

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 54

May 13, 2020

Welcome to The Mind of Christ study this week. One of the purposes of this class is to slow things down so we get into different sections for a long enough period of time that we can begin to analyze the mind of Christ and see what His thinking was in different ways and see, therefore, how we can not only understand Him, but imitate Him in our own lives. I am grateful that you are joining us for this study, and I am trying to keep each one of these classes to a complete section of the life of Christ so that each will be a self-contained class.

Today we are going to look at a story that is found in three of the gospels. We are going to read from each of these accounts because they are all necessary in order to get the full picture of what Jesus actually said and did. This is about the healing of a leper and this is the first time, specifically, that we hear of Jesus having contact with a person who has leprosy. I am not going to spend a lot of time defining leprosy or talking about the disease itself; you can do that research for yourself, but it was an incredible disease and still is in some parts of the world. The people who were infected with this disease had a very difficult life. They were isolated from society and they had a strong motivation to want to be healed or cured of this disease. Few *were* cured in the time of Christ, but this was one of the fortunate ones who found a cure in Jesus.

Let's go to Matthew 8, and I'll be reading from the New American Standard Bible

Matthew 8:2-4

And behold, a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." ³ Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, and show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Mark 1:40-45

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." ⁴¹ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴ and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, and show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Luke 5:12-16

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." ¹³ And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him.

¹⁴ And He ordered him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” ¹⁵ But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Now that we have all of the stories here, what are some of the facts that make up this story? Well, the man was leprosy; he was ‘full’ of leprosy, Luke says. It is interesting that some of the more complete medical diagnoses of the situation you will find in Luke, because Luke was a physician.

The second thing is, he begged for healing on his knees. He got down on his knees before Jesus and begged for healing. He also requested it in ‘this way’, and it’s consistent in the three accounts. “*If you are willing, you can make me clean.*” **If you are willing** ... we’ll come back to that.

We are also told that Jesus was moved with compassion for this man. We’ll talk about that some more, as well. Jesus even went to the extent of touching this man; probably something that had not happened in quite a while because he had been socially, if you will, isolating, from isolating, literally being quarantined, isolated; and now, Jesus came and *touch*ed him. Jesus told him that He *was* willing, and of course He did heal him, and the leprosy left him immediately.

Jesus warned him not to tell anyone as to what had happened to him, but He told him to go and show himself to the priests, to offer the appropriate sacrifices, and to follow what the Law of Moses said about such things as leprosy. And this was to be “**a testimony**” to them. We will discuss that a little bit in a few moments.

The man, also, ignored Jesus’ request (or command) not to tell anyone, and he began to spread the word, and it created quite a stir among the people. And, finally, as a result of this, Jesus had to often retreat to ‘lonely places’ (uninhabited or unpopulated places), where He prayed and carried on His training of the Twelve. So, those are the essential facts of this story. They were still in Galilee at the time, and Leprosy was a dreaded disease, very contagious and to be avoided at all costs.

So, what did Jesus think, or know, about Leprosy? Well, we are speculating here as to all of the knowledge and information that Jesus had in His head about any particular disease. Of course, I know He’s God in the flesh, He could know everything; and I would assume He knew everything there is to know about Leprosy. But, He is, still man and He has to struggle with the same kinds of things that we struggle with as people. And so, did Jesus have some ‘built-in’ prejudice against a leprosy man; was it difficult for Him to touch this man? Was this the first up- close and personal encounter in His earthly life He had ever had with a leprosy person? We don’t know, but it is easy to have some built-in prejudices about people who have been ostracized by a society, like it was in our case with the AIDS epidemic early on. We knew so little about it and we were very, very cautious, obviously, about not wanting to contract it until more was known about the disease. Then we learned that it was much more difficult to contract AIDS than we originally thought.

Did Jesus know about the risk factors? Did He know about the pathology of the disease? Were there any *genetic* issues involved here or any *accidental* kinds of things or environmental issues, and on and on it goes as to all the possibilities about any particular disease; not just leprosy, but any malady that a person had? How much about that malady did Jesus understand? Did Jesus need any medical knowledge at all in order to heal people? I kind of doubt He did, but would medical knowledge have helped Him to approach different people in different ways?

And finally, did Jesus know anything about this man's history? Did He know how long he had had leprosy? Did He know how long he had been isolated? Did He know anything about his family? Again, we don't know, but I raise these questions to try to personalize the story because often, we leave out these personal things in regard to the stories that we read in the Bible.

But the leprous man used the phrase, "If you are willing..." Now, remember; Jesus was returning to His primary mission of preaching. And we talked about, in the last lesson, how Jesus had gone from a few isolated miracles to now whole crowds of people coming from all over the region to be healed by Him. It caused Jesus to have to go off and find quiet places. He was beginning to put an emphasis on His preaching and teaching. Again, the context here of the story is of the man coming to Him and saying, "If you are willing..." I wonder if the news had spread that Jesus was trying to minimize or downplay the healing ministry and emphasize the teaching ministry, and perhaps the word had gotten around that Jesus was trying to *avoid* the crowds. He didn't want to have so many people coming to Him to be healed ... He wanted to teach more. So, could that have had something to do with this man asking Him, "If you are willing?" You know, 'do you have time, maybe two minutes, to deal with me and heal me, and then I'll be gone?' Again, I don't want to read more into this question, but the leprous person obviously thought Jesus had the ability to heal him; and so 'able' and 'willing' are two different things ... it can be. Jesus certainly was **able** to heal him and the leprous man seemed to know that; that's why he came to Him. But was He willing to heal him? There is often a gap between the two.

What shaped Jesus' will? What caused Him to be on this occasion willing, when He was really trying to devote most of His time and attention to teaching and preaching? Well, the story tells us right out that His motivation was *compassion*. This idea of compassion is an interesting word because it basically has to do with the intestines or bowels of a person. The place where you feel compassion for someone is 'in your gut'. And it is often used metaphorically for the heart of the person.

Compassion is the word that is used in **Matthew 9:36** where it says, "**He saw the crowds and He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**"

The same word is used in **Matthew 14:14** when He saw the 5,000 besides women and children, and they had nothing to eat and were hungry. It says, "**When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.**"

In **Matthew 20:34** when Jesus saw the blind men, it says, "**Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.**"

In **Luke 7:13** when He ran across the widow whose son had died, and they were on the way to bury her son, it says, “**When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, ‘Do not weep’.**” He stopped what he was doing and he healed her son; He raised her son from the dead. Jesus did not want to leave people in the condition they were in. That **drove** Jesus. And it tells us, again, about how **we** should think about things. Are we moved by the same things that moved the heart of God? These are important questions for us because if we are going to be “like” Him, if we are going to think like Jesus thinks, then we are going to have to be **moved** by what **moves** Him. And on this occasion, this man with a contagious disease, a man who had been isolated for so long; Jesus had compassion on him and wanted to do something to help him.

Jesus’ response to him was, “Yes. I am willing”. When we hear those words from God, when we bring our need to God, when we bring, sometimes, a desperate need to God, and we say, “If you are willing, Father. Your will be done. Not **my** will” and we hear in one way or another, those really sweet words from God that say, “Yes, I am willing”; those words change lives, those words reduce pain, those words dispel despair, those words bring hope to the hopeless, and those words bring usefulness to the uselessness of people’s lives. Jesus was willing; He was willing. It created an opportunity here. This was an opportunity.

You know, any encounter Jesus has with an individual creates an opportunity. And on this particular occasion, Jesus wanted to control the opportunity for this man. The man had options. When he received healing; when he was immediately made whole and he looked at himself and he suddenly saw that he had **no leprosy**; obviously the excitement was just amazing for him. The joy was amazing for him; but it created an opportunity for him, but it also created for Jesus something of a conflict, because now He had to try to control the message that this person may deliver. So Jesus limited him and said to him, “Don’t tell anybody”. He even ‘sternly’ warned him, “Don’t tell anybody.” And when Jesus put that obligation on him, it created for this man, a choice of obedience or disobedience. ***You see, until Jesus tells us something, we are free to do what we please. But once He puts a limit on us, then we are obligated to obey what Jesus says to do.*** But on this particular occasion, that’s not what happened.

Jesus was telling him that instead of going and telling everybody what has happened here, I want you to go and show yourself to the priests and follow all of the prescriptions of the Law. Was Jesus being unreasonable? Was He using some kind of reverse psychology to say, ‘if I tell him not to tell people he’ll go out and tell everybody?’ I don’t think so. Or was Jesus just simply, in a very practical way, trying to get some preaching done? And Jesus knew if this leprous man who had been healed went out and spread his story, that people were going to flock to Him, and it was going to be even more difficult to teach and preach.

So Jesus was not being unreasonable; He was just trying to help this man realize that there is something more going on here. There is a higher calling that is going on here. But Jesus was also trying to manage a little bit of the message by telling him to go and show himself to the priests and follow the prescriptions of the Law.

In other words, Jesus was producing what the Bible says in these texts was a testimony; a witness. Jesus wanted this man to be a witness, but He wanted him to do it in a certain way. Not by just going out and telling everybody what Jesus had done for him, but to follow the Law of Moses, and that would *become* a testimony. It would be going through the proper channels because now, the *priests* would have to inspect this man; he would have to determine whether or not this man was actually cleaned or cleansed, whether he had actually had leprosy and now was cleansed. There had to be some kind of proof that something had happened, that a cure had occurred, and this would have given credibility to the story that would one day be told.

If we go to **Leviticus 14**, and we're not going to read it now, but you would do well to go and read that entire section and see what exactly is going on here in the cleansing process. It was not simply to show up at the priest's door and let him look you over, and he says, 'okay you don't have any leprosy so you can go away'. No ... there was quite an elaborate procedure to go through ... in fact it was a *two-week process*! This man, if he were to **go** to the priest, it was going to involve him in about a two-week process. It would have been fairly expensive for him because he was going to have to offer animal sacrifices – not just one, but several sacrifices for God. He was going to have to shave all the hair off of his body. He was going to have to continue to socially distance himself, or isolate himself for the waiting period. Again; all the sacrifices; he was going to have to put oil on his body, and again, lots of blood was going to be shed through these sacrifices. He was going to have to go to Jerusalem. Remember, this was happening in Galilee and he would have to go all the way to Jerusalem in order to show himself to the priests ... away from his normal place, and he would have to find a place there to live and provide for himself during this social isolation of two weeks.

Also, when he went home, he was going to have to cleanse his house, and there was an elaborate way to do this. When I wrote in my journal, I was trying to capture this. I'll read a little bit of this from my journal. This is what I wrote:

Wow! I just read **Leviticus 14** of what is required of a cleansed leper when he goes to the priest. The ceremony is lengthy, like two weeks at least, and expensive. Several animals are involved and it is meticulous. There is shaving of the hair, waiting, sacrifices, oil on various parts of the body, and lots of blood. If I am reading this right, the man would have to have gone to Jerusalem, a ways from home. This was quite a process. I really like the part, and there is one part I wanted you to hear; about taking the life of a bird under running water. Now, he had to kill this bird under running water, dipping a live bird in the dead bird's blood, and after, sprinkling the healed leprous person. Then the live bird is released over an open field. (Wow! That's part of the process of what he had to go through.) The cleansed man, then, must wash all of his clothes, shave off all of his hair ... even his eyebrows, and he must bathe his entire body. Then the man's house had to be cleansed. This was what Jesus was telling the man to do. Again; this is quite a process.

What did this do? Why did Jesus want this to happen? Well, first, it was an outlet for his joy. It was the place that he could go to, this process of rejoicing, knowing every step of the way that he was going to pass the test and he would be proven to be free of leprosy.

It was also a fulfillment of the Law. It was a way of Jesus upholding the Law and not unduly calling attention to Himself because He could say, “Look. I told the man to follow the Law of Moses. So if he didn’t follow the Law, it’s on him; I told him to follow the Law.

It also put the Jewish leaders on notice because now this man is going to come and he is going to go through a process of providing evidentiary proof of his cleaning of Leprosy. He was going to have to prove it by all of these ceremonies that he was going through, and it produced in him a testimony during that time.

I want you to understand that now you have a priest involved. Now you have one of the leaders of the Jewish community *involved* in one of the healings of Jesus! This is not just simply hearsay. This is not simply just some kind of anonymous story from a distant region of “Jesus healed my mother of some kind of malady”. This is getting the authorities involved in the process of verifying, and providing legitimacy to the actual healings that were going on. Remember, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were trying to *discredit* the healings of Jesus. They did not want to acknowledge that He actually healed anybody. They wanted to ignore that, but by taking this to the priest, it would have been much harder to ignore, because now, this would have kind of gone ‘on the record’. He had gone through a legal and spiritual process to be determined to be clean. And certainly, the question would have come up during this, “Well, how did you manage to become clean?”

Again, my guess is that very few lepers during the time of Christ, or any ancient time, would have been cured of their disease. We have only learned, in more modern times, how to deal with Leprosy and how to help people through this dreaded disease. So, it would have been rare; it would have been very *rare* for anybody to have overcome Leprosy, so the priest would certainly want to know, “How did you beat this disease?” And he could tell the story. He could tell the priest how he came to be cleansed.

There is no indication ... in fact it seems that the leper, even if he did eventually get to the priest and go through this process, he told **a lot of** people before he got there. So, he didn’t do what Jesus told him to do.

So, as a result, it says that Jesus had to slip off to ‘lonely places’ to pray. He had to find places to get away from people, because, again, this story was stirring things up again. You begin to see this kind of give and take here, of Jesus being pressed by the crowds, and Him wanting to do the primary work of teaching and preaching about the Kingdom of God, and so He was always looking for that balance in His ministry.

So Jesus was looking for this alone time with the Father. What makes it hard to find “alone time” with the Father? Sometimes, it’s just finding the lonely place to actually be. Sometimes, it’s finding ‘time’ for the lonely place to be. And sometimes it’s hard to find the focus when we actually get to that lonely place and we have the time to spend there. So, it’s interesting that we’re seeing a side of Jesus where there are basically three competing demands for His time and His attention.

One is the crowds and the immediate needs that they feel for cleansing, for exorcism of demons, and those kinds of felt needs.

There is also the drive that Jesus has to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to get the message of the Father out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Thirdly, there is this need that Jesus has to spend time alone, with His Father, in prayer.

I think that that's probably a good way to look at our lives. It's that we have three competing needs in our lives. We **need** to be serving people; we **need** to be meeting the needs of people and these 'felt' needs that people have, whether it's serving our family or serving our friends or our neighbors or people in our church or whatever we may do. We **need** to be doing that.

But we also need to be spending a significant amount of time in proclaiming and teaching the word of God to people ... teaching our children, teaching our husbands and wives, spending time in the Word, proclaiming Christ through social media or through other means by which we can help people to come to know Christ. That is a significant amount of time that we need for that.

But we also need time alone; to be strengthened with our quiet time with God. We need time in the Word and time in prayer. It's essential that we balance these three areas of our lives, and we *see* this in these stories about Jesus and it informs us about the way He thinks, and helps *us* to be able to bring *our* thinking more in balance. Sometimes, the transition from life to quiet is a difficult transition.

That's one of the reasons I love to begin my day with quiet ... because I've slept all night, normally, of course, in my house, and I can usually find that quiet place, particularly around 5:00 A. M. when there are not a lot of interruptions except for maybe a few folks on the other side of the world who are already into their day and they're noticing that I am up and they might contact me. But it's a relatively quiet time to be with God, to focus on the Word, and to begin my day.

So, now I want you to share with me in a prayer that I wrote on this occasion, again, in my journal, and I'd like to close with this prayer for this section.

“Dear LORD, help me to fix my thoughts on You, to bring You my needs and my anxious thoughts, to seek Your wisdom and Your grace, and to allow You to guide me through darkness and sin into light and forgiveness. Grant me peace so that I may know Your heart, and know the mind of Your Son. Give me conviction of conscience, and determination to be obedient in all things. Help me to realize that when I cause hurt to you or others; help me to know that. Give me the ability to confess, and to repent, and to stay pure in your sight. Give me clarity into my motivations. Help me to see You clearly during times of temptation. Keep me in the light all day and away from anything that contaminates body and Spirit, and grant me the strength to say, ‘no’ and to overcome evil. Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil. Forgive me, renew in me a clean heart, and replace evil with the face of your Son. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Thank you for joining us for this study on The Mind of Christ. God bless.