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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“CLEAN AND WHOLE”

Luke 5:12-16, 17-26

You are called on to summarize your life in a single descriptive word. What adjective is the closest fit?

Consider the totality of your character, convictions, relationships, thoughts, words, deeds, experiences, and circumstances. What does it all boil down to?

- Please turn with me to Luke 5:12-16.

“Unclean! Unclean!” That is what the leper shouts everywhere he goes: **“Unclean! Unclean!”**

⊖ **“Unclean!”** describes his physical condition, his social status, and his spiritual state. **“Unclean”** is his life reduced to one word.

○ {Lev 13:45-46} According to the Law, **“Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the [community].”**

This man has a tent for shelter. His family leaves food for him at a designated spot. His most basic material needs are met. Still, he is a bundle of misery.

⊖ First, he must contend with the disease itself. The word λεπρασ (lepras) describes several disorders that range from mildly uncomfortable to utterly ruinous.

If he has one of the severe sicknesses his skin is a mass of lesions and nodules, his muscles are contracting,

his nerves are dying, his flesh is falling off. He looks like a zombie. He smells like rotting meat.

⊖ Second, he bears the soul-crushing burden of grief, shame, and loneliness.

○ {Ge 37:34; 2 Sam 1:11} Tearing one’s garments, {Lev 10:6; 21:10} going around with unkempt hair, and {Ezek 24:17, 22} covering the bottom of the face are normal ways of mourning for the dead. Only, the death he grieves is his own. His life is over. His future is gone. He is a walking, breathing corpse.

○ {Nu 14:6; 2 Ki 22:11; Ez 9:5; Mic 3:7} Ripped garments are also a sign of humiliation due to sin and failure, and a mark of disgrace when God is silent and refuses to answer. People look upon this leper with a mixture of pity and contempt. Many blame him for his disease, as though it is a physical manifestation of his sin.

And he is “alone.” If he has a wife or children, he is cut off from them. He is dead to his family and friends. He is disconnected from society. The only close contact he has is with other lepers – and that “fellowship of the damned” affords precious little comfort.

⊖ Third, he has been stripped of identity and robbed of spiritual support.

○ {Ro 9:3-5} His was **“the adoption;”** his was **“the divine glory, the covenants... the law, the temple worship and the promises.”** He was a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was one of the Elect, one of the Chosen. He was an heir to the blessings of YHWH’s covenant community.

“Was,” not “is.” He is unable to keep most of the purity laws that set Israel apart from the nations. He is denied entry to the synagogue where the Word is read and preached, denied access to the Temple where sacrifices are made and prayers are offered. He is stranded outside the town, isolated and alienated from the people of God.

This man is buried under layers of pain, distortion, and disfigurement! “**Unclean!**” describes his physical condition, his social status, and his spiritual state. His life has been reduced to that one word: “**Unclean**”.

■ {Lk 5:12-14} And so “**While Jesus [is] in one of the towns, [this] man [comes] along who [is] covered with leprosy... he [sees] Jesus... [falls] with his face to the ground and [begs] him, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus [reaches] out his hand and [touches] the man. ‘I am willing,’ he [says]. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy [leaves] him.**”

✍ The immaculate, spotless Son of God touches this impure man. No uninfected person has touched him since his diagnosis. But Jesus does!

✍ Jesus heals him. He exchanges his cellular putrefaction for bodily health, his social alienation for fellowship, and his spiritual death for rebirth.

✍ Above all, the Savior gives him a new identity. He has heard and touched the Messiah, and if he had to choose one word to summarize his life now, it would be “Clean” or “New” or “Alive.”

We are not at risk of catching physical leprosy (though some people in some parts of the world are).

Yet there are people around us – and maybe some of us – who are afflicted with spiritual impurity and decay.

They are dying inside because of their own sin, or the sins that others have done to them.

Let us hear the Good News: The Lord Jesus has power to cleanse anyone. He is eager and more than able to bless us with physical healing, social restoration, and spiritual rebirth. He did it for the leper, and he can do it for us.

■ On to verses 17-26.

☹ Disabled. Busted. Out of order. That is what the paralytic is. “Broken” is his life reduced to one word.

At the very least he is a paraplegic, meaning his legs are nonfunctional. He cannot run, walk, hobble, or crawl. He is dependent on others to move him about.

But he may be a quadriplegic, in which case his arms and hands are also useless. If so he cannot pick up an object, cannot embrace another human being, cannot fold his hands in prayer. Someone else must scratch his itches, wipe his nose, feed him, and clean him.

This man is unemployable. Begging for handouts is the only occupation available to a paralytic.

If he was paralyzed before adulthood he has not taken a wife and never will. If he did not father a child prior to his disability, he never will.

○ {ISB; Ge 1:26; Ps 127:3} This is especially painful in a culture that puts a premium on lineage, “**as may be seen from the long genealogical records found everywhere in the Old Testament**” and also the

Gospels. First century Jews take seriously the command to **“Be fruitful and increase in number.”** They believe the proverb that **“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.”** Sons and daughters are the substance and sign of God’s favor in the present, and his provision for the future. If this paralytic has no offspring he is missing out on God’s blessing today, and has no future.

The guy’s body is busted. He lives hand-to-mouth, surviving on hand-outs from strangers. If he does not already have a family of his own, he never will. “Broken” describes his physical condition, his social status, and his spiritual state. His life has been reduced to that one word: “Broken.”

- Yet God has blessed him with good friends. In verses 18-19 they carry him to the house where Jesus is, in order **“to lay him before Jesus. When they [can] not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they [go] up on the roof,”** make an opening, **“and [lower] him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.”**

- Verse 20 is surprising: **“When Jesus [sees] their faith, he [says], ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”**

We expect the Messiah to respond to the paralytic. Instead, he takes action because of the man’s friends: **“When Jesus [sees] *their* faith, he [says]...”**

We expect the Messiah to say, “Get up and walk.” Instead, the first thing he does is to announce, **“your sins are forgiven.”**

- ☼ It is not that Jesus does not care about the man’s practical condition. It is that he sees our predicament so much clearer than we do.

- {Mt 16:26} We look at the paralytic and suppose that disability is his biggest problem. Christ looks at him and he knows that the man’s biggest problem is distance from God. If the Lord restores the man’s body but not his spirit and mind, he will be putting a band aid on a fatal wound. **“What good will it do for him if he gains”** mobility **“but loses his soul?”** This is food for thought for those who lose heart when Sovereign God does not do as they ask. What we assume to be the greatest good might not be.

- Verses 21-25 are equally surprising. Now that Jesus has forgiven the paralytic’s sins, we expect him to heal the man so he can feel better, earn a living wage, maybe raise a family and participate more fully in the covenant, and even become a disciple.

All of that is important. Yet the Lord’s priority is not any of those things; it is to refute his enemies who are thinking, **“Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”**

Thus he continues: **“Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or... ‘Get up and walk’? But that you may know... [I have] authority on earth to forgive sins...”** then he heals the man who stands up, takes his mat, and goes home praising God.

- In verse 26 the crowd is amazed. Filled with awe they worship God, saying, **“We have seen remarkable things today.”**

✎ Our merciful Savior restores the man's spirit by forgiving his sin. He has the authority to do that.

✎ Jesus repairs his body. He exchanges the man's immobility for mobility, his economic, social and relational poverty for opportunity, and his spiritual deficit for abundance.

✎ Above all, the Lord gives him a new identity. He has encountered the Messiah and if he had to choose one word to summarize his life now, it would be "Whole" or "Fixed" or "Strong."

No one here is a physical paralytic. But some are immobilized in other ways. We are spiritual cripples, ineffective and helpless.

We are trapped in brokenness, our strength sapped by bitterness, fear, anxiety, or pride. We are disabled by our lack of faith, hope, and love.

Bound up in self-pity and despair, we are unable to fully receive the love of God, or to love him in return. Forget about really loving others!

{2 Ti 3:5} Maybe we profess to walk with Jesus but it is all talk, no action. We maintain a form of godliness, but without power.

Let us hear the Good News: The Lord Jesus has power to fix broken people. He is more than able to make us whole, to give us purpose, to bring us into the fullness of covenant life, and to glorify God by our very existence. He did it for the paralytic, and he can do it for us.