

God Touches the Untouchable

Introduction:

- A. There have been studies which showed people who experience meaningful touching on a regular basis actually have a longer life expectancy than those who don't.
 - 1. They even found that babies which are not held and touched will actually die.
- B. While humans need to be touched, sometimes people are declared unfit to be touched.
 - 1. In 1994 in northern India, a lower-caste girl eloped with one considered an untouchable boy.
 - a. With the approval of the village council, the boy's head was smashed in with a stone, while the girl was whipped and branded with a burning log.
 - b. Such was the fate of the untouchable and the one who would touch him.
 - 2. Though the results are not always this dramatic, every society has its own untouchables.
 - a. And all of us, at certain times, feel like untouchables – unacceptable, unworthy, outsiders.
- C. The gospels tell the story of a person who had been infected with a horrible disease; nobody would go near him, let alone touch him – Mk.1:40-45.
- D. Leprosy, or Hansen's Disease, is a horrible disease.
 - 1. Luke, a doctor in addition to being a gospel writer, says the man was *"full of leprosy"* – Lk.5:12.
- E. Leprosy is not a rotting infection.
 - 1. Leprosy attacks a person's nervous system.
 - 2. A leper loses sensation and because they don't have the normal ability to feel pain, they will hurt themselves to the point of seriously damaging their body.
- F. Lepers often lose fingers and toes, and people used to think this was directly caused by the disease.
 - 1. Dr. Paul Brand and some of his researchers stayed up at night watching the lepers as they slept.
 - 2. They observed rats gnawing at the leper's extremities, but because they felt no pain they would sleep right through it.
 - a. Thus, Dr. Brand, after performing corrective surgery, would send a cat home with his patients as a normal post-operative procedure.
- G. A leper's life in ancient Israel was very hard.
 - 1. Most Jews would have seen a leper as a sinner under a curse from God.
 - 2. If a leper was seen on a public street it was permissible to pelt him with eggs or even stones.
- H. The Law of Moses instructed the leper to stay away from the camp – Lev.13:45,46.
- I. A leper was an untouchable – literally.
 - 1. To touch a leper was to defile yourself.
 - 2. Imagine the thought of never being touched again by people close to you.
 - 3. Dr. Brand once was in India treating a bright young man.
 - a. In the course of the examination Brand laid his hand on the patient's shoulder and informed him through a translator of the treatment that lay ahead.
 - b. To his surprise the man began to shake with muffled sobs.
 - c. "Have I said something wrong?" Brand asked his translator.
 - d. She quizzed the patient and reported, "No, doctor. He says he is crying because you put your hand around his shoulder. Until he came here no one had touched him for many years".
- J. Leprosy was not just a physical disease; it carried a religious stigma too.
 - 1. The O.T. Law judged him or her to be ritually unclean.
 - 2. The leper asks Jesus, *"If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."*
 - a. He doesn't ask just for healing, he asks to be made clean.
- K. The leper asks Jesus, *"If thou wilt..."*
 - 1. He wonders if Jesus wants to cleanse him.
 - 2. He can cleanse, but would he want to? – Mk.1:40-42.
- L. We read this story and see a wonderful miracle.
 - 1. But there are other things going on here that are even more wonderful.
 - 2. We see not only the wonder of a miracle; we see the wonder of the one behind the miracle.

I. Jesus Is One an Untouchable Can Approach.

- A. Jesus was regarded as a rabbi, a teacher.
 - 1. But His approach to people was completely different from other rabbis.
- B. The religious leaders of that day practiced a strategy of isolation.
 - 1. Lepers, Gentiles, tax collectors, women – all of these were to be avoided “like the plague.”
- C. A rabbi’s job was to make sure the law was understood and followed.
- D. It was a leper’s job to avoid all people, especially rabbis.
- E. Rabbis prided themselves on being unapproachable.
 - 1. They thought of themselves as being so close to God that common sinners – lepers, the unclean – should not be allowed to get too close.
- F. Jesus was different.
 - 1. He was eminently approachable.
- G. Jesus is someone an untouchable can approach.

II. Jesus Is One Who Will Touch the Untouchable.

- A. In His ministry more than one person sought to touch Jesus – Mk.5:25-29; Lk.7:37-39; Mk.10:13.
- B. But the leper of Mark 1 made no attempt to touch Jesus.
 - 1. He understood the situation.
- C. But notice what Jesus did: Mk.1:41.
- D. Jesus touched the leper before He healed him.
 - 1. He touched the leper while the leper was still unclean.
- E. Jesus did not need to touch the leper to cleanse him.
 - 1. All He had to do was “say the word.”
- F. Why then did He touch him?
 - 1. He touched him in order to teach him – and us – that He is one who touches the untouchables.

III. We must Both Touch and Be Touchable.

- A. It is not only the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who have been unapproachable.
 - 1. Throughout history religious people have been attracted to the strategy of isolation.
 - 2. The idea behind it is that sin, like the common cold, is contagious.
- B. Though it works in keeping out some sins, it encourages other sins – pride, self-righteousness.
 - 1. In isolation brotherly love dies; humility and compassion and generosity of spirit all suffocate.
- C. Is sin contagious? Seems that way.
 - 1. But sin and suffering are not all that is contagious.
 - a. So are enthusiasm and laughter and faith.
- D. In Matt.13:33 Jesus used leaven to describe the kingdom of God.
 - 1. We are to be like leaven and influence others in the world for good.
- E. In the world we live in we learn to keep our distance.
 - 1. If we get too close to those who are suffering, we might get infected by their pain.
 - 2. Only when you get close enough to catch their hurt will they be close enough to catch your love.
- F. Jesus did not call His followers to live in quarantine.
- G. The secret to spiritual life is not to isolate yourself from sin and suffering.
 - 1. It is to be so filled with the life of Jesus that in touching the world we are able to cure it.
- H. The leper did not infect Jesus with his sickness.
 - 1. Jesus infected the leper with His life – we should do the same.
- I. Today there will be people in your world waiting for someone to touch them.
- J. “Live in such a way that those who know you but don’t know God will come to know God because they know you.”

IV. We must Approach Jesus and Let Him Touch Us.

- A. All of us at some time in our life will feel like an untouchable.
 - 1. We will feel unacceptable and unworthy.
- B. We will be down on ourselves, and down on our situation, and down on the prospects for recovery.
- C. Other people might make us feel that way. (Parents, spouse, others)
- D. When you feel untouchable, see yourself as a leper.
 - 1. See yourself as a leper approaching Jesus.
 - 2. He will not scream at you, like others might.
 - 3. He will not demand that you keep your distance, like others might.
 - 4. He is someone you can approach.
- E. And see that He is someone who will touch you.
 - 1. He will touch you in your uncleanness.
 - 2. He will touch you if no one else will.

Conclusion:

- A. If you say to him, *"If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"*, He will say to you what He said to another untouchable, *"I will; be thou made clean."*
- B. As I close I would like to share with you a poem.

'Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile:
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar; then Two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars once; three dollars twice;
Going for three --" but no,
From the room, far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening up the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine;
A game -- and he travels on.
He is "going once," and "going" twice,
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice,
And going, and gone," said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand
What changed its worth." Swift came the reply:
"The touch of a master's hand."