

Father,

You are good and we're here today to praise You and your goodness. We thank You for your faithfulness this past year. We ask that You would be faithful to this coming year, LORD. We love You. We thank You that You are in this place. LORD, we ask that You would bless this sermon; let your Spirit use it in a mighty way. I pray for those that are hardened towards You, LORD, that you would soften their hearts.



For those that are farther away from You, LORD, than what You desire, LORD, I pray that they would meet You today and fall in love with Jesus. In Jesus' Name we me pray. Amen.

Good morning. [RESPONSE: "GOOD MORNING!"] Two thousand twenty almost finished. Can I get an amen? [RESPONSE: "AMEN!" LAUGHTER] [HE CHUCKLES] What a year. Right? [MAN IN AUDIENCE: "YES!"] So I'm Pastor John, I'm one of the pastors here, I'm going to be teaching this morning. For those that put their hope in the world, man, I hope you're humbled. [LAUGHTER] Seriously. Right? So if you kind of think about it, you know, we had a global pandemic we're still in, man. Right? Racial tension, division, you know, having to figure out how to homeschool our kids, put a five-year-old in front of the computer screen, that was fun. Right? A lot of tension with the election. Man, you put your hope in the world you're struggling, but listen, there's a lot to rejoice for those who have their hope in Jesus. Amen?

This past year we celebrated a lot in our church. There's been a lot of great things, a lot of new life. I've seen students on their face pleading out to Jesus, giving their lives to Jesus. We've seen young women and men just give their lives to Jesus all throughout this year, baptism, new life. We've seen our church—this church sent out coats and cans and peanut butter and diapers all throughout our community to meet tangible needs and just represent Jesus. We've seen thousands upon thousands of boxes packed to send out to kids all around the world with the message of the Gospel and love from this place. We've seen God meet needs after needs. We've seen churches be built. We've seen so many things that we have to give God glory for. He has moved and He has worked in this place and He will work because His Kingdom is not of this world and it's not limited by the fears of this world or the circumstances of it. And so we can rejoice of all the things that God has done.

We had a wonderful celebration the last few days, the birth of our Jesus, King, celebrating Him just with an amazing service online and on-site. It was just awesome to be reminded that He is King and He came in the midst of this year, which is tough, it was a tough year.

But let me just kind of say this, as a church we have prayed over a budget every year that we're asking God to meet and He will, He's faithful. And so we pray that God will meet our budget and we're coming up on a new year and we're going to ask some of you we need you to give, we need you to be faithful to what God is calling you to give in order to meet that budget; God uses His people to answer our prayers. And so we have a budget we trust God with every year and we're asking you to help us beat that budget this year. For some of you, you need to be obedient to that.



Listen, whenever they ask me, "Hey, can you talk about giving?" I'm like, I love talking about giving because when I grew up and I didn't know Jesus, I never met Him, I always was offended when the church asked me to give; but then I came to know Jesus and I'm always like, "I need to give more." And so I get that people who don't like Jesus won't like talking about giving, but people who love Jesus, listen, when you give you

give to the Kingdom of God. My wife and I, that's the first thing we do because there's a lot of things we give that have nothing to do with the Kingdom, nothing to do with eternity. And we gotta give to the mortgage or to electric, but when we get to give to eternity, man, we joyfully do that. And so those who love Jesus, who are walking with Jesus and have not yet given, we're gonna trust that you help us to meet our budget this year. Okay? All right.

So here's what we're going to do, we are going to change gears a little bit, we're going to start a new series, a brand new series called MIRACULOUS. And so the MIRACULOUS series is all about Jesus's encounters in the book of Matthew. So we've been in the book of Matthew the last couple weeks and we've been looking at primarily The Beatitudes. So Jesus is on the Sermon on the Mount, He's talking about character conduct, how should His people live in His Kingdom, so their personalities—right?—blessed are the meek and poor in spirit; He's talking about the character of His people. And then we're gonna see in Chapter 8 Jesus leaves the mountaintop, a big crowd of people around him, and in Matthew he kind of breaks up Jesus from His teaching to His miracles. And so now for the next four weeks we're gonna look at the miracles that Jesus performed that are recorded in the gospel of Matthew. So if you have your Bibles turn to Matthew Chapter 8, we're going to be looking at the miracle of the leper today. So Matthew Chapter 8 first couple verses in Matthew, and as you turn to Matthew Chapter 8 I want to just kind of tell you a little story that I heard.



I'm part of this website with pastors just sharing what other pastors are doing in their churches, and I remember a few years ago reading this story and I just thought it was so funny. So, the church got a brand new pastor, brand new head pastor, and it was the first Sunday that this pastor was going to be there. So the story goes that this guy he dresses up like a homeless man,¹ have you guys heard this? Okay. So he dresses up as a homeless man, raggedy clothes, messed up hair, he doesn't shower for a couple days, just full-on goes all out, stinks, and so he goes to the church—mind you, he's the head pastor, he's the new head pastor—he goes to the church and it's exactly what you expect, people are just freaked out by this guy. And so he walks like a homeless man, he kind of is really rude and he's just walking around, isn't saying much, he's bumping into people, and everyone kind of is just awkward around him.



And so he goes to the back of the auditorium and he sits down and the service starts and they worship and then when it's time for the preacher to come, I mean, picture this, he stands up and he walks up on stage and he takes off this wig and he's basically like hey, I'm so-and-so, I'm your new head pastor. And it was probably very awkward. Right? And so in this moment he basically had this message that he wanted to see what kind of church they were. Do they love the unlovable or the outcasts in the society? He was kind of measuring the heart of his church because it's easy to come to church and say you love Jesus, but what do you do with the people that look like they're not like you? And so he just was measuring the heart of his church, and I was like, man, that was brilliant. I don't know if I had the stones to do that, but that was an amazing gift to give their church a perspective of what they would do in that situation.

¹ <https://thefederalistpapers.org/us/a-homeless-man-walks-into-a-church-what-he-did-next-shocked-everyone>

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And so with that story in mind, I want to show you what Jesus does when He encounters people that the world pushes aside as outcasts, and I want you to learn about who Jesus is. For some of you, you're not interested in Jesus and I pray today you will be. So here's what it says Matthew Chapter 8, verses 1-4:

¹ When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

– MATTHEW 8:1-4 (ESV)

So we can stop there. So I want you to set the scene; imagine this scene here. So in life oftentimes people love what they get from people and so in Jesus' ministry oftentimes when He started performing miracles crowds would gather because people love miracles because it had to do with them, they liked the fact that they could have something. So Jesus had a crowd coming alongside of Him. Now picture this, the scene is Jesus is walking down with this crowd building, oftentimes when Jesus spoke the crowd would leave because they didn't like what He said, they liked what He did. This is a big thing. But in the midst of this crowd a leper comes, a leprosy man, a man that has what is called leprosy which is kind of uncommon now, still leprosy around the world but it was common then, it was horrific. And I gotta paint the picture of what that is.

So leprosy is something that basically took over your entire body and the best equivalent I have is the walking dead, that was what you were. In fact, if you were a leper you would have your body rot slowly and that's how you die; to a point where your hands would claw like this and eventually your feet would rot off, your hands would rot off, your skin was rotting, you were walking dead. This was the state of a leper, and culturally it was even worse.



LEPROSY

So a leper would be taken by the priest and they would literally pronounce dead. Can you imagine that? You are alive but you're treated like you have been killed, you are dead, you were no longer worth anything, you were pronounced dead even though you still breathe. And the leper, this is the irony, church, had to stay – you had to stay six feet away from the leper and this was his entire life. So not just family, no-no, social distancing always and the leper lived that way. In fact, he was treated so poorly in that time, lepers were—I'm gonna, like, picture this—if a leper would go into a marketplace the rabbis would brag that they wouldn't buy an apple in that marketplace because a leper

had walked through it. That was how society treated them so they were often alone, outcasts, hidden somewhere because if they were around people they were reminded they were walking dead.

This was the man who now is approaching Jesus. This is the scene that we have of this man approaching Jesus and the people are fleeing from this leper and yet he's walking to Jesus and it says that our God, the God that we worship, extended His hands and healed that man—that's the Jesus that we love. That's who Jesus is and we're gonna unpack this, but that's the scene. A leper in which

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everyone runs from, treats them like they aren't even alive, is approaching Jesus and our God doesn't shame them, doesn't run from them, doesn't mock them, He pursues the suffering. Jesus saw suffering and went towards it. This is huge church, and so here are some things that we learn about this miraculous, engaging moment in time where Jesus sees this leper and here's what we learn about Jesus.

First notice this, look at the text again, that the man came, he came to Jesus—now we gotta unpack this. Think about how remarkable that is. This is a person who every time he's in public is reminded that he is not worth anything. So a leper if he's going into public has to realize that he is going to be screamed at, they're gonna be running away, children are gonna be picked up by their mother, and he's gonna walk into a situation and everyone is gonna treat him like he does not deserve anything. He's gonna be treated like an outcast, like a leper, and so he knows this but yet he had decided—we know this—to go to Jesus anyway.



A leper comes to Jesus

MATTHEW 8:1-4

So he sees a crowd, he knows what's going to happen in that crowd, he's going to be mocked, he's going to be bullied, he's going to be slandered, but he goes anyway, so that's huge. So he's willing to take on the slander of people and the mocking and the tormenting in order to get to Jesus and he's okay with that. But he also—listen—he also goes without anybody asking him. So a leper was alone, he was alone, so there wasn't anybody in his life that said, "You need to go see Jesus." Nobody disciplining him, encouraging him to go, no one's saying to him, "Hey, you know what, you know what would help you is if you kind of go see this Jesus guy." He was alone but yet he knew that he needed Jesus; no one brought him, no one encouraged him, but he knew he needed Jesus.

I'm gonna make this real. So many of you in this room, some of your stories are this: You didn't grow up in the church, you didn't grow up in the church. In fact, for some of you, you grew up in a system where generation after generation was abusive or did not have a relationship with the Lord, had no Jesus in the home, and you didn't know of Jesus. And for some of you, you lived this world, you tried out the world, and there was something in you that knew that it was not it. There's something in you that said, "I'm not satisfied." And some of you through courage and strength pursued Jesus on your own and you found a living God who loved you and forgave you and offered you His Spirit and you met Jesus. No one pushed you, you actually had to step out of your circumstances to find Him. Some of you, that's your story—that's the leper's story.

**"I TRIED IT ALL,
BUT NOTHING
SATISFIED ME.
AND THEN I MET JESUS.
AND THAT CHANGED
EVERYTHING."**

But here's another truth that in this story there is nothing in your life—I know this because I just read this, our Jesus who's alive—there's nothing in your life that's going to disqualify you from going to Jesus. Nothing. So I'm going to call out lies of the enemy. If you think you did something in your past that disqualifies you from God's love—that's a lie. Nothing you can do is gonna separate you from being able to go to Jesus. Nothing. You can walk and live in that shame, but listen, if you meet Jesus, if you fall on your knees and encounter the living Christ, He will forgive you. He will pursue you in love, so nothing disqualifies you.

For some of you in this room, like, did you hear that? Some of you, you threw that deep, deep away when I just said that. You took that and you're like, "Nah, I'm not gonna take that," because for some of you in this room right now, this very moment, you are in deep, dark sin and you know you are, and

though you're here you're filled with shame. Some of you right now are abusing people in your life, some of you physically are abusing them, I know that, and you sit here and you're like, "Jesus wouldn't love me. I'm too dark. I'm too sinful." Listen to me: **There's nothing you have done that disqualifies you from coming to the throne – nothing.** He will meet you where you are in your sinful depravity and He will extend His grace, His love, and His forgiveness upon your life. And if you receive it, He will transform your heart and set you free from that bondage.

This is what we just heard. The leper was seen by society as dead and Jesus says n-n-no, you're not dead to Me, you're not dead to Me. In fact, I have a purpose for you and I have forgiveness to extend to you and healing to extend to you. This is what we see: The world says, "There's no chance." The rabbis said, "There's no chance." Jesus said, "Watch Me." I want you to receive that for those in here that think that they're unlovable or think that they can't be forgiven. Those are lies of the enemy and that's not true. This is Jesus, this is Jesus, He doesn't act a certain way and then change His mind. This is Jesus, this is the heart of who He is.

I remember when I was full-time youth ministry we would have a lot of kids come to Student Center, a lot of kids come that just came from tough family environments, sexual abuse, drug abuse, and they would come because they just liked their friends. And I remember I would always kind of break off a bunch of them and we'd have these Bible studies after the message and oftentimes they just weren't interested in what we had to say. We would be reading and asking questions and they wouldn't talk, they would talk to each other and they were really interested in each other, not in the content. And I remember the more that would happen the more raw I would get. I would start talking about the things I did when I was younger and the bad choices and I would try to get to a place where they would identify with the fact that Jesus is real and I would just be authentic and be real.

And I remember there was a group of a bunch of guys and one girl and I had this breakout group, and I remember as I was talking not a lot of the people were engaging. But as I was sharing the Gospel and sharing my story I noticed this young girl it would just kind of pique her interest and then look away and she was so overwhelmed—some women in here you'll know what I'm talking about—she was a teenager, she was overwhelmed with wanting these guys to like her. She was afraid of men, it was a captivator, it was suffocating to her, so she was worried about how she looked and how she talked and what she said, and if she was funny—she wanted them to like her so she was so captivated by these guys who didn't really care about her. But every once in a while I could see the Spirit of God tugging at her and she was listening to me.

And so I remember afterwards the guys ran to the gym to play basketball and I just said, "Can I talk to you for a second?" And she came over and I said, "You were listening to me," and she said, "Yes, I was." I said, "So what do you think? What did you think about what I said and my testimony and Jesus?" And she's like, "You know, I don't know." And I was like, "I want you to know something," and she started sharing her story. And I was like, "Okay, I want to tell you something." She's like, "Well, but, you know, my parents are on drugs and I, you know, I sleep around a lot and, you know, God wants us perfect." I'm like, "Listen, you matter." And I just was like, "Do you know that you matter? Do you know that Jesus pursues you in love? That you are worth more than what you think you are?" And I remember her just starting to cry because she didn't believe that, just started to bawl. I'm like, "You matter, you matter, and they don't care but Jesus does. You matter and don't you dare, don't you dare surrender that gift of who you are for some other people who don't care for you. Like, walk in that, live in that, believe that—you matter. It doesn't matter what they think you need to do, Jesus has already rescued you from having to try to prove something to them."

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So I'm speaking to her and I'm saying, "You matter." And she's crying and she knows that but she's pushing against it and she just gets up and she walks into the gym and I just started praying. I said, "God, I can't make her know that but You can, so please just pursue her, rescue her from that lie, rescue her from whatever she thinks she needs to be for culture to love her. Set her free from that."

And this is what happened with this leper, everything around him says you don't matter but when he saw Jesus he says, "What if I do?" And so he pursues in this situation where he's mocked, but he sees Jesus and he says, "Okay, I'm gonna go to Him because He is different." So not only does he come but look at the passage, he comes in reverence, it says that the leper approaches Jesus and he worships Him. The Greek word actually is kissing towards that person, it's a kissing hand to foot, the posture of worship is this humility where he goes before God and he says that Jesus is Lord. This is huge because the leper saw Jesus for who He was even though Jesus was surrounded by religious people who'd missed it. So the people who were "good" and had all their acts together saw Jesus and missed who He was. The leper saw Jesus and said, "You are Lord." There was a reverence for who Jesus was, it wasn't about what Jesus could give him, it was about who Jesus was. And the people that were religious missed it, but the leper didn't. Here's why.

I believe that if you look at the Old Testament, the Old Testament tells us that there was an encounter with a leper and a king. In 2nd Kings Chapter 5 it says that there was a leper who approached the king of Assyria, King Jehoram, and the king says to this leper as he approaches him:

7. . . "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?"

– 2 KINGS 5:7 (ESV)

So this king is saying listen, the only person that can cure a leper is God. And so this leper sees Jesus and he doesn't see a teacher, he sees God because he knows this, that there hasn't been anybody healed of leprosy but he sees Jesus and says, "No-no, you are God, You are able to do this." In the midst of him being surrounded by religious people, the leper saw Jesus for who He was, he saw Him as God. What does this tell us about the reverence of God? Well, first of all, you need—in order to know who Jesus is, in order to see Him for who He is—you need to have reverence which means you need to die to yourself. In order to see Jesus clearly, you can't see Him through the lens of want, you need to see Him through God, you are God—I need You, You don't need me. That's a humble thing. The leper was given a gift, church.

Here's what the leper was given. The world was pushed away, so the friends and the lies and the influences of the world were stripped away, so the leper could see clearly. It wasn't, "If I go to Jesus, I'm going to lose my job," or "lose my reputation," he lost all that anyway. It didn't matter. So many times we are blinded by who Jesus is because we are not wanting to risk what we would have to lose to follow Him. We're blind. Listen, I've seen this thousands of times. I've worked in the prison ministry as a chaplain, all of those men when they're trapped in a prison cell cared about their families and God, nothing else. They didn't care about their rep, their friendships, what got them in there, all that was silly and meaningless to them. When they were stripped of all the distractions they thought, *It's about my God and my family*, every time. And so it's a gift, it's a gift this leper had to be in suffering. I know this sounds weird, but suffering is a gift because oftentimes when we suffer we see clearly who Jesus is and our need for Him.

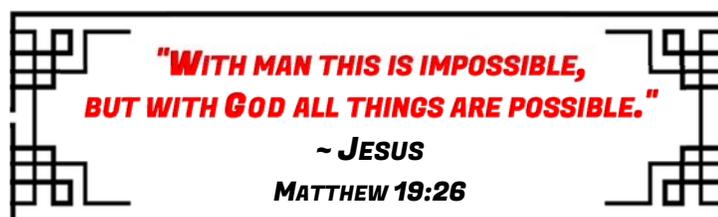
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And this is what the leper did, he saw Jesus for who He was, and Jesus recognized his heart. He cares about the heart. He looks at the heart and He says, "Okay, you know who I am. I see your faith. I don't see your outside condition or circumstances, I see your heart and I'm going to respond to that in love." This is what it means to have a reverence, to die to self. Listen, miracles are just a representation of two things: (1) That God is powerful and in control, and (2) that He's present and personal. This is what miracles teach us. We don't worship miracles, we worship the Miracle Worker, the Maker. Right? Like, we don't worship, like, everybody Jesus heals eventually dies so the temporary healing of the flesh does not necessarily mean that you're going to love Jesus, but it should teach us about who Jesus is. That He is sovereign, He is in control.

This is a huge message that I had to learn. Like, when I was in college my brother, he had this plaque on our dorm and it was PRAY FOR WONDER, that's what it said. And I remember every time I would leave I just would always see this, a plaque, it would say PRAY FOR WONDER and I always just used to think, *What does that mean, wonder, and how do you pray for that?* And the posture of the plaque was this, it was when you leave pray that God would do things in your life that only God could do. That you would see things and say, "Man, God had to do that or it would not have happened." And this is a situation where wonder was present, where God did not look at the circumstances and say, "I can. I can." He looked at the heart and He said, "If it's willing, I have no limitations."

Like, we did this a couple weeks ago in our prayers. When you pray to God you have to understand that God is not limited. He's not limited. Your friends and their advice is limited. Social media and their advice is limited. Your finances to somehow numb what you're going through is limited. God is not limited. Logically, listen to me, the author of all the laws in which you or I are under, God created those laws. He's above them. So if our God wants to say to water, "Gravity, stop, I want to walk on it," it stops. [SNAPS HIS FINGERS] If our God says, "Waves, stop," your waves stop. The energy it takes to make that wave—it stops, church. When my Jesus says, "I want to take water and make it into wine," instantly time and the laws of it stops because my God is greater than those things.

That's the God the leper was going towards. That's the God that you get to pray and have fellowship with every day. And so can you bring something that the doctor says is impossible to God? Absolutely. Can you bring an impossible thing—a friend, a family member, a parent, a sibling who doesn't know Jesus and you think there's no hope for him—can you bring that to the Lord in prayer and believe that God can do it? Absolutely. This is the God we pray to. This is the God we worship. Nothing is impossible for God and we are to have reverence and wonder for that truth.



Listen, I'll give you another practical example. My children, one of the things I love to do with my daughters is go out to our trampoline and look up at the stars. So when it's nice out we'd go up and we'd just look at the stars and we would say, like, "What do you see?" "Oh, I see," you know, "spaghetti monster." "I see a," you know, "a troll," and whatever, we just kind of make up stuff. And as we're looking at the stars one of the things that God does to my soul is remind me of how big He is and I need that. I needed that in 2020, church, did you? To be reminded of how big my God is and how in control He is. That the author of all of these stars is on the throne and He's coming back and says, "Trust Me."

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I needed to know that. I needed to be reminded of the awe and the wonder of who He is. And then I need to look at the horizontal stuff in my life after I look up here and I say [LOOKS ABOVE], "Okay, this is who You are, so this [THE HORIZONTAL STUFF] is okay." Because if I keep my eyes on my social media account and my job situation and my family situation and the news, if I keep my eyes horizontal and I forget who God is I begin to have fear. And church, here's one of my prayers this morning—we need to stop being afraid. Stop being afraid, you serve a God of wonder. Be wise but don't you dare be afraid, this is the God you serve.

So he [THE LEPER] acknowledges the wonder of who God is – You are Lord. It's the first time we ever hear Jesus called Lord—by the leper—and it also says he acknowledges Jesus' power. I want you to hear this, it's only four verses but it's packed with depth. So the leper says, "Lord, if You're willing, You can make me clean." Okay, stop. So the leper, church, does not come to God and say, "How dare you make me a leper!" He doesn't say, "God, why, why do I deserve to have my hands and my feet fall off and to rot to death!" That's not how he approaches God. He doesn't go to Him and say, "How dare You! Why couldn't it be somebody else? Why is it me that's going through this and not somebody else?" He doesn't come in anger or frustration.

In fact, he says, "Lord, if You're willing," which means the leper is saying to God if You want me to be a leper, I'll be a leper. If You want my flesh to rot and me to be pushed out of society, Lord, if it's your will, I'll do that because You are God. So it's, church, it's Lord, I have a prayer but if You do not want to heal, it's okay. I trust You. You're Lord. This isn't my home. Man, that's a humble thing. God sees the faith of the leper and he doesn't come in anger, he says, "Lord, if You're willing."

Think about that. How many of you have separated from God because you're angry at Him? Are you a leper? I mean, this man had every right to say, "God, what are You doing here?" but yet he sees God and he acknowledges who He is and that He's powerful and He's in control. And He approaches Him in humility saying, "If You're willing, You can; but Lord, if You want me to be a leper, I will." [EXHALES "WHOA"] I mean, is that your heart towards God? God, if You want me to go through this for your glory, I will, but You can deliver me. How powerful and sovereign is our God. And know that there's nothing random; there's nothing that you're going through that is random that He can't redeem and set apart.

Like, there are things in your past that God is going to use if you give them to the Lord. This is a comforting thing. This is what the leper thought. He thought, *Hey, listen, this is what God has me, but Lord, You can take me to a different place. I trust You in that.* You know, we talk about something only



God can do, we have these testimonies of the past year, so many times when people approach God with a prayer of the impossible and God answers that prayer and we give Him glory. I mean, there have been people coming to the Lord like crazy here, giving their lives to Jesus.

Stopping chasing the world and started to chase the throne, started to say, "God, I need You. I need a relationship with You." And so we praise all of these things.

It was so powerful just the other day, I'm – I literally am doing online apologetics, I'm talking to atheists online because I can't talk to anybody because no one wants to go outside, so I'm talking to people online, it's very disconnected but I'm trying because Jesus is the hope of the world regardless if we're in a pandemic. That's why we can't be afraid, be wise but you can't be afraid because if the church is quiet and fearful and runs – who's going to the leper? Jesus goes to the leper; He doesn't run. When the church runs from the suffering of the world there is no hope. Like, there's no hope if we run from suffering so we have to be brave and trust and wise but fearless knowing that Jesus is Lord, He's in control. We're going to love people this year.

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And so in this there's this amazing testimony of this atheist, I didn't share it first service but it's so powerful, it just happened last night where this atheist was so mean cursing me out, and you know it's from the enemy because it's like, "Jesus loves you." "How dare you! Bleep-bleep-bleep-bleep!" And you're like, "Why would you be angry at a message of love?" Right? There's a contrast there. But I remember just being in prayer, *Hey, Lord, I don't know who this person is but soften their heart, soften their heart.* And all of a sudden he posts this post and he says, "If God is a loving God, then why would He let me see my mom suffer to death in a hospital room and die right in front of me?" That's what he posted. I said okay, there it is, there it is. He doesn't think God loves him. He doesn't think that Jesus would reach out His arms to him. In fact, He thinks Jesus was laughing and ran away. And so I said, "God, teach him about who You are and how much You love him."

And just last night he texted me on Facebook and he said, "You know, I just lost my mom a couple years ago and you just seem to have a lot of hope. Can I talk to you?" So I'm texting him and I said, "Absolutely. What's your question?" He's like, "Did God love my mom?" And I said, "Yeah, absolutely He loved your mom." And he's like, "I don't know if my mom knew Jesus." And I said, "Well, you know, in our last dying days, you know, who knows what the Spirit of God is gonna do in that heart. And I pray that your mom gave her life to Jesus and He knows and that she's with Him." And I just started encouraging him, "Maybe Jesus penetrated her heart in the very last second, I don't know, but God is a God of love and He pursues us in love." And I said, "What about you? What's your relationship with Jesus?" And he said, "I was angry at Jesus, but I don't want to be angry anymore." [APPLAUSE] Isn't that awesome?

So Jesus heals this leper, He reaches out and touches him. In that world that meant that Jesus was also untouchable but God doesn't care what the world thinks, and then He says to the leper go to the priest. The reason He did that was when he goes to the priest, the priest had a ceremony that would let the leper back into the society. It was being born again. And the irony is the priest probably never performed that ceremony ever. It's the first time he had to get the book [GESTURES PAGING THROUGH BOOK], but that's why Jesus sent the leper there, to be welcomed back into the society as a brand new person because he touched Jesus, he met Jesus. And here's the thing, no one talks about this, Jesus says to the leper don't you dare go tell anybody – we know in Mark² the leper runs and tells everyone; he doesn't listen to Jesus, he just starts to tell everyone about what happened. I would think that he's overwhelmed with joy and he just couldn't help sharing.



² **MARK 1:43-45 (ESV):** ⁴³ And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

But here's my closing challenge, what kind of church are we going to be next year? Here's what I know when I read God's Word, when you talk about New Year's resolutions, like, you can say, "I want to lose weight," "I want to get a raise," that's fine, but church, we already know what we're supposed to do. We already know what we're supposed to do, we're supposed to share the love of Jesus with the world. That's our purpose. That's what we're supposed to do and it doesn't change because the New Year starts. So what kind of church are we? Here's my prayer is that we're a church where everyone in this room meets Jesus. I don't want you to go to Calvary for several years and never meet Jesus. We're doing it wrong if that's the case.

And when I say meet Jesus, yes, I'm talking about a person who's alive. I want you to experience His promised Spirit in your life. I want Him to be known to you. I want you to have a thousand questions but meet Jesus and say, "Okay. I'm in." So I want everyone in this room, everyone in this place to meet Jesus, and I want everyone who walks in in 2021 to meet Jesus, not us. In fact, I want us to come after. I want them to meet Jesus because we get out of the way and then we surround that person. I want to be a church that has communities focused on discipleship and growing people in their walk with the Lord. That there is no young woman that gives her life to Jesus that doesn't transform everything about her life through discipleship and intentionality that surrounds her. I want men in this room to go from abusive, self-centered husband to godly service in their homes. And I want us to be a church that loves Jesus, loves each other.

And here's another thing, I want us to be a church that shares Jesus throughout everywhere in this world. Like, I want us to be a church where everyone in this community says they love Jesus by their works, their deeds. I want everyone in this room to use the gifts God's given you; use your time, your resources, your energy, your gifts. If you're a builder, build. If you're a teacher, teach. If you have a gift of hospitality, use that gift. If you have the gift of prayer, use your gift. I want you to use your gift for the glory of God. I want us to be good stewards of what God has given us; we're all stewards of this. If Jesus doesn't come back in our lifetime, this is gonna be handed to the next generation so I want us to be a church that cares about what generation we give it to.

And I also want to be a church that when we give it changes the world and it doesn't create a fear in us. I want to be a church that's fearless about these things; like, how can we be a church that in the midst of a global pandemic we are wise but fearless? What does that look like? I don't know what that looks like in your life, but you do. People online, people here—stop being afraid. It's done. We're not afraid anymore. We walk in wisdom, but we're not afraid. We have been set apart. We have been redeemed and we have a mission and we cannot step out of that mission ever. So when the world runs—Jesus went towards the leper, He reached His hand in love. This is our Jesus. What does that teach us about our lives? How do we live that way? How do we live that way to the suffering and the broken, the people in our lives, and how do we see Jesus in that truth?

And so what I want to do right now is I'm going to pray that we would become that type of church, and we are, but I don't want to pray for some New Year's resolution that's of this world. If anything, 2020 should teach us don't you dare put your treasures in this world. But I want to be a church that puts our treasures in the Kingdom to come and focuses on that and so that next year at this time we would say, "Man, look what Jesus did. He did something here that only He could do." And we want to give Him praise for that. Amen?



LEPER

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Father,

We love You and I thank You, LORD, that You are sovereign, You are in control. And LORD, if you are willing You can do amazing things as You did in the life of that leper; You can do amazing things in our lives.

So LORD, I pray for those that need to extend their forgiveness, LORD, I pray they'd do that. For those that need to move from fear to courage and faith, I pray they'd do that right now. LORD, I pray that You would teach us to be vulnerable to You, to fear You over fearing men. And LORD, I pray right now for this next year that You would



answer our prayers – make us a church focused on You, LORD. I pray for all those that are going to walk through this building over the next year that they would meet and fall in love with Jesus, and that would give You glory and honor as they do. We pray all these things as we worship Your Name. Amen.

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Calvary Fellowship Website: <https://www.cfdowningtown.com/watch>

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/vhcaOdtDr5I>

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KEYWORDS: willing, love, forgiveness, fear, faith, courage, reverence