

Making a Mess of a Perfect Miracle

The Gospel of Mark #7

Mark 1:40-45

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently at the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it will be blessed in what they do.

I came to conclusion two score and seven years ago that there are many people on this planet who are extremely gifted at the art of being ordered, neat, and tidy and I am not one of them. As a matter of fact, to this very day, when I traverse into territory that is extremely ordered, neat, and tidy, I break out in hives and cold sweats because I fear that I, above all other mortals, am the very person who has the capacity to make a mess of a perfectly ordered, neat, and tidy place. In this great community of ours, there are many places you can run into me while out and about. You can spot me at Sam's Club in the Discount Clothing Section. You can spot me at golf courses in Indian River County that don't require collared shirts. You can even find me at the Cleveland Clinic seeking temporary asylum from box cutters in the Emergency Room. But the one place you'll never spot me is at an antique store. That's because the last time I went in one, I saw the sign that said: "You break, You pay" and immediately forgot how to walk like a normal person or breathe like a living one. To this day, I don't go into antique stores because I will make a mess of them. I'm willing to assume that I'm not the only one who suffers from a deep fear of messing up perfectly ordered, neat, and tidy places either. If you are one of those individuals who immediately takes your shoes off when you walk into someone else's house, then you are right there with me. Why do you do that? Here's why: you don't want to be the one who leaves the shoe impression in Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Steamer's perfect Dalton, GA carpet, do you? That's why you are the first person to take your shoes off. You are afraid you'll make a mess of it.

Search the Scriptures and you will find that God is in the miracle business. He created the world by speaking it into existence, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. That's a miracle. He used Joshua to make the sun stand still. That's a miracle. And He raised Jesus from the dead. That's the greatest miracle of all. But Jesus' first miracle in the Gospel of Mark, the one we will see today, is also the most perplexing and troubling. Here's why: Jesus completely and totally cleanses a leper. Not since Naaman, the Gentile, had anyone in Israel ever witnessed or heard of a prophet, or a priest, or a king, doing such a thing. No record exists in the Bible outside of Naaman of someone being totally and completely cleansed of leprosy until this guy shows up on the scene in the Gospel of Mark. Then, ten more lepers would follow his lead. But after Jesus' heals this chap, he responds to Jesus' command not to tell anyone what he did by doing the exact opposite. And in so doing, the former afflicted and castigated outcast made a mess of Jesus' perfect miracle. Here is why you need to listen intently today: if it was possible for a leper to make a mess of his miracle by knowing Jesus called him to obey and deliberately choosing to disobey, it is equally possible for us to make a mess of God's perfect interventions in our lives when we behave in the same way, just like the leper. But I've got great news for you today church. It is this: I want to give you 4 lessons we can learn from the leper who a mess of his miracle so that we won't track mud into God's sacred carpet and make a mess of his interventions in our lives. To do that, please turn with me to Mark 1:40-45. Notice particularly how the passage starts with a miraculous mountain top experience and ends right smack dab in the middle of a valley.

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. ⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

4 Lessons We Can Learn from the Leper Who Made a Mess of His Miracle

1. A lesson on what we can take for granted

- **The Lesson in Your Closet:** (1) There's a lesson about Jesus in your closet and mine. (2) It's those old well-worn tennis shoes that are in your closet; (3) You've thought of throwing them out, but you can't; (4) Here's why: there's a lot of mileage in your shoes. Some of them you wish you would have back. Some of them you are glad to have used them; (5) But only you have put them on your feet and walked in them; (6) No one else has because no one else is qualified to do it. No one except Jesus. (7) Jesus put the leper's shoes on his own feet. Unfortunately, the leper didn't appreciate it enough to obey what he told him to do.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We can make a mess of the perfect miracle of God's intervention in our lives when we take for granted the lengths Jesus went to in order to take our place.
- **About Leprosy in the Ancient Times:** (1) Physically Debilitating – caused when bacteria attack the nervous system that caused permanent damage to skin, nerves, limbs, and eyes. Leaves the leper permanently disfigured. (2) Socially Isolating – people were so scared of contracting leprosy that lepers were banned from the community and had to live outside the towns in colonies. (3) Emotionally Scarring – When you contracted leprosy, your disease became your identity. You didn't just have leprosy. You were a leper. (4) Spiritually condemning – people viewed leprosy as God's punishment for sin, leaving them unable to participate in the religious community.

- **In Light of That, consider v40:** (1) For the leper to come to Jesus, he had to leave his secluded place of isolation and find him. He had to walk each step of his journey saying “unclean, unclean” so people would not approach. (2) In turn, for Jesus to heal him, he had to take the physical debilitation, the social isolation, the emotionally scarring, and the spiritually condemning on himself. (3) In short, he traded places with the leper. (4) And when he was healed, the leper responded in disobedience.
- **App:** Our obedience or disobedience to God’s directives is directly related to the depth of our understanding of Jesus taking our place.

2. A lesson on what we can fail to consider

- **Hebrew Professor:** (1) I went to my Hebrew class my first year in seminary and forgot that we had a test that day. (2) Before the class, my professor said: “before we begin this test, which is 25% of your final grade, are there any requests?” (3) Immediately my hand went up and I said “Oh yes. I would like for you to pray for divine intervention.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We can make a mess of the perfect miracle of God’s intervention in our lives when we fail to see, or even consider, the reason for His miraculous intervention in the first place.
- **Why in the World Would Jesus Say Tell No One?** (1) In v44, Jesus makes a shocking statement just after performing the healing: “tell no one.” (2) That poses a significant problem for us because we are called to “Go Tell It on the Mountain.” (3) But here’s why Jesus gave him those orders: His mission from the Gospel of Mark is Clear: He’s the Son of God who came not be served, but serve, and give his life as a ransom for many. (4) Jesus didn’t want him to speak because the leper didn’t even know who he really was. And since he didn’t know, the first words out of his mouth were “if Jesus can perform this miracle for me, he can do it for you.” Instead of: He’s the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world and his miracles prove it.
- **App:** God’s intervention demands an inquiry on the part of the receiver: what does his intervention reveal and who He is and what he wants me to learn?

3. A lesson on when we are the most at risk

- **Masada:** (1) In Israel, there is a mountain that many desire to climb in the desert called Masada. (2) It has a lot of history: Herod’s vacation home was there, and it was the fortress for the final Jewish resistance in the land in the 1st century. (3) But when you climb the mountain and arrive at the summit, you’ll immediately notice that you are in danger of celebrating your ascent too much. (4) If you do, the rocks will give way and you can find yourself right back where you started.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We can make a mess of the perfect miracle of God’s intervention in our lives when we ignore our greatest spiritual vulnerability. It is this: we are the most vulnerable to pitfalls and failures after the highest moments of mountaintops and successes.
- **Two Commands Immediately Followed the Healing:** (1) (a) See to it that you tell no one and (b) go show yourself to the priests at once. In Levitical law, pronouncements of cleanness from individuals who were unclean can only come from the priest. (2) The leper does neither; talking freely as if he was Paul on Mars Hill or people on Facebook telling anyone and everyone who was listening. (3) As a result, one thing could have happened that could have jeopardized the leper’s future: Pharisees who heard him could have gotten to the priests before he did and pleaded with them not to declare him clean on the grounds that it was a false healing from what they would have deemed a false prophet starting to get attention. (4) And another that would, not could, affect Jesus: he had to leave the area because of the attention.
- **App:** Be careful to be firmly grounded on the mountaintop. For the rubble underneath can give way after your ascent and send you tumbling back down to where you started.

4. A lesson on the impact of disobedience

- **Parents Instructions to a Child:** (1) When a parent asks a child to do something right then and there, the most common reaction from that child isn’t to do what his/her parent asks them to do at that very moment. (2) Instead, it is to ask this question: why? (3) Such a question implies that the child needs a reason to obey. (4) So, the parent, happy to oblige, gives them one: “because I said so.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We can make a mess of the perfect miracle of God’s intervention in our lives when we disobey God’s directives because we don’t understand them. When we do, we thwart the coming of the Kingdom in our lives and in our community of influence.
- **Not Obeying Because We Don’t Understand Can Lead to Unintended Consequences:** (1) The consequences for the leper’s disobedience don’t fall on the leper. They fall on Jesus. (2) He didn’t obey because he was (a) too excited and (b) didn’t understand the reason for the directive. (3) As a result, it forced Jesus to be in isolation. What started as isolation for the leper has ended with isolation for Jesus. (4) Just like the cross, where Jesus hung in isolation and said: “forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.”
- **App:** There were many people in Galilee that needed to hear Jesus, to see Him, and to be touched by Him but couldn’t because of the leper’s disobedience. May we be the exact opposite. May our obedience be the door that opens the opportunity for others to hear, to see, and to be touched by our master’s healing hand. Amen. Glory to His Holy Name.