

I AM WILLING... BE CLEAN!

Mark 1:40-45

Key Verse 41, Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

Have you heard about Dr. Wiley Hamilton Forsythe? He was born in Kentucky in 1873. He graduated from Princeton University and studied at the Hospital College of Medicine at Louisville, graduating in 1898. He had the desire to do missionary work in a foreign country; thus, he went to Korea as a medical missionary in 1904. One day in 1905 when he was returning home late at night after giving medical treatment to some injured Koreans, he was attacked by unidentified assailants. His ears were cut off and his skull was fractured. However, Dr. Forsythe did not stop serving Korean people. Another day in 1909, he found a woman who fell on the street. When he examined her, he realized that her hands and feet were swollen, and her clothes were stained with pus and blood. She was suffering from leprosy. Then, Dr. Forsythe took off his coat and covered her with it. He raised her up and put her on his horse and entered into a town. When Korean people saw him with a woman of leprosy and helping her, they were very moved by his compassion. The news of his good deed was spread to other towns, and many people with leprosy in the region came to him in order to be healed. In 1912, Dr. Forsythe founded the first hospital specialized in Hansen disease (or leprosy) in South Korea. But he got sick and had to return to America. After suffering from the disease for 7 years, he died in 1918 when he was 44 years old. His life was short, but he remains as a father of lepers in the hearts of many Koreans. I am very thankful to many North American missionaries including Missionary Sarah Barry who sacrificed their lives for Koreans. I am one of the fruits of their love and sacrifice. I pray that God sends out many North American missionaries from our church to other countries in order to practice the amazing love of Jesus in the world.

Today's passage teaches us that we are spiritual lepers who lost the true image of God. But Jesus loves us and wants to restore the image of God in us. May God bless each of us to listen the voice of Jesus who says, "*I am willing ... Be clean!*" through this message.

Verse 40 says, "*A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'*" Luke, who was a physician (Col 4:14), describes the physical condition of this man more meticulously saying, "*a man came along who was covered with leprosy*" (Lk 5:12). It seems that the man's leprosy had been seriously advanced for a long time.

Some of us may associate the leprosy of the Bible with Hansen's disease, an infectious condition caused by slow-growing bacteria called *Mycobacterium leprae*; however, Bible scholars point out that it also includes a number of skin diseases. Leviticus chapter 13 gives a ceremonial instruction about how to examine and discover defiling skin diseases among the people of Israel. The priest examined the disease on the skin of a person's body very carefully, even taking 14 days of examinations for some cases. If the hair in the diseased area had turned white and the disease appeared to be deeper than the skin of his or her body, it proved to be a leprous disease and the priest pronounced him or her ceremonially unclean (Lev 13:3). Then, those who had the leprous disease had to wear torn clothes, let the hair of their head be

disheveled, cover their upper lip and cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev 13:45) Furthermore, they were expelled from their community and had to live alone outside the camp (Lev 13:46). Everything they touched was contaminated to be unclean and people who contacted them had to undergo the priest's examination.

Why were the defiling skin diseases considered so seriously by the law of God in the Jewish community? Some scholars explain it with the hygienic aspects of the laws as a means of preventing the spread of infectious diseases. We can understand well this point of view as we have been experiencing social distancing and quarantine for the purpose of preventing the spread of the coronavirus. However, the main reason comes from the Jewish religious and socio-cultural notion of cleanness and uncleanness. Because God is holy, cleanness was fundamental to the establishing and preservation of holiness in the Israelite community. Cleanness was ritually acceptable to God, whereas uncleanness was unacceptable to God. Leprosy was particularly dangerous as a source of uncleanness, therefore, those who had the leprous disease had to cry out "unclean, unclean," and required special cleansing rituals in order to be pronounced cured (Lev 14). Consequently, the leprous disease was regarded as a symbol of sin and the judgment of God. We can find several examples of God's punishment with leprosy in the Bible such as the story of Miriam, the older sister of Moses and the story of Uzziah, king of Judah. When Miriam opposed Moses, God punished her, and her skin became leprous (Num 12:10). Likewise, when Uzziah became proud and tried to burn incense on the altar of the temple of God, which was allowed only for the priests to do by the law of Moses (Ex 30:7), leprosy broke out on his forehead. He had to live as a leper in a separate house until the day he died (2 Chron 26:20). Therefore, those who had the leprous disease felt that they were condemned by God because of their sins.

Leprosy and sin have many things in common, especially in terms of disfiguring the image of human beings. Leprosy can affect the nerves, skin, eyes, and lining of the nose. The noses of leprosy patients shrink away, their earlobes swell, and over time they lose fingers and toes, then hands and feet. Many of them also go blind. They cannot feel pain because their in-built warning system gets broken. Dr. Paul Brand, the author of *The Gift Of Pain*, illustrates a shocking story of a young girl with leprosy. When the young girl named Tanya was eighteen months old, she was playing happily by herself laughing and cooing at her room. A few minutes later her mom went into Tanya's room and found her sitting on the floor of the playpen, fingerpainting red swirls on the white plastic sheet. But when her mom got closer, she screamed because the tip of Tanya's finger was mangled and bleeding. It was her own blood she was using to make those designs on the sheets! She had bitten off the tip of her finger and was playing in the blood. But she did not feel pain due to leprosy. Her father called her a monster! All of us want to be beautiful, thus many people get cosmetic plastic surgery in order to reshape their face. But imagine that you lose your nose, fingers, legs, vision, and so on. How horrible it would be!

Whereas leprosy disfigures the physical image of human beings, sin disfigures the true image of God in us. Genesis 1:26 teaches us that we were created in the image and likeness of the Triune God. What are the image and likeness of God in human beings? Colossians 3:10 says, "*and [you] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*" And Ephesians 4:24 says, "*and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*" Therefore, the image of God in us is true knowledge,

righteousness, and holiness, which include sound intelligence, healthy emotion, and righteous volition. God's divine attributes such as goodness, love, grace, mercy, patience, holiness, and righteousness are engraved in all human beings. In addition, we humans are spiritual beings, which is a very big difference from animals. Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life and the man became a living being. God's breath of life means the spirit of God. Hence, we should be united with God, who is the Spirit. Furthermore, we are missional beings because mission is the very nature of God. After creating humankind, God blessed us saying, "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it*" (Gen 1:28a). God's divine mission given to humanity is to fill the planet with men and women who have the true image of God and who oversee the creation of God as good stewards.

However, sin disfigured the true image of God in humanity. Apostle Paul depicts the defiled image of humanity without God: foolish hearts, depraved minds, idolatry, sinful desires, sexual impurity, lust, wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, envy, lies, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, disobedience, unfaithfulness, no love, no mercy, stubbornness, unrepentant hearts, self-seeking, and others (Romans 1:21-2:16). This long list of human sins is totally opposite to the original image of God in humanity. Do you know what are the seven deadly sins of college students? An article written by Thomas H. Benton enumerates them, which are: sloth, greed, anger, lust, gluttony, envy, and pride. Slothful students often postpone required readings and assigned preparations, feel their classes are boring and skip them; however, they regard themselves as full of potential saying, "I will be lazy now, but I will work hard later." Many greedy students desire to get good grades albeit they do not study hard. Some of them cheat on exams or plagiarize their papers. Some students get angry easily for getting bad grades and complain to their professors. The biggest fantasy of college students may be to have a romantic relationship with his or her ideal type of person. Some of them have casual dating through mobile apps only for the purpose of having sexual relations. Many students are addicted to pornography, especially in this time of social distancing. Alcoholism and drug addiction are common sins that many college students suffer from. Some students hate their classmates and roommates because of envy. Many college students are proud saying that they will be rich and famous someday. However, in reality they suffer a lot from their sins without knowing the true meaning of their lives. In fact, all of us suffer from our sins. All of us lost the true image of God like the man covered with leprosy. Therefore, all of us received a divine calling from God, that is to restore the true image of God throughout our lives. To be a true disciple of Jesus means to be a true imitator of Jesus denying our sinful nature and restoring the true image of God in us.

Then, how can we restore the true image of God? It is impossible for us to do it with our own effort because we lost ability to overcome our sins. But the solution is very simple. As the man of leprosy did, we just need to come to Jesus and cry out to him saying, "*If you are willing, you can make me clean.*" The man acknowledged that he was unclean; therefore, he had a great desire to be cleansed from his leprosy with the healing power of Jesus Christ. If you do not acknowledge that you are a terrible sinner who lost the true image of God, you cannot have a great desire to be cleansed from your dirty sins. Consequently, you will not be able to experience the power of Jesus who can cleanse you from all your sins and transform your life to be restored to the true image of God. Therefore, let's examine ourselves honestly before God and come to Jesus asking for his help and healing.

When we come to Jesus, we need to have right attitudes as the man with leprosy had. They are humbleness and faith.

First, humbleness. The man with leprosy begged Jesus on his knees saying, *“If you are willing, ...”* He knelt down before Jesus, which was an expression of his humbleness. For most of us it is very difficult to kneel down before others because of our pride. But this man did not stand on his pride; on the contrary, he humbled himself before Jesus. Moreover, he placed the final decision in the hands of Jesus saying, *“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”* “If you are willing” connotes that if Jesus were not willing, he would accept it too. The man with leprosy knew that Jesus was the Lord who had authority to heal him or not. When we come to Jesus, we must recognize that Jesus is the Lord, and we are undeserving sinners. We cannot be forgiven or healed without the mercy of Jesus. Therefore, we have to ask the mercy of Jesus humbly rather than demand him to do something for us.

Second, faith. The man with leprosy had to stay distanced from people; otherwise, he would be stoned to death. On the other hand, Jesus was always surrounded by the crowd. Hence, the man had to risk his life to come to Jesus. In addition, he had to reveal his shame to Jesus and people and believe that Jesus would accept him in spite of his leprosy. Furthermore, he had to believe that Jesus had enough power to heal his sickness. Amazingly, this man overcame all these obstacles and came to Jesus by faith. *“You can make me clean”* was his statement of faith. When we come to Jesus, we must have solid faith in the love and power of Jesus. It would be very difficult for us to expose our dirty sins to Jesus and others. We may worry about the judgment of people. But if we do not overcome it by faith, we would not be able to be healed and restored by Jesus. We must trust in the word of God that says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 Jn 1:9). Jesus has enough power to forgive you and heal you. Let’s come to Jesus by faith confessing our sins to restore the true image of God in us.

Now, let’s turn our eyes to Jesus. How did Jesus respond to this man’s petition? Verse 41 says, *“Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’”* Firstly, Jesus was indignant. Other translations say that Jesus was moved with pity or compassion (NRSV, ESV, NASB). When Jesus saw the man with leprosy, he became angry at the human condition that defiled humanity’s true image of God due to sins. At the same time, Jesus was filled with compassion on this man who had been disfigured and was suffering from the disease. Compassion is a quality of showing kindness or favor. Our God is a compassionate father toward those who fear him (Ps 103:13). Jesus Christ exemplified God’s compassion in his preaching and healing. When Jesus saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mk 6:34a). When we go to Jesus sincerely with our sins, Jesus will show us his compassion and forgive us.

What did Jesus do next? Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Jesus knew that those who had contact with a leprous patient became ceremonially unclean by the Jewish law. Then, why did Jesus touch him? Was the healing power of Jesus transmitted to the man through his touching hand? No! Jesus could heal him without touching as in the case of healing ten lepers (Lk 17:14). However, Jesus touched him intentionally because Jesus knew that the man with leprosy needed to be healed not only physically, but also emotionally. The man’s emotion was deeply wounded by the rejection of people and social stigma for a long time. His

self-esteem was very low. He felt that nobody including God loved him. Jesus wanted to heal his emotional wounds so that he could have healthy emotion that is the true image of God. When Jesus touched him, he was very surprised and moved by the love of Jesus. He could feel that God loved him. He could feel that Jesus loved him. When the hand of Jesus touched the man, his wounded heart was healed and filled with the love of God.

After touching him, Jesus said, *“I am willing. Be clean!”* In this word of Jesus, we can know clearly that Jesus wanted to heal the man with leprosy. Jesus wanted to restore the true image of God in the man. This is the heart of God and Jesus. Likewise, Jesus wants us to be restored to the true image of God. Do you want to be healed and restored by Jesus? Then, let's ask Jesus saying, “Lord Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Without doubt, Jesus will respond to you saying, “I am willing. Be clean!”

The restoration process of Jesus did not end with emotional and physical restoration. After healing the man with leprosy, Jesus ordered him saying, *“Go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them”* (44). According to the Mosaic Law, those who had leprosy had to pass through rigorous cleansing rituals in order to be pronounced cured. Jesus did not ignore the law of God; on the contrary, Jesus fulfilled it perfectly. Jesus wanted to restore him holistically—spiritually, physically, emotionally, and socially. Jesus wants to restore us holistically so that we can have the true image of God and serve God's mission in the world.

When we read a booklet titled *Early UBF Ancestors' Gospel Faith and World Mission Spirit*, we can find an interesting story of Dr. Samuel Lee. One day in 1963 when UBF had only 2 years of history in South Korea, Missionary Sarah Barry suggested to collect the cost of printing from student members. Then, Dr. Lee criticized her saying, “How do you expect poor students to pay for it? You are a rich American, you pay for everything.” But Sarah Barry insisted, “We should collect it from the students for educational purpose.” Their argument continued until Sarah Barry broke down in tears. That night, Dr. Lee could not sleep and began to read the Bible. Then, he was reminded that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45) and taught his disciples giving spirit saying, *“You give them something to eat”* (Mk 6:37). Dr. Lee realized that Koreans including him were full of receiving spirit and beggar mentality. He realized that Korean people were like lepers whose fingers shrank toward them because they did not know how to give. In the middle of the night, Dr. Lee went up a mountain and repented with tears all night. Upon coming down from the mountain in the morning, he spoke in a loud voice saying, “Let's stretch out our leper-like, shrunken fingers and give to others so that the tide of God's blessing may turn toward Korea.” From then on, the movement of giving spirit began in UBF and many Korean missionaries were sent out to the world. This is our church's powerful story. However, we may have lost this spirit of giving and sacrifice to serve others due to our selfishness. Maybe our heart became shrunken due to worries of life and self-seeking lifestyles. May God help us to restore the spirit of giving and sacrifice in order to continue to serve world mission ministry for God's glory.

I was a very selfish man seeking the success of the world. My dream was to be a judge or lawyer who has power and money. However, when the great love of Jesus touched me, my heart was broken, and the purpose of my life was changed. Jesus healed my selfishness and made me a shepherd and missionary who preaches the gospel of Jesus in South Korea, later in

Venezuela, and now in the US. This new life in Jesus has been a great blessing to me and my family. However, I am selfish by nature looking for an easygoing life. May God help me to be a man of love and sacrifice who preaches the gospel of salvation and practice the love of Jesus to all nations. May God help all of us to restore the love and sacrifice of Jesus and serve the world mission commandment preaching the good news to all nations.

I started this message with the heart moving story of American missionary Dr. Wiley Hamilton Forsythe. He gave his life for Jesus and Korean people, especially for those who had leprosy, showing them the love of God who sent his one and only son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Dr. Forsythe was a man who had the true image of God. I pray that each of us may come to Jesus sincerely with our sins and kneel down before him saying, *“Lord Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”* Then, our Lord Jesus who is full of compassion will respond to us saying, *“Yes, I am willing. Be clean!”* Jesus will cleanse us and transform us to restore the true image of God in us. May God bless all of us richly with the love and power of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.