

CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 14. Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law (8:14-17)

Section 15. Jesus Calls Men to Discipleship (8:18-22)

Section 16. Jesus Stills a Tempest (8:23-27)

Section 17. Jesus Frees the Gadarene Demoniacs (8:28—9:1)

JESUS' RELATION TO THE OUTCASTS OF ISRAEL

(The following were suggested by Wm. Barclay, [I, 298-300]:)

- I. Jesus Touched the Untouchable. Here we see the man who was kept at arm's length by all men, wrapped around with the pity and compassion of the love of God. (8:2-4)
- II. Jesus Loved the Unloveable. Here we see the love of God going out to help the foreigner and the slave whom men either hated or despised.
- III. Jesus Healed the Unknown, Humble Folk. Here we see the infinite love of God of all the universe displaying all its power where there was none but the family circle to see (8:14, 15), to Whom any man at any hour might come without being thought a nuisance. (8:16, 17)
- IV. Jesus Challenged the Badly Motivated. (8:18-22)
 - A. The scribe, the short-sighted enthusiast in danger of shallow zeal.
 - B. The disciple already committed to any other duty in danger of tragic failure to seize the greatest opportunity.
- V. Jesus Calmed the Uncalmable. Here is the power of God bringing peace and serenity into tumult and confusion. (8:23-27)
- VI. Jesus Tamed the Untameable. Here we see the power of God dealing with Satan's power, God's goodness invading earth's evil, God's love going out against evil's malignancy and malevolence. Here we see the goodness and love of God which save men by triumphantly overcoming the evil and hatred which ruin men. (8:28—9:1)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 12

JESUS HEALS A LEPER

(Parallels: Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

TEXT: 8:2-4

2. And behold, there came to him a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
3. And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.
4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus accepted the worship of this miserable leper. If Jesus is not God come in the flesh, what should one think of Jesus for accepting? Or was this "worship" that one must render God alone?
- b. What insight do you gain into the nature of true worship in this leper's request, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst . . . "?
- c. What is significant about Jesus' touching the leper?
- d. If leprosy was a dread disease, why does Matthew say Jesus "cleansed" him instead of "healed" him?
- e. Why was it important for the cleansed leper to "tell no man"?
- f. Why was it necessary for the leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering?
- g. Why would the priests need to know that the leper had been healed "for a testimony unto them"?
- h. What do you think Jesus' deepest purpose was in commanding the cleansed leper to "tell no man"? Could not Jesus foresee his disobedience to such a difficult command? Or, foreseeing that the man could not keep such good news quiet, Jesus might have used reverse psychology to get the maximum advantage of news coverage through a rapidly spread "secret". What is your opinion?
- i. Do you think, in light of the previous question, that the man was entirely blameworthy for his actions? Are his actions true to normal human psychology; i.e. are they actions that we would normally expect people to do under similar circumstances? If so, does this mitigate his responsibility for disobeying Jesus' specific prohibition?
- j. What is your opinion? Jesus touched the leper. Do you think that Jesus was legally (in relation to Moses' law on defilement) unclean until sunset that day and until He had bathed Himself? On what basis do you answer as you do? This question may not seem too important to moderns, but upon how you answer may depend how much significance you attribute to Jesus' spontaneous but meaningful gesture.

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

While Jesus was in one of the cities, a leper approached Him when he saw Him. He was a mass of leprosy, covered with it, Coming up to Jesus and falling to his knees, he bowed his face to the earth in front of Him and begged Him for help, "Sir, if only You are willing, You can cleanse me because You are able to do it!"

Jesus' heart was moved with compassion and, stretching forth His hand, He touched the leper, saying as He did so, "Indeed, I am willing! Become clean." Instantly he was cleansed of the leprosy, for it left him. Jesus dismissed the former leper with this stern warning, "Be sure that you tell nobody; but go to the priests for your physical examination, and offer the gift Moses commanded in Leviticus 14, for your recovery. Do this as a public proof—as evidence to the authorities and the people—of the reality of your cure."

But the man went away and began to talk freely about it and spread the news so much that more than ever Jesus' reputation was well-known. Consequently, it became impossible for Jesus to show Himself in a town but He stayed outside in the open country which was sparsely settled. Yet great multitudes of people came to Jesus from every quarter to hear His message and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus continued in His habit of retiring from time to time to lonely places to pray.

SUMMARY

When a leper in the last stages of his disease came to Jesus in one of the Galilean cities, humbly and desperately seeking cleansing, Jesus touched him, speaking but a word of power. He then sent the man directly to the priests to undergo the necessary physical examination performed by them and offer, consequently, the proper sacrifice. The man was not to mention his cleansing to anyone prior to that examination but he spoke freely about it to all. His actions rendered Jesus' ministry more difficult because of the excited crowds pressing Him to perform the same miracles on their own sick folk. But Jesus managed to keep up His habit of praying by getting away from people to be alone with God.

NOTES

I. THE LEPER'S REQUEST

8:2 **There came to him a leper.** With this surprising sentence Matthew begins this section which describes the marvellous supernatural

works of Jesus. To be able fully to appreciate Matthew's inclusion of precisely this illustration of Jesus' unfailing compassionate love for outcasts, we must grasp the whole Jewish viewpoint regarding lepers and leprosy. Otherwise, we may fail to see why this sentence is such a surprise. For special help in grasping the Jewish concept of ceremonial and spiritual defilement (Lev. 15:31), seek out the principal passages in the OT on this subject by checking through concordance listings under "defiling, defilement, unclean, uncleanness, common, impure, profane, unholy, polluted".

Leprosy is an infectious condition produced by microbe discovered and described by A. G. Hansen in 1874. Hansen's disease is contagious, its infection being thought to arise from direct contact with infected skin and mucous membranes, although not very readily communicated by casual contact. Seemingly it is not hereditary. Nerve involvement is attended with anaesthesia, tingling and pain of the parts affected. In those forms of leprosy where nodular growths are the most prominent features the small bones of the hands and feet are destroyed and often drop off. Modern medicine has discovered treatments for leprosy of the various types (lepromatous, tuberculoid and non-specific) and control through early diagnosis, isolation and some drugs that show encouraging results, although complete cure is not yet promised. Spontaneous arresting of the disease and temporary cures have occurred. However, treatment is often necessary for years. (See UWRE, 2954; ISBE, 1867)

Some affirm, however, that Hansen's disease is not the biblical leprosy. There are several complications to our problem of identifying precisely the leprosy of the Bible:

1. The Biblical terminology identifying leprosy describe only the initial symptoms and discuss none of the later manifestations as a fully developed disease or attempt a medical description of its characteristics. The purpose of the biblical terminology was originally for identifying and isolating the victims of this disease. It is worthy of note that there is no mention of treatment of remedy for the disease.
2. The biblical term "leprosy" in the critical passage (Lev. 13) is obviously used in several senses, meaning, generally, "skin disease" and, precisely, "leprosy" (the real thing). It would seem that Moses in that passage is describing leprosy and then listing eight other skin diseases which might be confused for leprosy, but which, regarding ceremonial defilement, were "clean".

3. Any remarks derived from the Mosaic legislation would have to be tempered by the actual practice of the Jews in Jesus' time, which may well have been quite different from that intended by Moses. For instance, while Moses required lepers to stay out of inhabited centers (Lev. 13:46), this regulation may have been relaxed in later times so that lepers even entered a segregated portion of the synagogues, although not into the Temple. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 493)

This circumstance however would not surprise us especially in Galilee where Gentile custom and influence were stronger, producing a more general laxity of rigid Judaism. Further, there are four facts that serve to clarify much ignorance regarding modern prejudices concerning lepers and leprosy:

1. The biblical position regarding lepers and leprosy was stated in relationship to *one* nation of people, the Israelites, to whom the law of Moses, which contains the leprosy legislation, was given. Thus, the prejudices and inhumanity expressed regarding leprosy after the coming of Christ has no basis whatever in Christian documents, since Christ did away with that law *with all of its prescriptions*, whether on leprosy, circumcision, sabbath days or atonement.
2. Although certain biblical cases of leprosy were clearly visitations of the wrath of God (Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kg. 5:25-27; 2 Chron. 26:16-21), this by no means proves that all cases were that. This view of leprosy as a "stroke of God" may explain the usual hauteur with which some rabbis kept lepers at a distance. The defilement that a leper brings to others by contact with them may also explain this. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495)
3. Modern medical science has been able to discover medicine that for all practical purposes and under the right conditions of hygiene, does away with the virulent aspects of the disease, promising new hope for lepers which was totally unavailable in Bible times.
4. The chief emphasis of the Levitical legislation in the first place was the defilement which the disease brought to the sufferer, thus rendering him incapable of entering either the camp of Israel or of participating in the formal worship of Jehovah while in the grip of that disease. And it was by a sin offering that the ceremonial uncleanness was atoned for, upon one's cleansing from leprosy. (Lev. 14:13, 14, 18b-22) But the

homiletic use of leprosy as a TYPE of sin is not biblical, although the similarities are striking. Were we to judge leprosy from the ancient Jewish standpoint of defilement, there could possibly be no lower state, nor worse defilement than this; however, estimating the disease from Christ's standpoint, there are certainly worse defilements than mere leprosy. (Study Mt. 15; Mk. 7) Let it be remarked that though leprosy was atoned for by a sin, that is, a guilt offering, yet Jesus never declared the sins forgiven a leper in connection with his disease, in the same way in which He apparently did not hold the demon-possessed as particularly guilty or sinful, or as He did in the case of others (Lk. 7:47-50; Mt. 9:1-8). Yet, from the silence of the Scripture record, no real argument can be made, inasmuch as the Apostles recorded only what we have. But it must be made absolutely clear that leprosy today carries no spiritual contamination to any man as it did only to Jews under Moses law.

There came to him a leper, but not just a leper, for he was "full of leprosy" (Lk. 5:12), hence not clean (Lev. 13:13), because, were the man merely covered with white disease, he could have been pronounced clean without recourse to Jesus. On the other hand, there is an air of desperation in his voice. The fact that he approached Jesus "in one of the cities" (Lk. 5:12) may not prove the desperation of his case, which presumably would have driven him to approach Jesus in one of the cities, for, while the OT law required lepers to stay out of the camp of Israel (Lev. 13:46) and as a matter of practice they were thus excluded (Nu. 5:1-4; 12:13-15; 2 Kg. 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-23; Lk. 17:12), yet other cases indicate that lepers could enter cities (among Syrians not under the Mosaic law, 2 Kg. 5:1-5; among Jews, Naaman was permitted to enter Samaria, 2 Kg. 5:5-7. Four lepers thought they could enter the city of Samaria, 2 Kg. 7:3, 4). And had the Deuteronomic code specified that all sorts of unclean persons had to leave the city wherein they dwelt after Israel entered the promised land? The Levitical prescription had spoken of the lepers leaving the camp of Israel while Israel dwelt together in one great tent city around the tabernacle in the wilderness. How did the prescription apply upon entering Canaan? Again, Edersheim's note (*Life*, I, 493) should be recalled that lepers were permitted into a segregated compartment in the synagogues also. In what particular city of Galilee the leper approached Jesus is not stated.

We can better appreciate the impression Jesus made upon people

by this simple affirmation: **a leper came to him**. In order to preserve their self-righteous personal ceremonial purity, some rabbis went so far as to declare a distance no less than six feet as sufficient to keep from a leper, but if the wind blew from the direction of the leper, scarcely 100 were sufficient. Others boasted of throwing stones at lepers to keep them at their distance. Another went on record as refusing to eat an egg—the best example of well-packaged food—purchased on a street where a leper had been. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495). And yet this leper came to Jesus, without precedents in Jewish history, except perhaps the case of the Gentile Naaman (2 Kg. 5), whose position as an outcast of Israel he now shared. It may also be that the Lord had not cleansed any lepers previous to this occasion either; at least Matthew's summary (4:24) does not specifically mention leprosy as an example of Jesus' power. If this observation is correct, we can sense the same difference between Jesus and His contemporaries that this leper must have felt, a difference which awakened in him a long-absent hope that this friendly Galilean could change his vile body into the image of His own healthy human body, and thus caused him to dare to approach Jesus.

and worshiped him (see notes on "worship" at 2:2) Mark and Luke strengthen this expression by noting that the leper kneeled in front of Jesus bowing his head to the ground. From this unashamed expression of deep reverence for Jesus, how much can we deduce of this man's understanding of Jesus' true identity? Is he approaching Jesus with the same respect for Jehovah that caused Naaman to stand before the door of Elisha? Perhaps we can say he intended the highest respect for this Prophet who spoke for the living God and who could, through the power of the Almighty, cleanse him. It is tempting to read more understanding into the leper's confession than he actually grasped of Jesus' Deity. **Lord**, for this Jew, may not have meant all that this glorious title has come to mean to Christians, for until Jesus' full Self-revelation was completed and His highest claims fully justified and His true identity completely announced, it is quite possible that those who addressed Jesus as **Lord** intended little more than the term of courtesy and respect, "Sir" (cf. Mt. 21:29; 25:11; 27:63; 1 Pe. 3:6; Jn. 12:21; 20:15; Ac. 16:30; Rev. 7:14), as also the term *kyrie* is so used in modern Greek. The problem is not how much this man understood of Jesus' true position as Lord of lords, and thus the depth of his devotion, but rather what real content is present in our addressing Him as Lord, given our superior advantages of knowing Him. (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)

If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. Nowhere has

there ever appeared a better statement of the right basic attitude of prayer, which so trustingly, yearningly lays our otherwise hopeless case upon God's power to help. (See notes on 5:10) The leper probably did not intend this plea as a prayer to deity, but as the disciplined request for cleansing. He meant, and we must mean as we pray,

1. If thou wilt (Luke adds *edeêthê*, "He begged Him.")
 - a. Some have suggested that this leper's expressed uncertainty about Jesus' willingness throws the responsibility for his continued misery upon Jesus who could so easily deliver. Perhaps so, for, psychologically, people are tempted rather fatalistically to blame God for their continued suffering, and with this sighed expression they resign themselves to their fate. Also the usual treatment received at the hands of other rabbis might have taught this leper never to presume upon any.
 - b. It is more probable that the leper's lowly acquiescence intends to leave Jesus free to decide whether to leave him in his horrible contamination or not. It takes deep insight and rigorous discipline to place his case in these terms before Him who is the leper's last hope. As he bravely states his desire, he is committing himself, if Jesus shall so choose, to remain a leper! (cf. Dan. 3:16-18; 2 Sam. 15:24-26) He thus showed a more profound insight into the Lord's authority than some more privileged disciples.
2. **Thou canst make me clean:** "I am sure of your power." No double-mindedness here! (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Heb. 11:6; Jas. 4:4, 8) Note how immediately the man comes to the point of his petition: "Cleansing, Lord!" No flowery expressions or lengthy appeals to Jesus' reason, understanding or sympathy were needed. Christians can learn more directness in their petitions from this Jew who felt his need deeply and could concentrate it into one sentence.

II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE

8:3 And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him.

To the western mind this verse cannot have the earth-shaking importance it would have had to the Jew trained in Levitical legislation regarding ceremonial purity and defilement. (See on 8:2; Lev. 11:39-45; 13:45, 46; 15:all, esp. 31; 18:24-30; 22:3-9; Nu. 5:1-5; 6:5-9, 12; 19:11-22; Dt. 24:8, 9) These passages clearly require Jewish clergy and laity alike, as well as those under special vows, to maintain

that special separation from certain acts and contacts that were defined by God as "defiling" or "unclean." While it is true that there were certain acts which defiled but were permissible (sexual relations, for example, Lev. 15:18), yet, for the most part, no God-fearing Jew could bring himself to go deliberately against the general order: "You shall not defile yourselves . . . you shall be holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44, 45) without bringing himself under the condemnation: "Thus shall you keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." (Lev. 15:31)

But what is so eternally important about views on Jewish defilement to the modern Christian whose entire mentality revolves around completely different principles?

1. Because OUR appreciation of this meaningful gesture of Jesus is enhanced as we understand the background in which it comes. Leprosy's attack upon this man brought into the picture all of the heartless application of Moses' Law. The Law was the same for all—heartless, and he, a leper, had been forced by that Law to leave his family, his associations, his life. That same Law required all to clear a heart-chilling circle around him everywhere, none could share with him the warming embraces of love. The Law had perhaps made him even forget how the touch of another's hand felt, for he was now, for the duration of his hopeless case, a fellow-sufferer with others of the living dead. Yet, Jesus, "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:41), swiftly, spontaneously moved to the leper's side, and touched him. This was a demonstration of love we should not soon forget! This was an answer that shouted Jesus' love more than any word could have done. For Jesus, and for those who follow Him, there is but one law: loving helpfulness to anyone who has a need, regardless of the loathsomeness of that which makes his need so apparent. If necessary, we must be prepared to dispense with conventions and take the necessary risks to help a suffering fellow human. This means also that we must be prepared to take the consequences for our actions.
2. Because our understanding of the nature and identity of Jesus of Nazareth is partly contingent upon what we think of this act whereby He seemingly went beyond the express prohibitions of God's Law. The Law had been clear enough against this deliberate defiling oneself through contact with what had been

defined as "unclean". Why must Jesus break the Law—if He, in fact, did? Or, is Jesus, as Author of the Law, hereby revealing a facet of its interpretation and application that we could not have previously known?

- a. Is he revealing that the Law is not the only or perfect expression of perfect righteousness, and that much of the loving compassion for suffering humanity, which God Himself really felt, had to be omitted from the Law's legal prescriptions? If so, by His actions Jesus is saying, "Friend, the Law says I cannot touch you, but God's mercy, which triumphs over strict justice, permits it." This seeming disregarding of the ceremonial law is on the same level as those acts which, though, strictly speaking, are violations of the Mosaic legislation or interpretations thereof, are yet acts in which not only Jesus, but any man could rise higher than the strict application of the law, so as to show mercy and kindness to these miserable, suffering neighbors to every Jew. Lev. 19:18 is also legislation on the treatment of lepers too, and more people than Jews failed to see this.
- b. Is Jesus revealing here, as elsewhere, that any Jew could have ministered mercifully to these unfortunate sufferers? (See on Mt. 12:1-8) If so, Jesus may be saying, "Though the safe course for any man is not to touch you because of the absence of adequate medicines whereby you could be healed and brought back into the circle of human fellowship again, yet I am that medicine, hence, I am the only one truly qualified to bridge the gap and bring you back to health." Is Jesus' action intended to teach us that the law of loving-kindness is above the law of ceremonies? (cf. Mt. 9:12, 13; 12:1-14) Certainly, He is teaching that, although the Law heartlessly had to separate the "unclean" from the "clean" to preserve holiness, there was however no excuse whatever that could justify all the inhuman traditions and heartless cruelties on the part of the ceremonially "clean, pure and righteous."
- c. Could it be that Jesus is also revealing the end of the entire system of ceremonial defilements? This He will do on other occasions and by means of the very character of the gospel (cf. Mt. 15:1-20). If so, this incident is in perfect harmony with other revelations. This point is however not weakened by the fact that the leper was not dispensed with the

necessity to present himself to the Levitical priests for inspection and official recognition as cleansed, because the Law itself must stand until Jesus took it away by His death on the cross. (Eph. 2:11-16. See notes on Mt. 5:17-20)

But, how could Jesus touch the leper without incurring at least one day's defilement?

1. One possible answer offered by some is that He thus declared Himself an independent Priest, after Melchizedek's order, hence qualified to touch such a leper. This is doubtful, because, His future priesthood was to be heavenly and universal while the Law's prescriptions dealt with this world's problems and the Jews only (Heb. 8:4). Further, the Mosaic system established the Levitical priests as the official health officials; Jesus, the future High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (see Heb. 6:20—7:28), had not been designated such a health official for whom Moses' laws had relevance. Again, Jesus made no such declaration of High Priesthood during His earthly ministry. There is a better reason why Jesus touched the leper without fear of contamination of defilement:
2. He was God and could act without any reference to Old Testament Law if He so choose: as Deity, He was the Author of the Law, hence above it. Evidences supporting this conclusion, which find their only satisfactory explanations in this conclusion, are the following:
 - a. Jesus showed divine authority by taking charge of the Temple, when He cleansed it (Jn. 2:14-22).
 - b. There is no evidence that Jesus ever offered sacrifices for sin or even attended all the feasts required of all Jews. (Dt. 16:16) Rather there is evidence to the contrary which would explain why Jesus would not have offered sin offerings. (See Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15)
 - c. Jesus forgave sins directly, without reference to the Mosaic system (Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 7:48-50).
 - d. He deliberately announced the change of the central place of worship, a cardinal doctrine of the Mosaic system. (Jn. 4:20-24 contrasted with Dt. 12:1-14; Josh. 22; 2 Kgs. 18:22; 2 Chron. 32:12; Isa. 36:7)
 - e. Jesus set aside the distinction between clean and unclean foods (Mt. 15:11; Mk. 7:19).

- f. For all practical purposes, Jesus drastically altered Mosaic legislation regarding divorce. (contrast Mt. 19:1-9 with Dt. 24:1-4)
- g. Jesus was baptized by God's inspired prophet, not for forgiveness of sins, as John had commanded others, but "to fulfill all righteousness" (see on Mt. 3:15).
- h. He also claimed to be "greater than the Temple" (Mt. 12:6), "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:8), and declared that there are cases when human needs supercedes the strict observance of the Law (Mt. 12:1-14) His enemies thus understood His claims to superiority to the Law and its institutions and attacked Him at His trials on this basis, ignoring His disregard for their traditions (Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58).
- i. The KEY INCIDENT which explains Jesus' unique position as Son of God and, at the same time, Son of Man, is the temple-tax incident (Mt. 17:24-27). God's Son is not bound to pay the temple tax even though Moses commanded it (Ex. 30:13; 38:26).

Thus, here Matthew records an act of Jesus that was, for those trained in Levitical purity, every bit as marvellous as the cleansing itself. But to Jesus, the Son of God come in human flesh, this act was no different than what He had been doing since His incarnation, for His incarnation had already brought Him into intimate, defiling contact with mortal flesh. Some have observed that when Jesus touched and healed and cleansed the leper, that Jesus' purifying touch overweighed the contaminating influence of the leper's uncleanness. Jesus was not defiled, but the leper was cleansed; the two were not left in the leper's former condition—defiled (the situation covered by the Law). Jesus made the leper like Himself—pure, (a situation unimagined by any but God!) How like Jesus to touch this leper! Here is a revelation of His quickness to perceive another's feeling because He loved him. In short, here is the untouchable wrapped around with the love and mercy of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

- 3. Another reason why Jesus may have chosen to touch the leper was to clear any doubt about His willingness to heal. But there is no indication that Jesus touched him to strengthen the man's faith, as some say, because this miracle like many others did not depend upon the faith of the individual healed. (cf.

8:5-13, 28-32; 9:18-25; Lk. 7:11-15) There is no hint of a psychosomatic "cure" here.

Saying, I will. (Greek: *thélo*) This is not the simple future (*ésomai*) meaning "I shall do it," but rather *thélo*, meaning, "I wish (to heal you), I am willing (to do it), I will it!" This expression of Jesus was not merely the naked word or warming touch but also the sheer exercise of His will, which cleansed the leper. **Be clean.** The command of Jesus is perfectly consonant with the previously expressed views on defilement: He did not say, "Be healed," even though this certainly was involved, but rather: "Be cleansed." The marvellous and immediate result: **And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.** Both Mark and Luke note further: **immediately the leprosy left him**, almost as if to answer critical charges that Jesus' "healings" were not obviously and immediately manifest to all, but required time, much prayer and boundless credulity. Instantly the raw sores and dead flesh and insensitive nerves were restored to perfectly normal health. This omnipotent act of Jesus shadows into insignificance all modern attempts at "faith healing," because His was real, immediate and complete.

8:4 **See thou tell no man.** Mark says that He "sternly charged him." This man's former conduct in coming to Jesus in a city to be healed, when the clear implication of the Law was to forbid it, showed that he needed such severe language. But he showed a similar carelessness with Jesus' stern warning. This command probably clarifies the fact that the leper was not cleansed in the presence of the "great multitudes" of 8:1, for such a charge as this could have little meaning, although Jesus sometimes required this of multitudes also (Mt. 12:15, 16).

But this command to silence cannot be urged as proof that Jesus, during His lifetime never claimed to be Messiah, or that He was, for some reason embarrassed by the possibility that His disciples after His death might attribute Messiahship and Deity to Him on the basis of such fabulous stories as the (unreal) cleansing of a leper. His injunctions to silence had quite another basis: He was fully aware of His real Messiahship and time schedule. He did not always forbid such publicity (as in the case of the paralytic, [Mt. 9:2-8 also Jn. 5:1-18]); rather He sometimes commanded it (Mk. 5:18-20). He also empowered Apostles to enter the same miraculous ministry (Mt. 10:7, 8). This seeming inconsistency between Jesus' claims to be Messiah and His forbidding people to say anything about His works which identified Him as such, cannot be offered as basis for rejecting the miracles as not possessing historical reality or for supposing that the prohibitions of

publicity are but hypocritical expressions created by the writers of these narratives. This apparent inconsistency is really a valuable guarantee of the truthfulness of the witness given by the gospel writers. To resolve the supposed contradictions we need but look in each case of an injunction to silence for answers to the following questions: In what part of Palestine was Jesus located when He prohibited such publicity? To what persons did He make such prohibitions? What political background made necessary such precautions, which without them, would have hindered further the progress of Jesus' ministry and schedule?

Galilee and Judea were particularly sensitive to any Messianic uprising. Jesus needed time to teach what kind of Messiah God really intended, before the people could seize Him and use Him and His movement to raise a national liberation front to deliver the nation from the galling yoke of Rome.

See thou tell no man, is sometimes interpreted by some as Jesus' use of reverse psychology whereby he forbade the man to advertise the miracle, thus insuring its greater publicity. It is reasoned that surely Jesus would have foreseen the effect of so wondrous a cleansing upon the emotions of so horribly afflicted a wretch, and could thus have predicted the enthusiastic reaction to his cleansing. Perhaps, it is said, Jesus told him not to tell, so that the man would tell it all the more as a secret too good to be kept. After all, nothing travels as rapidly as a secret!

No, this suggestion is doubtful because:

1. Although reverse psychology is not in itself wrong, the plain import of Jesus' words required obedience to their obvious meaning, unless something in the face or voice of Jesus indicated to the man the opposite meaning, a fact not recorded by any Evangelist. Rather, both Mark and Luke record the man's actions, beginning with the weak adversative *dé*, Luke adding also *mállon*. While *dé* by itself, may introduce a contrast between the clause it introduces and that which goes before it, *mállon dé* introduces an expression or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded. ("instead"). Luke's actual word order is *dé mállon*, which Arndt and Gringrich translate "but to a greater degree, even more than ever." So it is clear that Mark and Luke regarded the result of the man's advertizing as contrasting, not harmonizing, with Jesus' intent.
2. Political popularity of the Messiah concept among the Jews was definitely detrimental to the real success of Jesus' ministry,

and to agitate further an already emotionally charged atmosphere was not at all expedient.

3. Also, the man needed to concentrate on his own obedience to God by carrying out without interruption the prescribed ritual for cleansing. He must not disregard God's commands out of excited gratitude to Jesus.

But, someone might object, was not there a crowd already present when Jesus thus forbade the unwanted publicity? Were a crowd present, would not His injunction to silence be rather meaningless, since, manifestly, the crowd, not being required also to keep silent, would have spread the news? And, is not the exact wording of Luke that "a report about him (or "Him"?) went abroad, so that many crowds gathered . . ." more consonant with the possibility that there were already many present who also told of the cleansing? No, because Mark clearly links the coming of the crowds to the man's actions after he left Jesus. And just because Jesus was in one of the towns does not presuppose the existence of a crowd. Mt. 8:1 probably is not to be connected chronologically with 8:2-4, so again we have no crowd until after the man went away. There is also hurry implied in Mark's expression: "He sent him away at once" (*euthus exebalen*), lest his lingering till excited crowds could gather, further hindering the man's getting away to Jerusalem and impeding Jesus' ministry.

But go show thyself to the priest means: "Go to Jerusalem!" because the seven-day ritual of cleansing and offerings were to take place at the Temple (see Lev. 14:11) and the priest who officiates at the cleansing is the same as he who offers the sacrifices, applies the blood and oil. A whole colony of priests living in Galilee could not pronounce him clean, without that trip to Jerusalem. Jesus, our potential High Priest, superior in every way to Aaron, does not here set aside the man's responsibility to obey the then-valid Levitical prescriptions that applied to him. Jesus, Himself the end of the Law, would not save the man the long walk to Jerusalem for his physical exam.

And offer the gift that Moses commanded. See Lev. 14 for the entire procedure of cleansing. **Offer for thy cleansing.** Though Jesus' Power had taken away all the physical aspects of the leprosy, and thus the leper was "cleansed" physically, yet a leper is legally "unclean" until his physical examination by the priests confirms the fact that the disease has indeed left him. Though a healed leper is considered "clean" prior to his offerings (Lev. 14:7), he is not legally "cleansed" until after his offerings (Lev. 14:20).

Go show yourself to the priest . . . for a testimony to them. Who is "them"? **Them** is plural while **the priest** is singular, so can the testimony to be rendered, refer to the priest at all? Perhaps, since one priest may be a representative of the class of people in Jerusalem hostile to Jesus. It was very important that the priests have the testimony borne to them that this healed leper could bring, because they had not all the opportunities to see all the miracles that crowds in Galilee had. The priests who had only heard of Jesus, or who were hostile and unbelieving, needed to have this conclusive evidence of the reality of Jesus' miracles thrust into their presence. They became thus, to us, another group of witnesses to the reality of this man's cleansing and to the fact that Jesus did not disregard the law (cf. Mt. 5:17, 18). And, certainly, the clean bill of health from the priest in the hands of the former leper would be powerful witness to the Messianic identity of Jesus. There are a multitude of reasons why Jesus should make this peculiar requirement of the man:

1. That the people and priests might see that Jesus did not disregard the Law.
2. To get the official seal upon the validity of the cure by authoritative certification by the priests, thus convincing others of the completeness of the cure, permitting the former leper to re-enter society.
3. To prevent the priests from hearing of the miracle before the man arrived, and from deciding against the reality of the cure out of hostility to Jesus. They could perhaps deny that the man had ever been a leper, or that he had been truly cleansed. Thus their ignorance of the cause of his cleansing would keep them from being prejudiced against a correct appraisal of the leper's true condition.
4. To prevent the multitudes from becoming unduly excited about so great a miracle (cf. Jn. 6:15), when Jesus' primary purpose was to preach, not to heal (Lk. 4:42, 43).
5. To remind the man himself of his responsibility to God's revelation as then given and applied to his case. He might be tempted to think that a man so miraculously cured was not bound by ordinary rules. His mixing with others before being declared clean by competent authorities would serve only to confirm the antagonism of the religious leaders to Jesus.

III. THE LAST RESORT

Did the cleansed leper get to Jerusalem and offer as he had been told or did he disobey this command also, as apparently he did the

other one to tell no one? Mark says: "But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news." All of the justifications in the world that the man could have offered for his actions did not remove the hindrance he thus created for Jesus: **Jesus could no longer openly enter a town** (Mk. 1:45). This was not a question of ability but of strategic impropriety of doing so. Jesus was planning and executing the strategy of His campaign, but the leper created a crisis for Him, by coming to him openly in a city. Jesus sought to settle it by endeavoring to keep the miracle as private as possible, but the disobedient leper interrupted Jesus' plans, caused unwanted excitement, thus closing the door to further activity by Jesus in open cities.

He was out in the country (Mk.), **withdrew to the wilderness** (Lk.) and still the multitudes came to Him from every quarter to hear and be healed! Jesus had to use such withdrawals to the desert places as tactics to thwart the plans of those who sought to take over His movement to use it for their own political ambitions. Jesus' only hope of accomplishing His earthly purpose lay in the careful training of a few hardy believers who were zealous enough to imbibe of His spirit and purposes and carry out His work after the heady excitement caused by His presence had died down. Jesus kept dividing His multitudes in order to conquer them. His popular movement would have been otherwise impossible to control. His constantly shifting headquarters made it difficult for anyone to capitalize on crowd fervor.

It is a distinguishing mark of Jesus' true greatness that, at the height of this popularity, **He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed** (Lk. 5:16). He could have done an excellent job as rabbi at Capernaum alone. He had the masses literally in the palm of His hand, but He recognized how near to being in THEIR hands He was! He deliberately escaped the noisy crowd of well-wishers to slip into the presence of His Father to pray about this crisis.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is there any necessary (especially temporal) connection between 8:1 and 8:2?
2. What additional information regarding this event do Mark and Luke contribute?
3. Describe the kind of leprosy proscribed by the law of Moses. Tell where the legal descriptions are to be found, what examinations are to be made and, how those definitely diagnosed as lepers were to be regarded by the Israelites.

4. What are the similarities (or differences) between the leprosy described in the Mosaic legislation and modern leprosy?
5. Does the Bible teach that leprosy, as an obvious physical disease, is a symbol or type of sin? Prove your answer.
6. If you deny that leprosy is a type of sin, then, what instruction may be derived from this passage by way of application?
7. In what way(s) is the fact that Jesus touched the leper to be viewed by the then-current Jewish mentality as unthinkable, disgusting or even revolting? Is there any Mosaic legislation against touching a leper? Cite the passage.
8. Why does the Bible speak of "cleansing" of lepers, instead of "healing" them? What, if anything, is the difference?
9. The leper "worshipped" Jesus. Is there anything implied in this word more than simple, natural, oriental obeisance of humility rendered to a respected superior? Prove your answer.
10. Explain the psychological contrast between the original approach that the leper made to Jesus and his later response to Jesus' specific command not to tell anyone but the priests about his healing.
11. What, according to Mark and Luke, was the result of the leper's disobeying Jesus' command to "tell no man"?
12. What do Mark and Luke report as Jesus' reactions to the results of the cleansed leper's spreading the news of his cleansing far and wide?
13. For whom was the leper's offering to be a testimony? And, what was the "testimony" to testify to "them"?
14. Though the nationality of this leper is not stated in the text, as sometimes the nationality is given for other people whom Jesus helped, yet we can confidently affirm that this man was Jewish. What clue in the narration leads us to this conclusion?
15. Is there anything in the account to indicate whether the man advertized his healing *before* or *after* his examination by the priests? (Cf. Mk. 1:45; Lk. 5:15)

Section 13

JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

(Parallel: Luke 7:1-10)

TEXT: 8:5-13