

Sermon for Sunday, February 28, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"THE MAN WHO CAN"

St. Luke 5:12-16

Text: "While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and besought him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean'." St. Luke 5:12

The leper was a man in desperate need. His disease had cut him off from society for the Jewish law ruled that he could not associate with others. It was simply a health measure to protect others from catching his disease, but it was dreadful being alone. He was required to wear a distinctive clothing so that others could tell who he was at a glance. And if someone accidentally came too close, he was required to cry out, "Unclean, unclean." But his problem was worse than that. There were awful physical disabilities as well. Leprosy cripples the hands and feet. The nerves are destroyed and because he could not feel pain when a sandal thong was too tight, it would cause a terrible sore. If he got too close to the fire, he could not feel the heat and could burn himself dreadfully. If he tried to work, he could not feel the warning pain of a blistered hand until the blood began to flow. Yes, the leper was a man in desperate need. Yet, he was also a man who understood what his need was. He needed healing. He needed cleansing. He needed to be made well.

There are many people today like the leper--they are people in desperate need. There probably isn't a person here this morning but that he has needs. There are sinners here this morning and that includes all of us because the Bible tells us we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There are all kinds of sinners but the best kind to be is a saved sinner. If you are not a saved sinner this morning you are in desperate need. The leper is a sort of prototype of us all because he was a man with critical problems and he knew he needed help.

The Bible tells us that when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and cried out for help. I think it would not be beside the point to emphasize that he saw Jesus with more than just his human, physical eyes.

Take for example an artist. A great artist must not only be able to see with his physical eyes, he must also be able to see with the soul, with the heart, with the feelings. The famous painting of Durer entitled "The Praying Hands" is a good example. Why have those hands become so famous? Are they simply the reproduction of some working person's hands? Are those dirty, torn nails very beautiful? Let me share with you the story behind the painting. Durer and a friend both wanted desperately to learn to paint and become great artists, but they did not have the necessary money for lessons and instruction. The friend offered to work and support Durer while he studied, and when Durer had become a great artist, he would pay for the studies of his friend. However, the only work available was hard, manual labor. By the time Durer had finished his studies, the hard work had so stiffened the fingers of his friend they would never again be able to do the delicate work with a brush that is required of an artist. In a very real sense, he had sacrificed himself for Durer. One night as they were going to bed, Durer saw his friend kneeling beside his bed with his hands folded before him in prayer. It was that picture that he captured and put on canvas. But in his picture he has captured more than work-hardened hands, torn nails, and stiff fingers. Somehow he has captured something that is almost holy. You see, he saw with more than the eyes for he saw those hands with his soul, with his heart, with the deepest feelings of his being and transferred that to canvas.

It would not be amiss, then, to say that the leper who fell on his face and

cried out to Jesus saw him with his soul, he saw him with eyes of faith. This has always been the case with Jesus. Once he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" That is, how do people see me? But it was his disciples who saw him with the eyes of the soul, with eyes of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Zacchaeus is another case in point. The Bible tells us that "he sought to see Jesus, who he was..." Because he was short and could not see over the crowd, he climbed a tree because Jesus would pass that way and he could see him better. You remember that Jesus called Zacchaeus down from the tree and went home with him for dinner. After he had spent some time with Jesus, we know that he saw him with new eyes, with eyes of the soul, for when it came time for Jesus to depart, Zacchaeus said to him, "Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And when Zacchaeus saw Jesus with new eyes, when he responded to him with his heart, Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..."

Is not this the profound need of our world today--the need to see Jesus Christ with the eyes of the soul? Recently I was at a meeting in Dallas. Seated beside me was a young lady who is a junior at SMU. She is from a wealthy home where they want for nothing in material things. Yet, as we talked and as I asked her what God wanted her to do with her life it was obvious that something was missing. "I'm looking for something," she said, "and I haven't found it yet." She had been raised in the Church and her father is an Elder, but she had not yet had eyes to see Jesus as her personal Savior. I told her about Jesus and what he had done for her and suddenly she saw him in a new way for the first time--she saw him as a living person with whom she could have a personal relationship. And when she saw Jesus--really saw him for the first time--her eyes filled with tears. I asked her if she would like to pray and invite Jesus into her life and there at the dinner party, she bowed her head and quietly asked Jesus to come into her heart. Until that moment she had seen him, but she had not seen him with the eyes of the heart, with the eyes of faith.

The Bible says, "this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." The world today is desperately searching in so many places and in so many ways to find meaning for life. What we need most of all is to see with our eyes and hear with our ears and understand with our hearts.

So, first, the leper knew his own condition, his desperate need. Second, he saw Jesus--saw him with the heart, saw him with spiritual understanding, saw him with the eyes of faith. Notice in the third place that he believed Jesus could do something about his condition. The Bible tells us that he cried out, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." When the roof tumbles in, what then? To whom or to what can you turn with faith and confidence that something can be done? In a recent article, Charles R. Hembree tells the heartrending story of a young father who committed suicide. In his pocket they found a child's crayon drawing, much folded and worn. On it the man had written, "Please leave in my coat pocket. I want to have it buried with me." It was a drawing signed with the name "Shirley." Investigation discovered that five months before Shirley had perished in a tragic fire. The father was so grief stricken that he had asked total strangers to attend his daughter's funeral so she would have a nice service. He said there was no family to attend as Shirley's mother had been dead since the child was two years old. The father had talked to a reporter before his death and said that all he had in life was gone, and he felt so alone. It was better to be dead than to live

in an impersonal world. According to the story, he left his insurance to the church where Shirley had attended with the note, "Maybe in 10 or 20 years someone will see the plaque with her name and wonder who Shirley Ellen Lee was, and say, 'Someone must have loved her very, very much.'" The point is this: obviously the father knew about the church and about Jesus. But caught up in his own grief he did not believe that Jesus could help him. He had only to look at the cross in faith where God gave his own son to know that someone loved him very, very much.

Yes, the leper knew his desperate need, he saw Jesus with the eyes of faith, and he believed that Jesus could help him. Now we come to the heart of the whole matter. There are many of us today who stand where he stood at that moment. Yet, if the leper had done nothing more, he would still have been a leper in spite of his faith. Many of us this morning are living defeated lives in spite of our faith because we fail to do what the leper did next. And what did he do? He asked Jesus to heal him. As nearly as I can tell, there is not a single instance in the New Testament where Jesus healed someone unless there was a request, an invitation.

That's as it should be. God will not overwhelm us against our wills. He will not force himself into our lives. The Bible says of Jesus, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..." Jesus will knock, but he will not batter the door down. He will knock, but we have to open the door and invite him in. Many of us today know our need, many of us see Jesus with the eyes of faith and believe that he can help us. Yet, many of us are still living defeated lives because we have never asked. We have never asked Christ to come into our lives. Jesus can't help us until we do.

Did you notice what happened when the leper asked Jesus to heal him? The Bible says that Jesus replied, "I will; be clean." And the Bible says that "immediately the leprosy left him." Had you or I been there that day and the leper asked us to help, we surely would have been willing. Unfortunately, we could not have helped in spite of our willingness. I have people come to my study with desperate problems and often my heart yearns to help them and heal them, but I cannot. As I visit in the hospitals, I see dreadful conditions that make my heart hurt and I desperately want to help, but I cannot. If the leper had come to me he would have come to the wrong man. I would be willing, but I would not be able to help him. But the leper went to Jesus. He went to the right man. He went to the man who was not only willing to help him, but most importantly, he was able to help him.

If some lost man offered a million dollars this morning for someone to save his soul, there would be many who would be willing to try. But there is only one man--Jesus--who could succeed.

Out in California is a place called Death Valley. It is one of the most desolate regions in the world that is 150 miles long and 10 to 35 miles wide. On one occasion, due to a freak in the weather, rain fell for 19 consecutive days in this barren region. The desert became resplendent with lilies, buttercups, posies, larkspur, columbines, indian paintbrush, and countless other flowers that no one dreamed had dropped their seeds there in that forsaken land. When the right thing happened, a desert became a garden. It doesn't matter how desperate your situation is this morning or how desolate your heart for there is someone who loves you very, very much. He died on a cross for your sins. He is not only willing to help you, but he alone is able to help you. He is the right man to ask--and all you have to do is ask.