

A man in a dark suit is seen from behind, with his right hand resting on the back of a figure who is completely covered in a white shroud. The scene is set against a bright, hazy background. A large, dark red number '4' is positioned in the upper left. A dashed line circles the number and extends to a paper airplane icon. The text 'Lord, I will go! Heal Me' is written in a bold, dark red font, with 'Heal Me' in italics, and is enclosed in a yellow rectangular box.

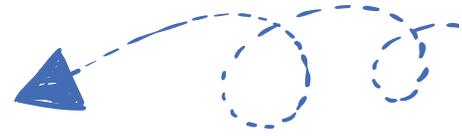
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Lord, I will go!
Heal Me

(Mark 1:40-42)

INTRODUCTION

If you journey through history, you will note that the world has been affected by great epidemics. Among the most known is smallpox, which, in a period of one hundred years, it brought more than 26 million people to the grave. Speaking of epidemics, we can't forget about the bubonic plague, also known as the black plague, which brought death to some 27 million human beings. Without going too far back, in 1918 in a British soldiers' camp emerges the mortal epidemic Spanish flu, which in only eight months takes the life of more than 25 million people.



It could be that these epidemics, due to the passing of time, are no longer currently known to people. However, at the end of 2019 we heard of the outbreak of a new type of flu, that emerged from the Chinese city of Wuhan, in a few weeks, all the city was quarantined. As the days and the weeks passed by, the feared virus was advancing: China, Korea, Japan, Italy, Spain... In short, the whole world. Such epidemic was named COVID-19. According to reports, more than 84 million people had been infected and more that 1.8 million people had died around the world.

Although all these epidemics had caused turmoil, there is an epidemic more mortal than smallpox, than the black plague, and including even COVID-19. In today's message, we will talk about that illness.

DEVELOPMENT

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of a certain leper that approached Jesus in search of healing. The evangelist Mark relates the story in the following manner:

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. (Mark 1:40-42)

The leprosy –just as the biblical scholars say—was a painful, disgusting illness that turned the person who contracted it unclean and for which there was no cure.

In the time of Jesus, leprosy was the worst illness (it was known as the "scourge" or the "finger of God") and it was greatly feared; not only for the fact that it was incurable, but also for the marks that remained on the people who suffered from it.

- The leper was considered totally disabled; physically and spiritually. He had to stay six feet away from people, including members of his family.
- The lepers were like the living dead. They had to use a black cloak to be recognized as someone among the dead.

- They were expelled from society. They could not live inside the walls of any city; their dwelling had to be outside of them.
- They were considered excluded from divine favor. Leprosy was considered a punishment that God sent to certain people due to their sins.

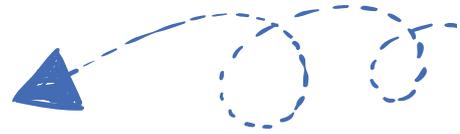
Dear friend, can you imagine the anguish and the pain of a leper? Being totally separated from family, friends and society. Imagine the emotional and mental pain that must have taken a toll on those affected by leprosy, living with an illness that was supposed to be a punishment from God, sent to the worst sinners.

But allow me to specify the following: even though the leprosy was a terrible illness, this was not the worst of all the illnesses. There is a sickness that is much more dangerous, of which the leprosy is only a symbol. The Christian writer Ellen White, in her book *The Desire of Ages*, page 266, speaks to us about sin as the most mortal of all the maladies:

The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the *soul from sin*. Its deadly poison permeated his whole body. The disciples sought to prevent their Master from touching him; for he who touched a leper became himself unclean. But in laying His hand upon the leper, Jesus received no defilement. His touch imparted life-giving power. The leprosy was cleansed. *Thus, it is with the leprosy of sin, —deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power.*

The leprosy is a perfect symbol of sin, that is the most mortal and destructive of all the maladies. The preacher Greg Laurie makes a magnificent comparison between leprosy and sin. According to the preacher:

- *Leprosy initiates in an imperceptible manner.* Sin also begins in the same way. Eve never imagined that a simple conversation with the serpent would open the doors of evil for this planet. David didn't think that a glance at the woman of a soldier would bring as a result so many troubles to the family.
- *Leprosy is inherited.* It could be an evil transmitted from generation to generation. As human beings, we are all born as sinners. We inherit sin from our first parents. Therefore, we are not sinners because we sin, but that we sin because we are sinners.



- *Leprosy expands in a rapid manner.* In the same way, sin grows and expands in a rapid manner in all the soul.
- *Lastly, leprosy is highly infectious.* Sin, as well as leprosy, infects everything. The consequences of sin not only are suffered by the one who commits the sin, but also those around him.

What most stands out from the encounter between Jesus and the leper is not the desperate condition in which this man was in, nor the turmoil that the illness had done to his body; instead, the wonderful miracle of which he was the object of. “Jesus,” declared Mark, “was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.” (Mark 1:41-42)

For her part, Ellen White says that

Immediately a change passed over the leper. His flesh became healthy, the nerves sensitive, the muscles firm. The rough, scaly surface peculiar to leprosy disappeared, and a soft glow, like that upon the skin of a healthy child, took its place.¹

Jesus gave back to this man his physical health, as well as his spiritual health. Allow me to tell you something that I discovered when I was studying for this sermon. In the healing of the other illnesses carried out by Jesus, the writers of the gospels used almost always the Greek verb *iaomai*, that means “to heal”, but in the miracle of the leper’s healing a distinct Greek verb is used. Do you know which one? It’s the Greek verb *katharizo*, that can be translated as “to clean” or “to purify.” This verb is used in the New Testament to refer to not only to physical purity and cleansing, but to “religious and moral, in the sense of pure, free of stain and guilt.” In summary, when Jesus healed the leper, He gave him all the privileges of a healthy man; he was restored not only socially, but also religiously.

Young people, if anything is clear in this miracle it’s that the Word of God is the antidote against the leprosy of sin. Some believe that what brought healing to the leper was the “touch” of Jesus, but the evangelists make it clear that what gave healing to the leper was the word of Jesus. Through touch, Jesus—just as

¹ Ellen G. White. *The Desire of Ages*. p. 263



it's presented in the Bible text—expressed the grace that He felt towards the leper, but it was His word that resulted in the miracle of healing.

My dear friends, the Word of God has the power to bring healing to our lives. The word of God:

Generates life, creates faith, produces changes, scares the devil, realizes miracles, heals wounds, edifies the character, transforms circumstances, imparts happiness, surpasses adversity, defeats temptation, inspires hope, liberates power, cleans our minds, brings things into existence and guarantees our future.²

What happened with the leper after he was healed? He began to say what Jesus had done in his life:

Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. (Mark 1:45)

Praise be the name of God! He who was healed from leprosy become a missionary. Wherever he went, he repeated one time and again that Jesus had healed him. His happiness was such that he could not remain silent.

CONCLUSION

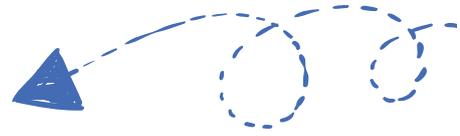
When we experience the healing power of Jesus, we cannot remain silent. Sin is the most lethal epidemic, but the word of God is the antidote against sin.

When someone is healed from the spiritual leprosy, he will let others know about the wonders of the Lord.

But there is something more. You and I are also called to demonstrate grace and love to those who are spiritual lepers. A while ago, I heard the story of Jose Damian, a young missionary from Belgium that was born in 1840. One day he heard that there were hundreds of lepers in a beautiful Hawaiian island. "All were hungry, wore rags and were abandoned by society," the church leaders told him. "We should send someone to bring them the hope of Christ."

Jose Damian offered himself as a volunteer missionary. When he arrived at the island of Molokai, and saw the situation of the lepers, with their face, hands

² Rick Warren. *Una vida con propósito* (Miami, FL: Editorial Vida, 2003), p. 201.



and feet disfigured, he could not bear the sight and looked the other way. He went to live in a little shack by himself; where he prepared his own food, washed clothes and carried out the rest of the chores. It disgusted him to see that, let's say, monstrous condition of the lepers and, additionally, he didn't want to get infected. That's why he prohibited them from getting close to his shack, he would go to the chapel, preached and returned to it.

One day Jose realized that his words did not provide any effect and that it wasn't enough to just preach. He understood that the love of Christ should demonstrate itself with actions and not only with words. Then, he decided to mix himself with the lepers, he helped them construct their own shacks, to dig wells so that they would have water in abundance; he provided clothes and food and washed and bandaged their wounds. Truly, Jose became one of them, but as a result Jose Damian died a leper. However, before this death, he had the joy to see that all the people in that place had accepted Jesus.

When we experience the healing miracle of the Word of God, we will also say as the ex-leper: "Lord, I will go."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How was leprosy viewed in the time of Jesus?
2. What should be done with those who were infected with leprosy?
3. What does leprosy symbolize?
4. What would those who experienced the healing power of the Word of God do?

