

Make Them Human – A New Take On The Healing of the Leper

Matthew Vander Els • 2024-04-28 • foundedintruth.com

MAIN VERSES

[Luke 5:12](#) • [Luke 5:13](#) • [Luke 5:14](#) • [Human Luke 5:15](#) • [Luke 5:16](#) • [Leviticus 13:45](#)

I Love Bibles

I couldn't figure out a way to seamlessly say the two things I wanted to start with today. So I decided I'd just say them and explain them later. For any of the teens who are normally with me, they won't be surprised by this. So here we go. I love Bibles. And my grandmother recently died. Don't worry, I'll explain it all.

Bibles first, though. I love Bibles, the physical actual books. I love all the different translations we have access to today. I love the amount of Bibles that exist. I love calfskin and goatskin. I love all the other different materials that Bibles are printed on. I love the maps in the back. I love the pictures. I love Bibles. Seriously, just shy of 600 years ago, I wouldn't have been able to say that. I would have maybe said, "I love that I heard someone tell me about the Bible today." But I would not have been able to say, "I love Bibles"—look at all these beautiful books that I have. And do you want to guess what the very first mass-produced book was after the invention of the printing press in roughly 1450? That's right, a Bible—the Gutenberg Bible. Mass-produced, by the way, in 1452 meant 180-ish copies, just so you know. It spread like wildfire throughout Europe. An entire leaf of it made it over here. But I love Bibles.

Yes, the Gutenberg Bible in 1452 was the very first mass-produced book on the recently invented printing press: Hebrew scriptures in Latin and the Greek New Testament. The Bible was and is such an important book that it was the first thing printed by whoever decided to make a printing press—though it wasn't actually Johannes Gutenberg. I don't remember who it actually was—but they decided that was the first book that should be printed, that everyone should have access to for themselves.

Everyone Should Have Access

See, we don't think about that today, that we live in a time where I can go get the Bible and read it for myself. And while I might not necessarily understand the nuances of it, I can still read it for myself, when it wasn't that long ago in human history when roughly 99% of us would have had to rely on somebody else to tell us what it said. I still rely on people to tell me what the Bible says. But I can read it for myself. I love a well-made Bible. Good, heavy, nice cover. Something I can print my name in. Something that reminds me of different milestones in life—whether it be a Christmas when I was a child or an Easter when my mom thought I should get a new Bible. Whatever. I love Bibles. And someday I'm going to realize my dream of having a library in my home filled with all the different Bibles that I want to have. Not because I need them, but because I want them. And maps.

She Wanted Me to Have His Bibles

During the Purim party this year, about halfway through, I found out that my grandmother had died. That was a few weeks ago. From here on out, I'm going to refer to her the way I always referred to her, and I'm going to bring up my grandfather as well. I refer to him the same way. So when I say Granny and Grumps, I'm talking about my grandparents.

She was almost 90 years old. She'd lived a very, very full life. She was the wife of my grandfather, Grumps, who himself had died just a couple years before. Quite frankly, she had missed him ever since, and she was ready to go. She was 16 when they were married, and he was 19. They were together for 71 years.

My grandfather was a pastor for about 30 years, and then after that he was a chaplain at a hospital for another 15-some-odd years before he retired. In the area I grew up in, in the Pacific Northwest, it was hard to run in the circles that we ran in when I was a kid and not meet somebody who knew my grandparents. He was the pastor, but they were most definitely the team. And I still get reminded today when I go back by somebody I've never met how much I look like my grandfather.

When he died, Granny gave me one of his Bibles, which I have right here. She knew that I loved Bibles, and she thought that I would appreciate his old Bible, which I do. I like Bibles more than I like this thing. Fine, I'll hold it.

One of the first things I did when I got this Bible was I looked to see where it came from. And sure enough, it came from somebody I've never met, but it was a gift to Pastor Dick Temple in

appreciation, December 25th, 1961. It's a Schofield reference Bible, which I'm not a huge fan of, but what are you going to do? It's nice to live in a time where I can care.

It has all of his notes in it, everything he underlined. I've looked through it many times, and I can see the things that stuck out to him, the things that he believed were important about following Jesus and pastoring a flock. He emphasizes things a little bit differently than me, but that's okay. It has prayers written in the margins. It has notes in it. It's a connection to my grandfather from a bygone age, an age I never lived in.

His Bible, Kept Until the End

About a week and a half after Granny died, I got an unexpected package in the mail. This is my grandfather's other Bible. It says Pastor Richard Temple on the front. This one he got in 1978, the year before I was born. And this was the Bible that he kept by his side until he died just a couple years ago. And this is the Bible that Granny wanted to keep until she died, and then she wanted it to come to me.

This one's an NIV, which I like better than the Schofield. I remember Granny telling me one time about this Bible because I've seen it many times, that when he bought it, it was actually kind of a controversial thing. He wanted to try out this newfangled translation. And back in 1978, that was kind of scandalous in his conservative church.

Like the other one, it has notes. All the same verses are underlined. I was comparing them last night, actually. It's pretty funny.

Granny knew I loved Bibles, and she wanted me to have Grumps' Bibles. So I was talking about this with my wife the other day, and the thing that stuck out to me was those are quite literally his only two Bibles. I got a bunch of Bibles. He pastored for 60-plus years, and he had two Bibles. And that has stuck out to me, so I'm talking to my wife about it, and she said a hard truth.

Love Versus Need

She said, "You love Bibles, and you see Bibles as really neat. Grumps saw his Bible as the thing he couldn't get through the day without." That was true. He taught me a lot of things before I realized what he was saying.

For instance, as we'll see when we get into the scripture that I want to discuss this morning, he taught me about marginalized society many decades before I knew the words "marginalized

society." He told me a story—geez, it was probably 25 years ago at this point. I was working in the first church that I was in with a youth group there, the first youth group I ever did. And there was a particularly difficult situation going on. I was much younger than I am now. I was much less sure of myself than I am now. And I was even more affected by people's opinions of me then than I am now. And it was a struggle. And I was talking to him about it.

A Story from the Hospital

And he told me a story about something that had happened to him when he was working as a chaplain in the hospital. He said there was a man in the hospital. His name was Ray. Ray was HIV positive and he was very sick. This was the late 80s. Any of you who have been alive since the 1900s will probably remember what it was like to be HIV positive in the late 80s. There was a much different feeling around it than there is today, and we understood much less about it. Back then it was definitely a death sentence. There was a lot of stigma attached to people who were HIV positive.

And many of them, my grandfather would tell me, he ended up seeing in their final days. And he said most of them spent their days alone. Friends stopped coming to visit, family members didn't come around, people were afraid because they incorrectly believed it was much more contagious than it actually was. But people didn't know.

Ray's case was pretty advanced. He was in and out of the hospital a lot. And eventually he was in until he passed. And Grumps being the chaplain, he got to know him pretty well. Ray used to tell Grumps how nobody would come and visit him anymore because most of his friends and family thought it wasn't safe. Grumps was one of the only people who spent time with Ray before he died.

And they began to read the Bible together, something that Ray had not grown up with. He had a lot of time on his hands, so he thought it would be fun to get to know somebody, and they read the Bible together. Eventually, Ray had read much of the Bible, and he brought up a very hard question for Grumps. You see, Ray was not only HIV positive, but he was gay. And again in the 80s, he asked Grumps one day, very sincerely, "Is being gay a sin?"

And Grumps responded to him that, yes, it was his opinion that it was a sin. And Ray responded, "Well, I don't like that part." And that was the last they ever spoke of it. It was not the last that they studied scripture together. In fact, they studied scripture up until the day that Ray passed. He was alive for another three and a half months, I think Grumps told me.

And they read scripture together every single day. Ray died not long after that, as I just said, but not before Grumps had the privilege of praying with him to accept Jesus into his life. He told me this story, and then he told me that many people in the circle that he ran in had a problem with his relationship with Ray. They didn't like his lifestyle choices and they didn't feel that Grumps made a big enough deal out of it. They didn't like that he was where he was for the reasons that he was, and it didn't seem to bother Grumps at all. And Grumps told me that at that point in his life, he couldn't really care. He said, "I couldn't care any less about Ray's past life, but I couldn't have cared any more about his future salvation." So he chose to introduce him to Jesus. Then he chose to show him Jesus. And then he chose to let Jesus do the rest.

What We're Going to Look At

What we're going to look at today is something I've taught on for years. And over the last two weeks it's come up in my mind again. It has renewed meaning for me, and I wanted to share it. Let's read together and then unpack what it looked like when Jesus touched marginalized society in his day.

We'll be in Luke chapter 5. The only scriptures we're going to look at today are 12 through 15. I don't actually have them up there. I'm going to read them. It only takes a second. It's a tiny little paragraph within a much larger block of teaching, and quite frankly, it's easy to miss. So Luke chapter 5, verse 12, in case anyone cared, I'm reading from the CSB translation.

"While he was in one of the towns, a man was there who had leprosy all over him. He saw Jesus, fell face down, and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, 'I am willing. Be made clean.' And immediately, the leprosy left him. Then he ordered him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them. But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds would come together and hear him and be healed of their sicknesses. Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed."

What I just read was the record of a miracle—one of many records of many miracles that Jesus did in the record of his life that we have in the Gospels. And it doesn't take long to read about a miracle, it turns out. It'll take me a little bit longer to unpack it, not just because I like talking, which I do—I like Bibles, I like talking—but because the Bible has a really frustrating way of saying a huge amount in such small verses. And because of cultural differences and style of ancient writing and how far removed from the actual events we are, we need to take a little time, in my opinion, to understand what's being communicated here so we can understand the

heart of our King. Make no mistake about it, this is definitely kingdom of God language being used here. And this is where Jesus expects us to emulate him in action. Yes, this is the recording of a miracle, and he expects us to emulate him in action.

There are two things that really stick out to me in this section. And one of them has always stuck out to me—one very specific short phrase that I've always noticed. The other I noticed much more recently, only after years of meditation on the same subject. We'll get to that later, but I want to give you some possible background to the story. I want to try to put us somewhat into the mindset of someone in the first century, to understand what they would have experienced when they encountered a man with leprosy. It's a little bit more difficult task, but bear with me.

What Leprosy Meant

So verse 12 says: a man who was there had leprosy all over him. What does that mean? I know from growing up around the Bible that leprosy is bad in scripture and those with it are required to live outside of town, separate from everyone else. They had to yell "unclean" when anyone got too close so people would know to keep their distance. But other than that, I didn't know anything about it. I didn't even know what it was.

So I went looking. Today, leprosy is known as Hansen's disease. It still exists in the world today, including the United States, although it is exceedingly rare here. It's most prominent in the Southeast Asian region of the world today, although Africa and South America have issues with it as well. It's a slow-growing bacteria, and it is contagious, but only after many months of prolonged contact. It's also very treatable today, especially if you catch it early, but if it isn't, it leads to physical deformities.

The World Health Organization does believe this is the same disease mentioned in ancient literature, including the Bible. I found that interesting. They specifically wrote on their website: "When reading about leprosy, we think this is the same disease mentioned in ancient literature." They also mentioned today that people with leprosy face discrimination and stigmatization, which, based on what we're about to look at, I do find interesting.

So now that we're all experts in what leprosy is, I want to try a second exercise. I want to try to put us into the mindset of someone in the first century, to understand what they would have experienced when they encountered a man with leprosy. It's a little bit more difficult task, but bear with me. While the Bible doesn't say how common it was, I think we can safely infer that it was more common there than it is in our context today. It seems that everyone was aware

of these communities of people that lived away from everyone else, that shouted "unclean," that were specifically called out in the Hebrew scriptures to do certain things and to stay away.

So again, I went looking, and the internet provided me with a story that I found really helpful. So I stole it. I adapted it slightly, and I'm going to read it to you. I can't write this well, so I would also like to give credit to the people who wrote it, but to be honest, I didn't write it down when I found it. And then when I went back to find it again, I couldn't find it. So yeah, wah, wah. So on the very small chance that whoever wrote it is out there right now, I apologize.

Imagine a Man

All right, so here we go. I want you to imagine a man. He's in his mid-30s. He's just starting out in life. He has a beautiful wife. He has two adorable little children. He's got a third one on the way. His marriage has had a few ups and downs, but he and his wife always seem to work things out. He has a good job, his own piece of land. He's building a nice house on it. He figures they'll be done with it in five or six years.

One day he comes home from work and he shows his wife a small sore that developed on his hand from using a certain tool too much. It's not really painful, but it does keep him from working on his house that evening. He takes it easy at work for a couple of days, but the sore just keeps getting larger and larger. It still doesn't hurt. But after a few days, they both get a little alarmed and his wife persuades him to go see a person in town who knows about these things. It's not a doctor, but he's been trained in the area of skin infections, things of that sort.

So the man looks at it, studies a few books he has lying around, and he says, "It's hard to determine what this is. I have a few theories, but I want to be sure, so I need you to stay here for two weeks so I can observe the sore." So that's what they do, and for two weeks the sore gets bigger and bigger until it almost covers his whole hand. It becomes wide around the edges. It doesn't cause much pain, but it sure doesn't look good.

At the end of the two weeks, the man with the medical training says to the younger man, "I figured out what you have, and I am very sorry to inform you, but you have leprosy. You're going to have to leave your wife and your children, your land, your home, your job. You're going to have to go off and live with the other lepers out behind the town."

Hearing this, the man is terrified. It's a death sentence. The process of dying by leprosy is worse than dying itself. In most cases, the body of a person just rots to pieces while the person continues to live. But this isn't what terrifies the man. He's not afraid of dying. He's not afraid of

the process that leads up to that. What he's afraid of is the complete and total separation and isolation. He will always be thinking of them.

"Let me go home and tell them goodbye," he begs. "Let me give my wife one last kiss."

"I'm sorry," says the other man. "You can never go home again. You can never hold your wife in your arms again. You can never ever wrestle with your son again. You can never kiss your little girl goodnight again. If you see them and touch them, they may get leprosy themselves."

His family would come and bring him food every day, but they couldn't get close. They would leave it at a certain place on a rock, and when they withdrew, he would go and pick it up and eat it. In this way, he watched his children grow up, yet he was never able to touch them. He watched his wife cry as she left the food, but he was never able to comfort her.

After several years of this, he started wishing they wouldn't come anymore. It wasn't that he didn't want to see them.

It was that he didn't want them to see him. He had lost an ear already, several of his fingers and toes. His face was horribly disfigured. His hair was falling out. According to Jewish law, he wore rags for clothes. His hair was to be uncovered and disheveled, and they covered his face with a cloth. It's in [Leviticus 13](#), 45, if you want to look it up.

This very well could have been the man who approached Jesus saying, I can only imagine what he looked like. Verse 12 says that he had leprosy all over him. I imagine most of us think, like I did, that leprosy is a disease that causes your skin to rot and fall off your body, but that isn't actually true.

The common form of leprosy causes damage to the body's nervous system. As a result, it causes you to not be able to feel anything. The infected parts of the body go numb and eventually lose all sensitivity. It wasn't uncommon for someone with leprosy to be missing a limb because it was injured and they simply couldn't feel it. Like someone lying next to a fire at night rolls a little bit too close and burns off a limb without ever waking up. That is a miracle we can emulate.

Remembering that everyone that we come into contact with, every single one of them, is human, made in the image of my king. That is kingdom behavior. And as an image of my king, I am required by my king to be involved in it.

Grumps and the Story of Ray

25 years ago, Grumps told me this story without telling me this story. He never explained it. He never explained it this way. He never said, hey, have you seen Luke chapter 5, verse 12? Let's go. No, he told me a story about a guy named Ray. That was it. There's another thing that I noticed, and even though I've read this hundreds of times for the last many years, verse 16 stuck out to me very recently when I was reading it, and it never had before.

Jesus in the Deserted Places

"Yet often he withdrew to deserted places and prayed. Jesus often withdrew to deserted places to pray. The man with leprosy was required to withdraw from society to die. To wait and die a terrible death away from everyone he ever knew or loved. Jesus withdrew on purpose to pray in deserted places where no one else was."

I found myself wondering, is it possible that in these deserted places where no one else was, Jesus learned to empathize with those who spent their lives there? Do you think by withdrawing that Jesus was able to learn what he needed to learn, being that he was fully human as well, to understand what a portion of society that had no value whatsoever lived with? I do.

I think that to truly walk out heaven on earth now, sometimes we have to reach down into the dirt where none of us like to be. Because you've been there, Jeff. You know what it looks like. But you also know the way out. It's hard and uncomfortable in the places I don't want to be anymore. I don't like it. It goes against my idea of blessing. It goes against everything I've built up in my mind that I am not anymore.

Sometimes the blessing comes from the mud. And what a blessing to be able to be the one who touches another person and brings exactly what they need.

Being What Others Need

I'll be done in just a moment. So if you want to come back up, you can while I finish. Being exactly what another one needs is important because blessing isn't about me and what I get. It's about his kingdom and the role that I am privileged to play in it.

This passage is a neat miracle. But more than being just a miracle, it invites us on a journey by reminding us there is a part to play. Jeff spoke about wanting so badly to play a part this morning. And the Father had a part for you, and now you're playing it.

There Is a Part to Play

There is a part to play. We get to participate in the kingdom that Jesus wants to build on earth now. And what a miracle that is. All these years later, I realized that's the only thing Grumps was trying to teach me. It's the proof I have that he loved the Bible in the way I love Bibles. I'm thankful that I likely have many more years to learn the lesson. I love the Bible.

Let's pray.

Father, what a blessing and a privilege to be a part of a legacy that teaches that we can bring heaven on earth now. What a blessing it is to be a part of a community that allows us to learn what that looks like. Father, what a blessing it is to be under your grace. May the Lord bless every one of us today. Amen.

I invite you to sing the Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people in order to strengthen your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all of his Kedeshim, all his holy ones. And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Tsar Shalom, our Prince of Peace, Yeshua HaMashiach. Shabbat Shalom, family.

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at Foundedintruth.com. EMAIL: Info@foundedintuth.com. FACEBOOK: facebook.com/foundedintruth. WEBSITE: Google:

Watch or listen: foundedintruth.com/bible-teachings/make-them-human-a-new-take-on-the-healing-of-the-leper/

This automated transcript has been lightly edited for readability; scripture quotations appear as spoken. For the authoritative teaching, watch the video. • Founded in Truth Fellowship, Rock Hill SC • Saturdays 11:00 AM • Your giving keeps every teaching free: foundedintruth.com/give