

# ***Jesus Chooses; So Do We***

**Mark 1:40-45**

**Focus:** Whereas the world is naturally centrifugal experience, Jesus' compassion makes for a centripetal ministry.

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## **Colossians 3:12-17**

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*

*Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

*Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.*

*And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;*

*and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*

*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

## **Mark 1:40-45**

*A leper came to Jesus begging him, and kneeling he said to him,*

***"If you choose, you can make me clean."***

*Moved with [compassion], Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him,*

***"I do choose. Be made clean!"***

*Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.*

*After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

*But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country;*

*and people came to him from every quarter.*

## Sermon

When our neighbors are **broken**—

in pain or  
in sorrow or  
in need

EITHER

we choose to move **toward them**, in their direction  
coming alongside them in ministries *public or private*  
—an **active choice** to bless those Christ would bless

OR

we choose to do nothing  
*which is so often no choice at all*  
a passive inaction → *a still-born compassion*

At which point the **inevitably atomizing** tug of the world—  
a world that often seems **naturally inclined to isolation**

In our inaction, the world pulls us apart from others  
away from those to whom our Lord calls us to go

*Still, Jesus chooses to move in compassion toward others.*

Therefore, so can we.

*What I love about the NT gospels—Matt, Luke, John ... Mark*

is how they are the **playground** for our **faithful imagination**

As we learn how rightly to imagine God

As we come to trust in what God is like

As we seek to respond to what God is up to in the world

The gospels **forge** our **faithful imaginations**,

not usually through **abstractions**

but most often through **interactions**

Through the **retelling**

of an **engaging narrative**

that is the **ministry of Jesus of Nazareth**

**Mark 1:40-45** → short and sweet as it is

is one such interaction

that has **loomed large** in my imagination

It is the **proactive interaction** of two engaging characters

One comes in **crisis**

The other, in **compassion**

### *First, there is a leper*

Whatever the precise diagnosis of his skin disease

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century,  
such a condition would have brought with it,  
not only a **hideous itch**, but also a **dreadful isolation**

Lepers would often be clustered together ...

Not only would your **body** suffer,  
your **spirit** suffers as well—**cut off** from others ...

Untouched by God's grace,  
the world seems to have a **natural atomizing tendency**

people are prone to move away from crisis, calamity, chaos

Over the years, a number of people who have moved through difficult stages of grief after a tragedy have reported to me how surprised they were by close friends who seemed to disappear when needed most

What's worse, many do so with a self-protecting sanctimony

So the **image in my mind** is a stark one:

The world has moved away from him, leaving him alone ...

In his desperation, he comes begging to before Jesus

*If you choose, you can make me clean.*

My paternal grandmother—a great believer that everyone has their proper place—she would have judged him **presumptuous**

But I think when you are **desperate**, you'll risk the kind of gauntlet he throws down before this traveling, healing rabbi

### *So there is this leper; then there is also our Lord*

this **strange** and **wonderful figure**  
who has been moving from town to town

**announcing the news** that God  
is looking out for those in need

**demonstrating that news** by blessing and healing

those whose lives and bodies  
bear the marks of a fallen/broken world

The moment that most **captures my imagination** in this passage  
is Jesus' response to our leprous friend:

*If you choose, you can make me clean.*

So much hangs on Jesus' response/reaction

*What will Jesus do in the face of crisis?  
Will he be faithful to his own message?  
or will he turn a deaf ear to the cries...*

EVEN MORE SUBSTANTIALLY

What is the nature of the God who has sent him?  
This one whom he makes flesh, what is this God like?  
Can the creator of all things also be attentive  
to the cries of one little creature?

Our leper has bet everything  
on the character of the one before him

### *Jesus' response is startling, and teaches us much*

He has a **trinity** of reactions:

- moved with compassion  
compassion = co-passion = suffering alongside  
Jesus is not **numb**, plastic, or unbending  
He **enters into the suffering** of the one before him
- he reached out and touched him  
“touched him”? → are you serious?  
not only a health concern, violated sacred law  
Jesus **connects** with the man, closes the gap,  
he **advances** where everyone else has **withdrawn**
- “I do choose. Be made clean.”  
Whatever else we mean when we call this rabbi **divine**,  
we surely don't mean he was a **holy automaton**  
a **mechanistic vending machine** of God's mercy  
“Of course he healed him, he's God in the flesh.”  
But Mark does not take the healing for granted  
It is a **free choice of Jesus' will**  
The good news here is not merely his **ability**;  
the startling good news here is his **willingness**

Whereas the world has pulled away from the leper,  
Jesus draws closer to him

*And this is the scandalous good news of the gospel:*

That who we see Jesus to be is who we imagine God to be  
That what we see Jesus doing is what we imagine God doing  
That Jesus' compassionate choice echoes God's com choice

### *This little moment in Jesus' ministry*

has loomed large in my understanding of the gospel

There is for me in Jesus' healing of the leper

both a **blessing** and a **burden**

both **grace** and **calling**

► The **grace** is simply this:

There is no place you can go, no burden you can bear, no sin you can commit, no omission so grievous ...

Lepers are welcome here, b/c lepers are welcomed w Jesus

I have enough **EVANGELICAL** in me to believe that,  
to announce it, to trust in its as a matter of life and death

► But there is also in Jesus' compassion a **sure calling**:

The direction Jesus moves is the **direction we are called**

Having been **cleansed** and **claimed** ourselves, we are also **called**

called to a ministry of compassion (suffering alongside) with  
those to whom Jesus would minister

EVEN BETTER with those to whom the living Christ  
is already ministering

I also have some **SOCIAL GOSPEL** in me, just enough to believe that  
we are called to be present to those most in need of connection  
to move toward **the leprosy of sin and brokenness** in the world,  
not away from it

*My experience is that, ungraced by God, untouched by Christ's compassion, the world has a centrifugal pull to it*

centrifugal = a pull outward from a center ...

### examples

personal examples

*But it also my experience that the Holy Spirit calls us to a ministry of centripetal force*

centripetal force = a pull inward, toward a center

*My amateurish understanding of physics is that, while centrifugal force can be experienced all over the place, centripetal force is a rare occurrence*

And that's why it is such a helpful metaphor ...

I know that have frequently felt the pull of the Holy Spirit, the call of Jesus' gospel, to risk my own comfort/security to go and stand with those most in need

There was a man in my previous community  
a friend of mine, though not a member of my church  
a longstanding businessman in the community, well known

Two years ago he was arrested in a underage solicitation sting

centrifugal force

But he was a member of tall steeple Methodist church in town ...

centripetal force

*Jesus' compassion for the leper in Mark 1*

has over the years taught me that we who follow in his way  
are called to be **centripetal** people in a **centrifugal** world  
called to ...

That's one of the reasons I am here with you, your history of missional response and ministries of compassion

### SHYG mission trip

But efforts like a mission are only the public, official expressions of our **centripetal calling**

What about in your own lives?

What about in our day-to-day living? working? playing?

I would invite you to be open to the people and places wherein you feel that nudge of the Holy Spirit, pull of the gospel.

Because Jesus chooses compassion  
and thereby we are bold to imagine God choosing compassion  
we therefore are able to make a choice as well

*I do choose*, says Jesus

And so can we.