeating all the sickening details. The following quotation may be more than sufficient. Dr. Thomson in his famous work, “The Land and the Book,” speaks of lepers in the East, and says, “The hair falls from the head and eye-brows; the nails loosen, decay and drop off; joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed, and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue and the palate are slowly consumed.” This disease turns a man into a mass of loathsomeness, a walking pile of pests. Leprosy is nothing better than a horrible and lingering death. The leper in the narrative before us had sad personal experience of this, and yet he believed that Jesus could cleanse him. Splendid faith! Oh that you who are afflicted with moral and spiritual leprosy could believe in this fashion! Jesus Christ of Nazareth can heal even you. Over the horror of leprosy faith triumphed. Oh that in your case it would overcome the terribleness of sin!

Leprosy was known to be incurable. There was no case of a man being cured of real leprosy by any medical or surgical treatment. This made the cure of Naaman in former ages so noteworthy. Observe, moreover, that our Saviour himself, so far as I can see, had never healed a leper up to the moment when this poor wretch appeared upon the scene. He had cured fever, and had cast out devils, but the cure of leprosy was in the Saviour's life as yet an unexampled thing. Yet this man, putting this and that together, and understanding something of the nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, believed that he could cure him of his incurable disease.

He felt that even if the great Lord had not yet healed leprosy, he was assuredly capable of doing so great a deed, and he determined to apply to him. Was not this grand faith? Oh that such faith could be found among my hearers at this hour! Hear me, O trembling sinner: if thou be as full of sin this morning as an egg is full of meat, Jesus can remove it all. If thy propensities to sin be as untamable as the wild boar of the wood, yet Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, can subdue thine iniquities, and make thee the obedient servant of his love. Jesus can turn the lion into a lamb, and he can do it now. He can transform thee where thou art sitting, saving thee in yonder pew while I am speaking the word. All things are possible to the Saviour God; and all things are possible to him that believeth. I would thou hadst such a faith as this leper had, although if it were even less it might serve thy turn, since thou hast not all his difficulties to contend with, since Jesus has already saved many sinners like thyself, and changed many hearts as hard as thine. If he shall regenerate thee, he will be doing for thee no strange thing, but only one of the daily miracles of his grace. He has now healed thousands of thy fellow lepers: canst thou not believe that he can heal the leprosy in thee?

This man had a marvellous faith, thus to believe while *he was personally the victim of that mortal malady*. It is one thing to trust a doctor when you are well, but quite another to confide in him when your body is rotting away. For a real, conscious sinner to trust the Saviour is no mean thing. When you hope that there is some good thing in you, it is easy to be confident; but to be conscious of total ruin and yet to believe in the divine remedy—this is real faith. To see in the sunshine is mere natural vision; but to see in the dark needs the eye of faith: to believe that Jesus has saved you when you see the signs of it, is the result of reason; but to trust him to cleanse you while you are still defiled with sin—this is the essence of saving faith.

The leprosy was firmly seated and fully developed in this man. Luke says that he was "full of leprosy": he had as much of the poison in him as one poor body could contain, it had come to its worst stage in him; and yet he believed that Jesus of Nazareth could make him clean. Glorious confidence! O my hearer, if thou art full of sin, if thy propensities and habits have become as bad as bad can be, I pray the Holy Spirit to give thee faith enough to believe that the Son of God can forgive thee and renew thee, and do it at once. With one word of his mouth Jesus can turn your death into life, your corruption into comeliness. Changes which we cannot work in others, much less in ourselves, Jesus, by his invincible Spirit, can work in the hearts of the ungodly. Of these stones he can raise up children unto Abraham. His moral and spiritual miracles are often wrought upon cases which seem beyond all hope, cases which pity itself endeavours to forget because her efforts have been so long in vain.

I like best about this man's faith the fact that he did not merely believe that Jesus Christ could cleanse a leper, but that he could cleanse *him*! He said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make *me* clean." It is very easy to believe for other people. There is really no faith in such impersonal, proxy confidence. The true faith believes for itself first, and then for others. Oh, I know some of you are saying, "I

believe that Jesus can save my brother. I believe that he can save the vilest of the vile. If I heard that he had saved the biggest drunkard in Southwark I should not wonder." Canst thou believe all this, and yet fear that he cannot save thee? This is strange inconsistency. If he heals another man's leprosy, can he not heal *thy* leprosy? If one drunkard is saved, why not another? If in one man a passionate temper is subdued, why not in another? If lust, and covetousness, and lying, and pride have been cured in many men, why not in thee? Even if thou art a blasphemer, blasphemy has been cured; why should it not be so in thy case? He can heal thee of that particular form of sin which possesses thee, however high a degree its power may have reached; for nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus can change and cleanse thee now. In a moment he can impart a new life and commence a new character. Canst thou believe this? This is the faith which glorified Jesus, and brought healing to this leper; and it is the faith which will save you at once if you now exercise it. O Spirit of the living God, work this faith in the minds of my dear hearers, that they may thus win their suit with the Lord Jesus, and go their way healed of the plague of sin!

III. Now, notice, thirdly, that this man's faith was FIXED ON JESUS CHRIST ALONE. Let me read the man's words again. He said unto Jesus, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Throw the emphasis upon the *pronouns*. See him kneeling before the Lord Jesus, and hear him say, "If *thou* wilt, *thou* canst make *me* clean." He has no idea of looking to the disciples; no, not to one of them or to all of them. He had no notion of trusting in a measure to the medicine which physicians would prescribe for him. All that is gone. No dream of other hope remains; but with his eye fully fixed on the blessed Miracle-worker of Nazareth, he cries, "If *thou* wilt, *thou* canst make *me* clean." In himself he had no shade of confidence; every delusion of that kind had been banished by a fierce experience of his disease. He knew that none on earth could deliver him, and that by no innate power of constitution could he throw out the poison; but he confidently believed that the Son of God could by himself effect the cure. This was God-given faith—the faith of God's elect, and Jesus was its sole object.

How came this man to have such faith? I cannot tell you the outward means, but I think we may guess without presumption. Had he not *heard our Lord preach*? Matthew puts this story immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, and says, "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Had this man managed to stand at the edge of the crowd and hear Jesus speak, and did those wondrous words convince him that the great Teacher was something more than man? As he noted the style, and manner, and matter of that marvellous sermon, did he say within himself, "Never man spake like this man. Truly he is the Son of God. I believe in him. I trust him. He can cleanse me"? May God bless the preaching of Christ crucified to you who hear me this day! Is not this used of the Lord, and made to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?

Perhaps this man had *seen our Lord's miracles*. I feel sure he had. He had seen the devils cast out, and had heard of Peter's wife's mother, who had lain sick of a fever, and had been instantaneously recovered. The leper might very properly argue—To do this requires omnipotence; and once granted that omnipotence is at work, then omnipotence can as well deal with leprosy as with fever. Did he not reason well if he argued thus—What the Lord has done, he can do again: if in one case he has displayed almighty power, he can display that same power in another case? Thus would the acts of the Lord corroborate his words, and furnish a sure foundation for the leper's hope. My hearer, have you not seen Jesus save others? Have you not at least read of his miracles of grace? Believe him, then, for his works' sake, and say to him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Besides, I think this man may have *heard something of the story of Christ*, and may have been familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. We cannot tell but some disciple may have informed him of John's witness concerning the Christ, and of the signs and tokens which supported John's testimony. He may thus have discerned in the Son of Man the Messiah of God, the Incarnate Deity. At any rate, as knowledge must come before faith, he had received knowledge enough to feel that he could trust this glorious personage, and to believe that, if he willed it, Jesus could make him clean. O my dear hearers, cannot you trust the Lord Jesus Christ in this way? Do you not believe—I hope you do—that he is the Son of God; and if so, why not trust him? He that was born of Mary at Bethlehem was God over all, blessed for ever! Do you not believe this? Why, then, do you not rely upon God in our nature? You believe in his consecrated life, his suffering death, his resurrection, his ascension, his sitting in power at the right hand of the Father; why do you not trust him? God hath highly exalted him, and caused all fulness to dwell in him: he is able to save unto the uttermost, why do you not come to him? Believe that he is able, and then with all thy sins before thee, red like scarlet—and with all thy sinful habits, and thy evil propensities before thee, ingrained like the leopard's spots—believe that the Saviour of men can at once make thee whiter than snow as to past guilt, and free from the present and future tyranny of evil. A divine Saviour must be able to cleanse thee from all sin. Only Jesus can do it, but he can do it—do it himself alone, do it now, do it in thee, do it with a word. If Jesus wills to do it, it is all that is wanted; for his will is the will of the Almighty Lord. Say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Faith must be fixed alone on Jesus. None other name is given among men whereby we must be saved. I do pray the Lord to give that faith to all my dear friends present this morning who as yet have not received cleansing at the Lord's hands. Jesus is God's ultimatum of salvation: the unique hope of guilty men both as to pardon and renewal. Accept him even now.

IV. Now let me go a step further: THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD RESPECT TO A REAL MATTER-OF-FACT CURE. He did not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as a priest who would perform certain ceremonies over him.

and formally say, "Thou art clean"; for that would not have been true. He wanted really to be delivered from the leprosy; to have those dry scales, into which his skin kept turning, taken all away, that his flesh might become as the flesh of a little child; he wanted that the rottenness, which was eating up his body, should be stayed, and that health should be actually restored. Friends, it is easy enough to believe in a mere priestly absolution if you have enough credulity; but we need more than this. It is very easy to believe in Baptismal Regeneration, but what is the good of it? What practical result does it produce? A child remains the same after it has been baptismally regenerated as it was before, and it grows up to prove it. It is easy to believe in Sacramentarianism if you are foolish enough; but there is nothing in it when you believe in it. No sanctifying power comes with outward ceremonials in and of themselves. To believe that the Lord Jesus Christ can make us love the good things which once we despised, and shun those evil things in which we once took pleasure—this is to believe in him indeed and of a truth. Jesus can totally change the nature, and make a sinner into a saint. This is faith of a practical kind; this is a faith worth having.

None of us would imagine that this leper meant that the Lord Jesus could make him feel comfortable in remaining a leper. Some seem to fancy that Jesus came to let us go on in our sins with a quiet conscience; but he did nothing of the kind. His salvation is cleansing from sin, and if we love sin we are not saved from it. We cannot have justification without sanctification. There is no use in quibbling about it; there must be a change, a radical change, a change of heart, or else we are not saved. I put it now to you, Do you desire a moral and a spiritual change, a change of life, thought and motive? This is what Jesus gives. Just as this leper needed a thorough physical change, so do you need an entire renewal of your spiritual nature, so as to become a new creature in Jesus Christ. Oh that many here would desire this, for it would be a cheering sign. The man who desires to be pure is beginning to be pure; the man who sincerely longs to conquer sin has struck the first blow already. The power of sin is shaken in that man who looks to Jesus for deliverance from it. The man who frets under the yoke of sin will not long be a slave to it; if he can believe that Jesus Christ is able to set him free, he shall soon quit his bondage. Some sins which have hardened down into habits, yet disappear in a moment when Jesus Christ looks upon a man in love. I have known many instances of persons who, for many years, had never spoken without an oath, or a filthy expression, who, being converted, have never been known to use such language again, and have scarcely ever been tempted in that direction. This is one of the sins which seem to die at the first shot, and it is a very wonderful thing it should be so. Others I have known so altered at once that the very propensity which was strongest in them has been the last to annoy them afterwards: they have had such a reversion of the mind's action that, while other sins have worried them for years, and they have had to set a strict watch against them, yet their favourite and dominant sin has never again had the slightest influence over them, except to excite an outburst of horror and deep repentance. Oh, that

you had faith in Jesus that he could thus cast down and cast out your reigning sins! Believe in the conquering arm of the Lord Jesus, and he will do it. Conversion is the standing miracle of the church. Where it is genuine, it is as clear a proof of divine power going with the gospel, as was the casting out of devils, or even the raising of the dead in our Lord's day. We see these conversions still; and have proof that Jesus is able to work great moral marvels still. O my hearer, where art thou? Canst thou not believe that Jesus is able to make a new man of thee? O brethren, who have been saved, I entreat you to breathe a prayer at this time for those who are not yet cleansed from the foul disease of sin. Pray that they may have grace to believe in the Lord Jesus for purification of heart, pardon of sin, and the implantation of eternal life. Then when faith is given, the Lord Jesus will work their sanctification, and none shall effectually hinder. In silence let us pray for a moment. (Here there was a pause, and silent prayer went up to heaven.)

V. And now we will go another step: THIS MAN'S FAITH WAS ATTENDED WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A HESITANCY. But after thinking it over a good deal, I am hardly inclined to think it such a hesitancy as many have judged it to be. He said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There was an "if" in this speech, and that "if" has aroused the suspicions of many preachers. Some think it supposes that he doubted our Lord's willingness. I hardly think that the language justly bears so harsh a construction. What he meant may have been this—"Lord, I do not know yet that thou art sent to heal lepers; I have not seen that thou hast ever done so; but, still, if it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou wilt do it, and assuredly thou canst if thou wilt. Thou canst heal not only some lepers, but me in particular; thou canst make me clean." Now, I think this was a legitimate thing for him to say, as he had not seen a leper healed—"If it be within the compass of thy commission, I believe thou canst make me whole."

Moreover, I admire in this text *the deference which the leper pays to the sovereignty of Christ's will as to the bestowal of his gifts*. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean";—as much as to say, "I know thou hast a right to distribute these great favours exactly as thou pleasest. I have no claim upon thee; I cannot say that thou art bound to make me clean; I appeal to thy pity and free favour. The matter remains with thy will." The man had never read the text which saith, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," for it was not yet written; but he had in his mind the humble spirit suggested by that grand truth. He owned that grace must come as a free gift of God's good pleasure when he said, "Lord, if thou wilt." Beloved, we need never raise a question as to the Lord's will to give grace when we have the will to receive it; but still, I would have every sinner feel that he has no claim upon God for anything. O sinner, if the Lord should give thee up, as he did the heathen described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, thou deservest it. If he should never look upon thee with an eye of love, what couldst thou say against his righteous sentence? Thou hast wilfully sinned, and thou deservest to be left in thy sin. Confessing all this, we still cling to our firm belief in the power of grace,

and cry, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst." We appeal to our Saviour's pitying love, relying upon his boundless power.

See, also, how the leper, to my mind, *really speaks without any hesitancy*, if you understand him. He does not say, "Lord, if thou puttest out thy hand, thou canst make me clean"; nor, "Lord, if thou speakest, thou canst make me clean"; but only, "Lord, *if thou wilt*, thou canst make me clean": thy mere will can do it. Oh, splendid faith! If you are inclined to spy a little halting in it, I would have you admire it for running so well with a lame foot. If there was a weakness anywhere in his faith, still it was so strong that the weakness only manifests its strength. Sinner, it is so; and I pray God that thy heart may grasp it—if the Lord wills it he can make thee clean. Believest thou this? If so, carry out practically what thy faith will suggest to thee—namely, that thou come to Jesus and plead with him, and get from him the cleansing which thou needest. To that end I am hoping to lead thee, as the Holy Spirit shall enable me.

VI. In the sixth place, notice that **THIS MAN'S FAITH HAD EARNEST ACTION FLOWING OUT OF IT.** Believing that, if Jesus willed, he could make him clean, what did the leper do? At once he came to Jesus. I know not from what distance, but he came as near to Jesus as he could. Then we read that he besought him; that is to say, he pleaded, and pleaded, and pleaded again. He cried, "Lord, cleanse me! Lord, heal my leprosy!" Nor was this all; he fell on his knees and worshipped; for we read, "Kneeling down to him." He not only knelt, but knelt to Jesus. He had no difficulty as to paying him divine honour. He worshipped the Lord Christ, paying him reverent homage. He then went on to honour him by an open acknowledgment of his power, his marvellous power, his infinite power, by saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." I should not wonder if some that stood by began to smile at what they thought the poor man's fanatical credulity. They murmured, "What a poor fool this leper is, to think that Jesus of Nazareth can cure him of his leprosy!" Such a confession of faith had seldom been heard. But whatever critics and sceptics might think, this brave man boldly declared, "Lord, this is my confession of faith: I believe that if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Now, poor soul, thou that art full of guilt, and hardened in sin, and yet anxious to be healed, look straight away to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is here now. In the preaching of the gospel he is with us always. With the eyes of thy mind behold him, for he beholdeth thee. Thou knowest that he lives, even though thou seest him not. Believe in this living Jesus; believe for perfect cleansing. Cry to him, worship him, adore him, trust him. He is very God of very God; bow before him, and cast thyself upon his mercy. Go home, and on thy knees say, "Lord, I believe that thou canst make me clean." He will hear your cry, and will save you. There will be no interval between your prayer and the gracious reward of faith, of which I am now to speak.

VII. Lastly, **HIS FAITH HAD ITS REWARD.** Have patience with me just a minute. The reward of this man's faith was, first, that *his very words were treasured up.* Matthew, Mark, Luke, all three of them record the precise words which this man used: "Lord, if thou wilt,

thou canst make me clean." They evidently did not see so much to find fault with in them as some have done; on the contrary, they thought them gems to be placed in the setting of their gospels. Three times over are they recorded, because they are such a splendid confession of faith for a poor diseased leper to have made. I believe that God is as much glorified by that one sentence of the leper as by the song of Cherubim and Seraphim, when they continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." A sinner's lips declaring his confident faith in God's own Son can breathe sonnets unto God more sweet than those of the angelic choirs. This man's first faith-words are folded up in the fair linen of three evangels, and laid up in the treasury of the house of the Lord. God values the language of humble confidence.

His next reward was, that *Jesus echoed his words*. He said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; and Jesus said, "I will; be thou clean." As an echo answers to the voice, so did Jesus to his supplicant. The Lord Jesus was so pleased with this man's words that he caught them as they leaped out of his mouth, and used them himself, saying, "I will; be thou clean." If you can only get, then, as far as this leper's confession, I believe that our Lord Jesus from his throne above will answer to your prayer.

So potent were the words of this leper that *they moved our Lord very wonderfully*. Read the forty-first verse: "And Jesus, moved with compassion." The Greek word here used, if I were to pronounce it in your hearing, would half suggest its own meaning. It expresses a stirring of the entire manhood, a commotion in all the inward parts. The heart and all the vitals of the man are in active movement. The Saviour was greatly moved. You have seen a man moved, have you not? When a strong man is unable any longer to restrain himself, and is forced to give way to his feelings, you have seen him tremble all over, and at last burst out into an evident break-down. It was just so with the Saviour: his pity moved him, his delight in the leper's faith mastered him. When he heard the man speak with such confidence in him, the Saviour was moved with a sacred passion, which, as it was in sympathy with the leper, is called "compassion." Oh, to think that a poor leper should have such power over the divine Son of God! Yet, my hearer, in all thy sin and misery, if thou canst believe in Jesus, thou canst move the heart of thy blessed Saviour. Yea, even now his bowels yearn towards thee.

No sooner was our Lord Jesus thus moved than *out went his hand*, and he touched the man and healed him immediately. It did not require a long time for the working of the cure; but the leper's blood was cooled and cleansed in a single second. Our Lord could work this miracle, and make all things new in the man; for "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." He restored the poor, decaying, putrefying body of this man, and he was cleansed at once. To make him quite sure that he was cleansed, the Lord Jesus bade him go to the priest, and seek a certificate of health. He was so clean that he might be examined by the appointed sanitary authority, and come off without suspicion. The cure which he had received was a real and radical one, and therefore he might go

away at once, and get the certificate of it. If our converts will not bear practical tests, they are worth nothing; let even our enemies judge whether they are not better men and women when Jesus has renewed them. If Jesus saves a sinner, he does not mind all men testing the change. Jesus does not seek display, but he seeks examination from those able to judge. Our converts will bear the test. Come hither, angels! Come hither, pure intelligences, able to observe men in secret! Here is a wretch of a sinner who came hither this morning. He seemed first cousin to the devil; but the Lord Jesus Christ has converted him and changed him. Now look at him, ye angels; look at him at home in his chamber! Watch him in private life. We can read your verdict. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"; and this proves what you think. It is such a wonderful change, and angels are so sure of it, that they give their certificates at once. How do they give their certificates? Why, each one manifests his joy as he sees the sinner turning from his sinful ways. Oh, that the angels might have work of this kind to do this morning! Dear hearer, may you be one over whom they rejoice! If thou believest on Jesus Christ, and if thou wilt trust him, as the sent One of God, fully and entirely with thy soul, he will make thee clean. Behold him on the cross, and see sin put away. Behold him risen from the dead, and see new life bestowed. Behold him enthroned in power, and see evil conquered. I am ready to be bound for my Lord, to be his surety, that if thou, my hearer, wilt come to him, he will make thee clean. Believe thy Saviour, and thy cure is wrought. God help thee, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark i. 16—45.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—428, 602, 546.

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