



Further up, Further in

TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: January 9, 2022

SPEAKER: Brian/Chad

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 5:12-16

Family Dinner Table

Human touch is powerful. Studies have shown that touch can relieve stress as well as facilitate healthy brain development.²

In an interesting article called, *The Power of Touch*, from the March 4, 2015, issue of *The New Yorker Magazine*, author Maria Konnikova cites a study published in 2014 by psychologists Sheldon Cohen, Denise Janicki-Deverts, et al², stating that hugging provided a buffer from catching the common cold. The *New Yorker* article goes on to summarize:

In one set of studies, out this month, touch was shown to boost the immune systems of people who had been exposed to the common cold. For two weeks, researchers monitored a little more than four hundred adults, asking them not just about their social interactions but about how many hugs they'd gotten over the course of each day. Then the subjects were quarantined in rooms on an isolated hotel floor, where the researchers proceeded to expose them to a cold virus. The virus was quite effective: seventy-eight percent of subjects were infected, and just over thirty-one percent showed signs of illness. But not everyone was equally susceptible. The people who had experienced more supportive social interactions battled infection more effectively and exhibited fewer signs of illness.³

- As a family discuss how important touch has been to you, especially living in the wake of the pandemic.

¹ Ryle, J.C. *Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels Vol II*. Banner of Truth, 1986. 168.

² Sheldon Cohen, D. J.-D. (2014, December 19). Does hugging provide stress-buffering social support? A study of susceptibility to upper respiratory infection and illness - Sheldon Cohen, Denise Janicki-Deverts, Ronald B. Turner, William J. Doyle, 2015. SAGE Journals. Retrieved January 5, 2022, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797614559284>

³ Konnikova, M. (2015, March 4). *The Power Of Touch*. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved January 5, 2022, from <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch>

Today's sermon from Luke 5 reveals Jesus' love and care for the "untouchables" of society. We learn that those whom culture deems unworthy or unlovable are the very ones whom Christ seeks out in order to bring healing and restoration.

It's not by accident that the Bible uses leprosy to illustrate sin's destructive power. Sin destroys relationships as it separates us from loved ones, from God, and even from ourselves, as it distorts our unique calling as image bearers.

The Leper's Desperate Request

The man in Luke's account was described as "full of leprosy." He was quarantined outside the city and could be stoned for crossing the boundaries of his exile. He had no hope. Humbled by his great need, in desperation he falls at the feet of Jesus.

- Read Leviticus 13 for the Old Testament laws about leprosy. Why would it be considered unusual for the leper to approach Jesus? What can we infer from Leviticus that would add details to Luke's narrative?
- What does this verse tell us about the faith of the leper? And what does it tell us about *who* the leper thought he was approaching? (cf. Mark 1:40-45; Matt. 8:1-4)

The Lord's Powerful Reach

In verse 13 we read that Jesus did something extraordinary: he touched the leper! There are three things to note about Jesus' touch: First, his touch is an intimate touch; second, his touch is a powerful touch; and thirdly, his touch is a transforming touch. Jesus didn't need to touch the leper in order to heal him, but he chose to become "unclean" by placing his hand on him. (See also 2 Corinthians. 5:21)

- According to Leviticus 5:1-4, what makes one "unclean"? Read Matthew 15:18-20. What did Jesus say made one unclean?

The Lord's Surprising Reactions

After healing the leper, Jesus proceeds to instruct him to tell no one (v. 14). Jesus also shows respect to the ceremonial laws of Moses, even though he knew the last days of these institutions were at hand. Still, he bids the leper to go and present himself to the priest, so he might be restored to society. At the end of the encounter with the leper, we see Jesus retreat from the crowds in order to pray.

Throughout the gospels Jesus retreats and dependently relies on prayer to ready himself for his earthly ministry. (See also Matt. 14:23; Mk 1: 35 and 6:46; Lk 6:12)

In his commentary on Luke, theologian and pastor J.C. Ryle states:

Although "great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities," He still made time for secret devotion. Holy and undefiled as He was He would not allow the demands of public business to prevent regular private intercourse with God...There is an example set before us here, which is much overlooked in these latter days...There are few professing Christians, it may be feared, who strive to imitate Christ in this matter of private devotion...Why is it that there is so much apparent religious working, and yet so little result in positive conversions to God? There is not enough private prayer. The cause of Christ does not need less working, but it does need among the workers more praying.¹

Do you long to be touched by Jesus? Do you want to find the strength and courage to touch others with the gospel of Christ? If so, we should follow Jesus' example and make time with God a priority. Seek him out, sit at his feet, and learn from him so that you too can touch the untouchables with the restorative power of Christ's love.