



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March—April 2018

Unclean, Unclean!

By Bob Van Domelen

Note: This was the lead article for July 2003 but the notion of 'leper' has been on my mind lately, so I decided to repeat the article and add some recent thoughts.

2003

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (Matthew 8.2-3)

History tells us that lepers living during the time of Christ had to maintain a distance from healthy people and loudly announce their presence by calling out, "Unclean, unclean!" I have wondered about this man who approached Jesus so boldly. What brought him to such inner strength to take the risk he took? His was, after all, a disease without a known cure. Leprosy was for him (and others so condemned) a life sentence—each day another day of experiencing a disease that literally wasted his flesh before his very eyes.

The leper had said, "If you are willing" and Christ responded, "I *am* willing." In some ways, I wonder if the leper had the following conversation with himself before approaching Jesus. "If Jesus is willing to heal me, then I get to be healed. And if he isn't willing, well, then life and death will be pretty much the same as I had imagined they'd be for me before I even heard of this man. What have I got to lose? Well, that's settled then. I'll ask."

Centuries later, those with leprosy were sent to some remote island called Molokai where they would live and die isolated from healthy people. Good people, like the famed Damien of Molokai, did what they could for those who suffered and many, like Damien, eventually contracted leprosy themselves, becoming like those they served.

It would be years before medical science found ways to treat the condition, and those medical advances spelled the end of forced isolation.

It is fair to say that sex offenders have become today's lepers, although unlike early lepers there is little compassion for those who commit such crimes. Men and women who offend are isolated from family and friends in prisons as part of societal retribution. At the completion of their sentences many of these same individuals experience further separation as the result of divorce and/or court restrictions. And a growing number sit in confinement after their sentences have been completed awaiting trials that will

ultimately determine if they are to be civilly committed as sexual predators.

I am not arguing the degree of damage that offenders brought on their victims, for my own offenses have generated currents of pain that continue to flow unchecked years after the crimes were committed. Nor am I arguing the reality that some individuals are indeed predators with no desire to restrain their attractions, individuals who have every intention of continuing the very behaviors that brought them to prison in the first place.

I *am* suggesting, however, that sex offenders are being diagnosed in the same manner as lepers in the time of Jesus. I *am* suggesting that medical labels have been attached that clearly announce "No change is possible!" And I *am* suggesting that because the public has mixed righteous anger with equal measures of self-righteous retribution and fear, that we are not far from serious consideration for colonies of isolation. "At least in a place like that," proponents will argue, "our children will not be at risk."

"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!"

I have received hundreds of letters from individuals who have prayed fervently for no more victims. These are individuals both in prison and out of prison, but the common thread is a desire born of deep conviction—a desire to bring healing for themselves and their victims.

I have received perhaps even more letters from individuals currently in confinement who are waiting their turn to get into whatever treatment program might be available. These are men and women who have accepted responsibility for what they have done and want as much help as they can get.

Because of the sheer number of offenders, treatment is normally not offered until the final stages of confinement. Some live in states with few or no programs available and little likelihood that a program will open for them. And quite honestly, many of them are afraid to return to society without the appropriate tools they need to avoid re-offending.

"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!"

I have also read letters from people with an incredible faith in God. They are the kind of men and women who read this newsletter and loudly proclaim, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." And they believe God can

and will. These individuals acknowledge their need to surrender completely to the Lord; they share a desire for the healing of their victims; and they express a longing to grow in their spiritual lives with the support of others in a church environment.

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near,' heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons

(Matthew 10:8 - emphasis mine).

This is a message for all who seek the Lord in their daily lives, and this message contains that condition known as leprosy—a condition with no cure in the time of Jesus. Was Jesus saying, "Go out and do what might seem to be the impossible"? I think yes.

By laying his hand on the leper, Jesus changed that man forever. The Word tells us that the man was completely cured, and that word is both ominous and wonderful. Ominous for it implies the complete absence of the condition. And in the case of the leper, wonderful as the condition was indeed gone.

Will the sex offender ever be cured in that same sense—a complete absence of desire and/or any temptation? I am not going to write that God is incapable of bringing that about, but I am more inclined to feel that such will not be the case. I'm also more inclined to say that sex offenders will do what *all* people who have sinned do—they will face their temptations from a position of being a new creature in the Lord, seeking God's grace to meet and overcome the temptation.

For those of us charged with sex offenses reading this, we have a responsibility of significant proportions. We must be honest, accountable, and willing to learn healthy responses to daily living choices. Our faith cannot be simply a statement such as "The Lord will change me" if that statement is not founded on a willingness to submit and be obedient to His will. Our faith must be an active communion with God's desire for us, a witness of that relationship to those who watch, and lifetime commitment to the process. In short, faith *demand*s a response.

For those reading this article who have never been guilty of sex offenses, you have a responsibility to acknowledge God's word in all things. The lepers Jesus healed were considered untreatable and destined to suffer the consequences of the disease. Jesus did not remind the leper of the current thinking on leprosy. He answered, "I do will it. Be clean."

We are in a time not unlike the early days of leprosy only we call the lepers child molesters. One who has molested can never say, "There is no way I would ever re-offend," but every molester deserves whatever support is needed to minimize that possibility. Permanent confinement and loss of freedom is *not* the answer.

I fervently pray each day for my victims, for other victims and their offenders, and for those who have not yet been identified as either but will eventually join these ranks. My heart desires that some day the medical world will do for molesters what it has done for lepers, and I sincerely pray that this can be done without the extreme of colonies of confinement as the answer.

The leper who came forward beseeching Jesus broke the rules. He did not shout "Unclean, unclean!" nor did he keep an appropriate distance. Instead, he asked, "***If you***

are willing, Lord, you can make me clean." ***And Jesus responded, "I am willing, be made clean."***

I have no problem with keeping an appropriate distance in my self-boundaries, but I want to be clean. I want to be made whole. God wants that, too. □

2018

In a recent sermon, our pastor told us that Jesus had compassion on the leper. Then he touched him. Finally, He spoke to the leper saying "I am willing. Be clean!" I suspect that most of us would have turned away from the leper because that was what the Law demanded.

If we didn't turn, maybe our next response would be to talk to the man, to listen to his responses, and given the way most of us are, we'd say something like "I'll pray for you" or "I wish you well" before walking away. If we did feel some compassion, I doubt that it would have allowed us to touch the man because the risk of contamination would have been too great.

Our pastor also shared something I had not considered before. As word of the miracles Jesus did spread, he could not enter any town openly (Mark 1.45), so he stayed in the lonely places. The leper, on the other hand, was restricted to the lonely places outside the city as ordered by the chief priests. When Jesus healed him of his leprosy, he was able to enter the city, a cleaned man. The love and compassion of Jesus reconnected the man with family and friends.

Fifteen years ago, I believed that in time communities would find a way to deal with those on state registries, finding a way to encourage healing choices and life-sustaining relationships. Instead, society endorses walls of separation and requires us to declare ourselves 'unclean' whenever the physical boundaries they impose break down.

We have no way of knowing how the leper was received after Jesus healed him. All we know for sure was that Jesus had compassion on him, touched him, and spoke words of healing. It is rare, I think, for someone with a sex-related offense to find a homecoming celebration awaiting him or her after being released. Caution, hesitation, and maybe even suspicion are better words to describe that homecoming event.

Though some in reentry have no faith, those who do realize that it was their faith that allowed them to approach Jesus in their hearts and ask "***If you are willing, you can make me clean.***" And it was that same faith that heard and believed Jesus saying "***I am willing. Be clean!***" If those words are all we have to rely on with certainty, then we have enough.

* * * * *

Something to consider:

If we pray that our faith is sustained and that God will meet all our needs, should we not believe that for ALL who seek forgiveness – even for those who don't believe they need that forgiveness? Don't we pray for them?

And if we believe that God loves us, doesn't God also love the offender who makes national news for crimes similar to ours? None of us should ever say "At least I never did what he did!" We are all sinners needing the mercy and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father. And we are ALL redeemed by the Blood of Christ.

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Bits & Pieces

The following are taken from letters I have received since the last issue of this newsletter. Some are meant to offer hope and encouragement while others call out for us to be in prayer.

I would never have become so close to God without being segregated from the world and all its myriad distractions and temptations. I was truly a fool and swayed by every passing wind, my every goal was evil. What a willing pawn I was in Satan's control.

One good thing is that I have a men's bible study already lined up once I get squared away with my PO. I'll do what my PO asks because by doing so I'll be honoring God as well as my mom and dad.

What if those with the greatest burdens are God's prize soldiers while those who are mere babies remain in the comfort of the nursery? The point is that just as with physical growth comes pain, so it is with spiritual growth.

God is not a genie-in-a-bottle God. Unfortunately to much of society He is. When God doesn't meet their time table in responding to their prayers, they lose all hope since their hope was in what they asked – not in Christ Himself. Then they fall away.

I like song "Tell Me the Story of Jesus – write on my heart every word." Christ dwells in our hearts by faith.

I will continue to trust, now and when I am released, in Him for everything. The Lord is working on my heart every day and helping me to change. I am excited about my confidence and trust in Him to guide me, heal me, correct me, and provide for me.

I start every day with God by reading His word and doing Bible study correspondence. It's my way to start on the right foot every day. I give my life and will to Him so that I may do His will instead of mine and it makes for a great day.

Faith is a commitment to God that is not based on good conditions – it exists regardless of circumstances. Only God can put something in your heart that allows you to see that what He has spoken will come to pass.

God must be the Center of all I do because if He is not, failure is always a possibility and, more likely than not, a probability. The past six years have taught me this and I have learned to gauge my actions as if God was sitting right next to me.

As I get older, I recognize the reality that there will come a day when I am no longer able to produce ITL and that day might come without warning. As long as I am able, however, I will continue to serve God in this service believing that God will always meet our needs. <Bob>

Our Prayer Corner

Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For each of us, that we see ourselves as God sees us – heirs to His heavenly kingdom and loved beyond our imagination.
- For those who struggle to get past the identity of leper, that they come to believe that the only label that is true is that of "child of God."
- For those in treatment, that they take everything they hear and see to the Lord, asking for the ability to recognize what is true and what is not.
- For the church, that they understand ALL are in need of healing, ALL are in need of encouragement and support.
- For family, that in the moments when they are angry, they allow Christ to help them deal with that anger.
- For security staff, that they see their role as caretakers and protectors; that inmates offer prayers and support for those in that role.
- For all who read *Into the Light*, that they find hope and encouragement in the words shared.
- For victims, that they find ways to move beyond defining themselves as victims in order to reach the potential God has always had in store for them.
- For treatment personnel, that they might always seek to offer hope and change.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- Finally, for those who are still abusing and are reading this newsletter because God made that possible, that they will do whatever it takes to stop the cycle of abuse and harm caused to their victims.

Your Support Matters

Please consider financially supporting this ministry. *Into the Light*, a newsletter unlike any other, is made possible solely by your donations. Send contributions to

**Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI, 54115-5824.**

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A Little Humor . . .

A man and his wife were awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning by a loud pounding on the door. The man got up and went to the door where an inebriated stranger was standing in pouring rain, asking for a push. "Not a chance" said the husband - "It's three o'clock in the morning!" He slammed the door and returned to bed. "Who was it?" asked his wife. "Just a drunken stranger asking for a push." "Did you help him?" she asked. "No, I didn't - it's three in the morning and raining cats and dogs out there!" "Well you've got a short memory," said the wife. "Can't you remember about three months ago when we broke down on vacation and those two guys helped us? I think you should help him." The man did as she suggested. He got dressed and went out into the pounding rain. He called out in the darkness, "Hello, are you still there?" "Yes," came the answer. "Do you still want a push?" "Yes, please!" came the reply. "Where are you?" asked the husband. "Over here on the swing," the drunk replied.

