

# Connect360: A Leper and the Touch of Jesus

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- *Lesson 2 in the BaptistWay Press Connect360 unit "Miracles: The Transforming Power of Jesus" focuses on Matthew 8:1-4.*

What made this leper willing to approach Jesus? He was confident Jesus could heal him; the question remained if Jesus would. Jesus' authority over disease was undeniable in this man's mind, but like many of us, he wondered if Jesus would demonstrate mercy to exercise that power on his behalf. What seed of faith was planted which took root and bore fruit in his life? Standing far off in the distance, had he heard Jesus teach: "Ask, and it will be given to you ... For everyone who asks receives." (7:7-8)? Was that the catalyst for the hopeful faith he exhibited?

This man had faith and courage. Terrified shrieks likely echoed in his ears as he reached the crowd, making his way toward Christ while people shrank away from him. Many probably ran away in fear. Did his eyes strain only ahead, so he wouldn't behold the horrified looks or risk making eye contact with those desperately trying to avoid him? According to Levitical law, he should have had torn clothes, an uncovered head, and held his hand over his lips, crying out, "Unclean! Unclean!" as he trudged toward Jesus (Leviticus 13:45). Were there jeers and catcalls reminding him he was not supposed to be among wholesome people? In that moment of panic, did anyone in the crowd remember Jesus had recently said: "Treat people the same way you want them to treat you" (Matt. 7:12)?

# Doing the impossible

However, what seemed impossible—being cleansed and reinstated to society—was not an impossibility with Jesus (Matt. 19:26). The man was so convinced of this truth he risked everything to come before the Rabbi, even calling him “Lord,” a term which didn’t necessarily affirm Jesus’ divinity but certainly acknowledged him as God’s messenger. However, it’s doubtful he got close enough to touch Jesus, so he wouldn’t risk making the popular teacher unclean.

Uncleanness didn’t faze Jesus. While others backed away, he reached forward, answering the man’s question verbally and physically. Extending his hand and touching him, Jesus said, “I am willing; be cleansed” (8:3). His action likely sent shockwaves through an onlooking crowd. Ceremonially clean people did not reach out to touch those who were unclean; to do so meant defilement, invited ostracism and probably questions about one’s sanity.

While Jesus could have simply spoken healing over the man, he chose to touch someone who had likely not experienced the pleasure of loving human contact in a long time. What a blessing! Jesus’ words, “I am willing,” expressed his desire to heal and his willingness to touch the man. Miraculously, the leprosy was immediately cleansed, proving Christ’s power over sickness and that the man’s faith was well-placed.

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