

## There is Another King: Jesus

*Luke – Acts*

### Jesus' Touch Cleanses Us

*Luke 5:12 – 13*

#### Introduction: Spiderman 3

How many of you saw the movie Spiderman 3? I did too, and I was a little disappointed because the trailer had been so good. Here's the trailer (show trailer). The key idea here is: 'How long can one man fight the darkness, before he finds it in himself?' There are more and more movies that have to do with fighting evil in ourselves, mistakes, regret, and the need for transformation.

In the 1990's:

- *The Shawshank Redemption* (2:06). 'Rehabilitation? It's just a made up word, so young fellas like yourself can wear a tie and have a job.'
- *Schindler's List*: 'I could have done more.'

In the 2000's

- *Flags of Our Fathers* by Clint Eastwood critiques our handling of World War II.
- *The Bourne Ultimatum* (1:12.40; chapter 13): 'I'm trying to apologize for what I've done.'
- *Atonement* where Briony tries to make amends for false accusing her sister's lover of raping another woman. She tries to atone for it as an author, by writing a story with a happy ending, but it's only make believe.
- *The Kite Runner*: 'There is a way to be good again.'

What do these movie clips have in common? They're all moments where someone is sorry. There is something that needs to be cleaned up. But in some cases, something in us needs to be cleansed. It's not just that we make mistakes sometimes and need to apologize. Unfortunately the problem is a bit deeper than that.

In 1960, Israeli undercover agents pulled off one of the greatest kidnappings in history. They discovered the South American hideaway of one of the masterminds of the Nazi Holocaust, a man by the name of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann had presided over the slaughter of millions of Jews in the hideous Nazi Final Solution. Furthermore, he had personally executed a number of Jews himself. The undercover agents brought Eichmann to Israel to stand trial. Adolf Eichmann's deeds were well known to the Jews in Israel in 1960, when his trial took place, and a long line of witnesses were brought in to testify against him. As Eichmann sat in a small bulletproof glass booth, prosecutors called in a small, haggard Jewish man named Yehiel Dinur, who had miraculously escaped death in Auschwitz. Dinur, ready to testify, stared at the former Nazi mass murderer behind the glass, and the courtroom was silent, waiting for what Dinur would say about Eichmann, who was responsible for the deaths of his friends and beloved people. But no one was prepared for what happened next. Yehiel Dinur began to shout and sob, collapsing to the floor. What happened? Was he overcome by hatred? By horrible memories triggered by some evil in Eichmann's face? No. Dinur later explained in a '60 Minutes' interview that Eichmann was not the demon he expected. Instead, he was an ordinary man just like you and me. And in that moment, Yehiel Dinur came to the realization that sin and evil are the human condition. He said, 'I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this...exactly like he.' There is sin in every one of us. Then Dinur concluded with a statement that shocked the world then as it shocks the world today: 'There is Eichmann in all of us.'

So what do we do? There's a tendency among human beings to think and say that evil is alien to us, it's something outside us. After the news on television covers a story of the mom who drowned her own children, or the murderer who did such and such, or the racist who did something horrible, they bring on the psychologist who tries to explain why this happened. 'Oh, it was pressure from somewhere else. It was pain from the past. It was this or that.' We always try to make evil outside us. But what if it's not? What if Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* was right? In response to the question, 'What happened to you?' Hannibal Lecter says, 'Nothing has happened to me, officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce

me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behavioralism, officer Starling. You've got everybody in dignity pants. Nothing is ever anybody's fault. Look at me, officer Starling. Can you stand to say, 'I'm evil?'

The Old Testament prophets understood this condition. So what did they say God would do? Moses in Deuteronomy 30 said that God would have to change the human heart, and that He would! Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel in Ezekiel 36 said the same thing. Here's Ezekiel 36:25 – 27: <sup>25</sup> Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness. <sup>26</sup> Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.'

### **Context:**

Jesus claimed to be the agent of this human transformation. We're going to look at a string of scenes in Jesus' life connected by one motif: Jesus' touch. They all come from the Gospel of Luke. We'll spend most of our time in the first one, but we'll look at the other ones briefly. Let's look at the first.

### **The Man Covered with Leprosy: 5:12**

<sup>5:12</sup> While he was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored him, saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'

In order to understand this, we have to know what leprosy is. Leprosy was the HIV/AIDS of its day, maybe the worst feared disease in the ancient world. 'Leprosy' in biblical times may have included things other than what we now call Hansen's Disease, which is today's 'leprosy.' So it might have been broader. But in the worst of cases, that is what it was. Leprosy kills nerve endings so that you don't feel pain. If you burn your fingers, you won't notice right away. If you cut yourself, you could lose a lot of blood before you notice it had happened. If your foot muscles are tired, you won't know to shift your weight. Your skin and muscles start to deteriorate.

In Jewish law, you had to be separated from society, couldn't worship in the temple with the whole community, and had to wear bells to warn others that you were coming so they wouldn't touch you. See Leviticus 13:45-46: 'The person with an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.' What's more, very few people were healed of leprosy in the Old Testament – only two people (Miriam in Numbers 12 and Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5). Even today, we don't have a cure for leprosy. Back then, it may have been the most feared of all diseases. Why did Jewish law command the isolation of lepers? Because: the disease is contagious and could have swept quickly throughout the camp.

And so, this one man, this man with leprosy, doesn't want to be deadened anymore. He's been wandering around alone and disconnected. He's wanted to feel the hug of his family. He's wanted to know the touch of a woman. He wants his life to matter again. But he's got death dripping off of him, what with his skin falling off in chunks. Imagine what this leper's life has been like...For how many years? How many times has he cried out, 'Unclean, unclean!?' How alone has he felt? How hopeless? How bitter? How pissed off? How despairing? How unworthy?

But as serious as leprosy was as a disease, it was even more significant as an **outward symbol** of something **inward, deeper and just as real**. For example, the problem in Spiderman 3 wasn't just the black suit Venom. Yes, alien substance from outer space is a huge problem. But Peter Parker's self-pity and self-congratulation are actually a big part of the problem, too. And symbolically, when Peter is in the bell tower ripping off the black suit, he is inwardly ripping out the self-centeredness that has been in his life. Similarly, in the world of Jewish law and symbol, leprosy and other forms of uncleanness were illustrations of a spiritual condition. God, like all the great storytellers, had established external, physical markers to illustrate internal, spiritual realities. So graves and tombs were unclean, a classic motif. If you touched them, you became unclean. Why? Because: it was dead stuff. And you had to be cleansed symbolically in order to rejoin the rest of the community. Also, the Jewish kosher food laws taught the

Jews about death. God said, 'Don't eat lobster and pigs,' for example. Why? Because lobsters and pigs are bottom-dwellers. They eat *dead* things, *decaying* things. A friend of mine said that the lobster is the cockroach of the ocean. That's kind of nasty, huh? Ever since then, I've wondered, 'Why do we pay so much for lobster?' God was saying to the Jews, 'I'm teaching you this lesson. Don't be associated with death. You are with Me, and I am alive. Therefore I call you to life, to responsiveness, and to communication.' And finally, if your skin developed that white, ashy color of leprosy, well that's what a corpse looks like. You actually look like you're dying.

So let's follow the trail from outward to inward. Why is evil like leprosy? It deadens you to pain and other things that you should feel. For example, a person who becomes more and more self-centered often develops a 'seared conscience.' They think a lot of things are okay when they really aren't. If you exaggerate or lie, you become deadened to it. If you become materialistic, you become deadened to the suffering of others. If you have a few casual sex encounters, you become deadened to the pain of broken relationship. In all these cases, you lose a real connection to the other person and even to yourself. Evil deadens you to pain that you *should* feel, pain that *should* drive you back to God. There is a way that pain is good. And as we'll see, Jesus heals the leper so that he could feel normal pain again.

Illus: I remember sitting one day with my high school biology teacher, Miss Schultz, one day at lunch, and telling her what was happening at home. She was a very affirming person, which was why I went to her in the first place. Not to mention she was young and pretty, too. But fundamentally, she was affirming, and I really needed someone to listen and understand. For some reason, I added, 'Yeah, and I'm trying to hold together my grades and my swimming, too.' And being the affirming person she was, Miss Schultz said, 'Wow, I really respect you for that.' The lunch bell rang and I left that conversation feeling great. Then, out of the blue, it dawned on me that I could turn any situation to my advantage. That's what I mean. We can turn any situation to our advantage, can't we? That should tell us something, that there is something within us that is not right. I began to feel the deadness of my own soul, how selfish I was. And that was the beginning of my awareness that I was pretty sick.

The Jewish people developed that awareness. If you were a leper, you could kiss everyone goodbye, or not – you'd have to wave goodbye. You were as good as dead. You'd be untouchable. So this leper comes finally to Jesus. 'Well, maybe he'll heal me. Maybe he'll be willing. Maybe God will do it through him, even though this has happened very, very rarely. Maybe.'

### **Jesus' Touch: 5:13**

So all of a sudden, Jesus 'stretched out his hand and touched him,' according to Luke 5:13. AMAZING!!! What's the big deal about this? How easy it would be to blip over that little comment. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. So what? Why did Jesus touch the man? He didn't have to. He could have just said, 'Be healed!' and did the miracle. There are two reasons.

First, the phrase 'stretched out his hand' is a classic Jewish way of describing the power of God. If a Jewish person heard this, he or she would hear the literary allusion back to the Exodus. Moses wrote (Exodus 3:20; 7:5) that God 'stretched out His hand' and delivered Israel out of Egypt. And the Psalms (136:12; 138:7) say God 'stretched out His hand' to deliver his people against their enemies. Here we see the true character of God's outstretched hand. It is Jesus' hand. When Jesus stretches out his hand, it is to deliver the man, and to deliver us. When he stretches out his hand to strike an enemy, it is to strike the leprosy, it is to strike that which strikes us.

Second, Jesus probably knew that the man hadn't been touched in years. I wonder what that felt like for the man, being touched by Jesus. I wonder how long Jesus rested his hand there on his shoulder. Can you imagine not being touched for years, and then feeling the touch of Jesus?

Now you might look at this and say, 'Well, what a nice guy Jesus is.' But there's something more. Jesus wasn't supposed to touch him. In Jewish culture and law, if you touch something unclean, you become

unclean.<sup>1</sup> Not only that, but a sick person can give germs to the healthy person. It doesn't go the other way around. The healthy person does not give health to the sick person. It just doesn't work that way. But when Jesus touches the leper, he doesn't become unclean. He isn't worried about getting the disease. His cleanness infects the man's uncleanness. His health infects his sickness. It goes the other direction. How can Jesus do that? How can he break all the laws?

### What is Jesus Doing to Humanity? Cleansing It

Well let's step back and look at the bigger picture. When we contextualize this passage into the larger whole of the Gospel of Luke, this is what we see. Just before this passage about the leper, is a story of Jesus encountering Simon Peter. Both men 'saw' Jesus. Both 'fell' before Jesus. Both say something. But look how different their words are:

<p><sup>5:8</sup> But when Simon Peter <b>saw</b> that, he <b>fell</b> down at Jesus' feet, <b>saying</b>,  'Go away from me <b>Lord</b>, for <b>I am a sinful man!</b>'</p>	<p><sup>5:12</sup> ...there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he <b>saw</b> Jesus, he <b>fell</b> on his face  and implored him, <b>saying</b>,  '<b>Lord</b>, if you are willing, <b>you can make me clean.</b>'</p>
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Simon Peter has a set of assumptions that aren't true. He thinks Jesus will be contaminated by him. He thinks Jesus doesn't want to be in the presence of human failure and limitations. He thinks Jesus can't really heal the deeper evils in people. He thinks Jesus can't use people, or at least people like him. It's just like us if we think, 'My anger problem is too deep. Jesus can't use me.' Or, 'I'm just too messed up; Jesus can't work through me; I don't want to publicly identify myself with him.' So Jesus heals and cleanses the leper for Simon Peter. It's to show him that sin is not something that is just *forgiven*. It is something that is *healed*.

Jesus is drawn to the places in us that are the most unclean, the most dead. Like a moth to a flame, he wants to go there. We will often want to hide it from him and from others. But that is the place in your life he most wants to be. He wants to touch you there. Most of you have an awareness of what that place is, and in just a moment, I'll be done so we can engage directly with him, because he is always present to us. We just need to be present to him.

Maybe you've seen this world as a test, like Hinduism and Mormonism do, where you try to work off your evil, or you're being punished for some evil you did long ago. But you realized that part of our evil is that we don't care about the whole world; we only care about ourselves, and the 'this world is just a test' paradigm keeps us self-centered. Or, maybe you've tried to get rid of certain desires in you, like a Buddhist might. But not only can you not do that by yourself, you find it hard to cultivate positive desires. What about the desire to see love in the world? The desire to see joy and justice and mercy? Or, maybe you've tried the route of secular social science or philosophy, where the most you can do is contain the problem with your routines, principles, laws, social engineering, and so on. You can't really touch the problem so you keep a distance from it. Islam and Rabbinic Judaism today also keep a distance from real human evil. We think we can just restrain human beings with discipline, morality, laws, and penal systems. I wonder why that hasn't worked? Maybe you just need the touch of Jesus.

Here's another reason why you may want him. As a fellowship, we're going to try to engage BC with Jesus and justice. I think we will face problems. The movie Spiderman 3 asked the question, 'How long can one man fight the darkness until he finds it in himself?' I think that's true. You'll try to change the world, or this campus, or even just one person, and you'll hit your head against a wall. People won't want to change. Systems won't want to change. And so at some point we'll face our own internal resistance. When we try to be the people Jesus wants us to be, we will enter a battleground in ourselves. I thought I was a loving person, until I started working with at-risk youth in the inner city, and also leading in my

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<sup>1</sup> Haggai 2:11 – 13: 'If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?' And the priests answered, 'No.' Then Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?' And the priests answered, 'It will become unclean.'

fellowship on campus. And then I would hit my head against a wall. I said to God, 'I don't like this.' God said to me, 'What's going on? You said you were such a loving person.'

Whether you've been a Christian for a long time, or whether you're still considering Jesus, you will notice things in yourself that need to be cleansed. The reality of the situation is that the more we try to change the world, which is a noble goal and that mission is from God and we are to persevere in it, the more we realize that there is Eichmann in all of us. You'll try all this great stuff, and then you'll come home and have no patience with your roommate. You'll try all this activism and then exploit women and children by looking at pornography. What's wrong with us? In those moments, we will realize if we haven't already that social justice is really at its core a spiritual issue. We, more than anyone else, need the touch of Jesus.

The great news is Jesus is more than willing to do it. He's eager! That's his entire mission! Simon Peter thought that being sinful was a barrier to Jesus. Jesus said, 'No, it's not a barrier. Let me touch that part in you. Don't fall down and drive me away. Be like this leper, who fell down and asked me to cleanse him.' Simon Peter fell backward. The leper fell forward.

And just so you're fully persuaded, let me show you all the other occurrences in Luke of Jesus touching people or things:

- And he stretched out his hand and touched him (5:13). He didn't need to touch the leper in order to heal him, but he did.
- And he came up and touched the coffin (7:14). This was when Jesus stopped a funeral procession because a woman who had already lost her husband had just lost her son. Jesus raised her son from the dead. And although he didn't have to, he touched the coffin, and then said, 'Arise.'
- A woman who could not be healed by anyone touched the fringe of his cloak (8:43 – 44). This was a woman who was bleeding for 12 years. She was ceremonially unclean, too, like the leper. Jesus healed her by that touch.
- He, however, took her by the hand (8:54). This time, it's for sure. There was a 12 year old girl who had just died. Jesus didn't have to hold her hand. Dead bodies are unclean in Jewish law. Plus, it's kind of creepy anyway. But anytime Jesus encounters something unclean or dead, he touches it.
- See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see (24:39)

This last one happens after Jesus is resurrected from the dead. He had just touched the thing that is ultimately unclean: evil and death. And he had come through it. So he says, 'Come here, touch me.' Why can Jesus cleanse humanity by his touch? How come he can break all the rules? Because by stepping into human flesh, he was touching the evil that lived in humanity. All his life was the cleansing of the humanity that he was wearing. Jesus wrestled down all the hatred, lust, self-centeredness (and what have you) that is in us because it was in him too, when he came in human form. But he was cleansing his own humanity until he killed the evil in it by dying on the cross. Like Frodo taking the Ring all the way into Mordor, Jesus took his own humanity all the way to its death. But where Frodo failed, Jesus succeeded. He cleansed his humanity, perfected it in the love of God, and then was resurrected with a new, fresh humanity that was cleansed of evil. The resurrected Jesus then said, 'Touch me,' because I can share my Spirit of my new humanity with you. That's how Jesus cleanses us, heals us. He doesn't drive us away. Even when we say, 'I'm not worthy for you to work with me,' Jesus says, 'No no no. Come here. Let me touch you. Don't fall backward. Fall forward towards me. I am willing, again and again, to cleanse you. Just let me touch you.'

I'm going to ask the worship team to help us respond to Jesus' touch together. There may be some of you, though, who would like to be prayed for. Staff will be in the back of the room if you'd like us to pray with you. If you are not a Christian but would like to fall forward towards Jesus, to commit yourself to him, and be touched by him, we would like to pray with you and come before him with you. Or, if you are a Christian and would like to bring some area of your life to him so he could touch it, please let us know – we'd be honored to pray with you and together, offer it to him. It might be a big issue, it might be small. It doesn't matter. Whatever it is, remember that Jesus is drawn to it. That's what he most wants to touch right now.