

# The Willingness of God and Faith

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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Matthew 8:1-3

*When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

For years I have heard ministers and theologians compare leprosy to cancer. But with our advancements in treatment, many cancers are no longer death sentences. But leprosy was a death sentence. Not only did it bring about an agonizingly slow death but it brought with its diagnosis instantaneous social death. A man or woman who contracted the dreaded disease was immediately ostracized from the living. According to the law of God, the leper was forced from home and family to live outside the town, or city most often alone, unless there were other lepers.

Leprosy gradually spread over the body, bleaching the hair white wherever it appeared, crusting the affected parts with white flakes of rotted skin, and causing wretched sores and other deformities. From the skin the disease ate inward to the bones, rotting the whole body eventually. The leper was required to have his outer garment torn as a sign of deep grief, to go bareheaded exposing the disease, and to cover his beard with his mantle, to keep his foul breath covered as the disease would infect the gums and rot the teeth. He had to warn people to keep away from him, by calling out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' nor could he speak to any one, or receive or return a salutation, since in the Middle East this involved an embrace.

The contagion had to be stopped and without the modern medications that have eradicated the cursed death of leprosy, the only hope for the communities, which leprosy was discovered, was quarantine the victim.

But perhaps the most humiliating part of this pestilence was that it was wrongly considered a judgment from God. If you contracted leprosy, you were thought to have done something to incur God's wrath. This was because of instances in the Old Testament of God judging a few individuals by making them lepers. The first was Miriam, the sister of Moses when she complained against Moses. Second, was Ghazi, the servant of Elisha, who lied and took Naaman's money after he had been cured of leprosy. Lastly, the great King Uzziah was stricken with the deadly disease when he disobeyed the Law and entered into the temple to offer incense to the Lord, a duty reserved only for the Levitical priests. The moment he did it, he was struck by God. So, centuries later, people believed if you had this disease you had done something to deserve this fate.

In addition to this, leprosy is a metaphor or type for sin in the Scriptures. The Bible openly compares sin to leprosy, and there's no better picture of sin's defilement than leprosy. Sin begins but is never contained; it spreads its hellish contamination. Sin ostracizes, divides, and separates. All who touch sin are pronounced guilty. It can never be fenced; its consequences affect more than the one who transgresses. It is a corruption that goes to the bone of man's existence and leaves the sinner outside the camp, unclean before God and man. Yes, leprosy is a picture of sin.

All of this is the background of our text. And it is in the Bible because this poor leper represents the person whose soul is sick with sin. He is a telling picture of what means to be alive yet dead. A walking mass of death, a putrefied corruption of the spirit that renders a person unclean and unacceptable to God.

But he is also a picture of the amazing mercy of our Lord Jesus who is a friend of sinners and will receive one and all who come to Him. He has never nor will He ever turn one away if they will come. Oh, that there would be at least one here today who though vile in sin as this man was vile with the rot of his disease, may come to this same Jesus as this poor leper. Oh that you would hear the Gospel cry in this leper who could not be cured coming to a Great Physician, who will not turn him away.

As Isaac Watts' hymn suggests that we too, as the leper, come to Jesus, for He alone has the cure we need.

*Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin,  
And born unholy and unclean;  
Sprung from the man whose guilty fall  
Corrupts the race, and taints us all.*

*Soon as we draw our infant breath,  
The seeds of sin grow up for death;  
Thy law demands a perfect heart,  
But we're defiled in every part.*

*Great God, create my heart anew,  
And form my spirit pure and true;  
O make me wise betimes to spy  
My danger and my remedy.*

*Behold, I fall before Thy face;  
My only refuge is Thy grace;  
No outward forms can make me clean;  
The leprosy lies deep within.*

There is only one cure for it. There is only one remedy. It's a person. It's Jesus Christ. As we unpack this story this morning, would God open your heart to see this poor man is you. Would you find yourself kneeling at Jesus' feet this morning, "If Thou be willing, Lord, You can make me clean."

## **I. The Leper's Impressive Faith.**

This man's faith is remarkable and impressive for several reasons.

### **A. His Faith Propelled Him to Come to Jesus.**

What's so amazing about this? Many people had come to Jesus before this day. Yes, but not a leper. The law of God forbid him to come within the city gates, he was to remain outside. Therefore, to come to Jesus, he had to contradict God's very word. It's here that I am amazed. For somehow, God granted him faith strong enough to realize that the law of God was not to keep him from Jesus but to direct him to Him. This is the purpose of the law.

The Apostle Paul, talking to the Galatians, says the law is a teacher, a tutor who teaches you that only Jesus can save from sin. Therefore, it directs you to Him. The law of God masterfully teaches us the exceeding sinfulness of ourselves. This is the purpose of the law.

Before you will go to Jesus for your remedy and cure for sin, you will first try to cure yourself. You will first try to heal thyself, even as they said to Jesus in scorn and mockery as He hung on the cross, "Physician, heal Thyself." But the more you try to heal yourself the more you realize you can't. The more you try to turn over a new leaf the more rot you find underneath the surface. The more you promise to do better the more you realize there is nothing in you better to rely upon. That's the purpose of the law, to bring you to the point of realizing there is no remedy inside yourself.

*Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling.*

There is no hope within. I have no hope unless God would be merciful to me. This dear leper, somehow by faith, understood some of this. He understood that the law was not to prohibit him from coming to the One, who could heal him, but it was pointed his way to Him. In fact, all of the sacrifices in the Old Testament were pointing as a type and shadow of this one great sacrifice—Jesus.

What's so impressive about this man's faith is that somehow he could see some of this. Though maybe darkly, he understood enough that he would willingly forget about what the law of God said about him remaining outside of the city, and he would take the chance and run into the midst of the city, through the crowd, risking the contamination of others to come to Jesus.

The law of God is to bring us to Jesus, but for too many of us, we let the law keep us from Jesus. We hear the law of God, we see it, we hear it preached, and then we try to go out and do it as if we could come to God by our own merit. As if your hand could prove you worthy of God's forgiveness. Thereby the law, instead of helping us, becomes a hindrance. We think that by obedience or conformity to some religious rule and tradition that somehow we can make ourselves acceptable to God. No, that's not the purpose of the law. We have perverted it. It's there to prove there is none other but Christ, whose bloody fountain can wash away our sinful state.

## **B. His Faith Motivated Him to Come to Jesus Alone.**

Alone. He had no one to help him or assist him. Many times in the Gospel records you see people being brought to Jesus or they come with someone else. In the very next chapter, Matthew will record two blind men who came together for healing from Jesus. There was the paralyzed man who had four friends who carried him on his bed, and they lowered him through the roof of a home where Jesus was teaching. Here this man has no one.

On other occasions, people would intercede on behalf of others and take the Lord Jesus to the sick and infirmed, as Jairus did for his daughter. This man had no one to bring him to Jesus or to get Jesus for him or to go with him to Jesus, and yet his faith was strong enough, pressing him to get out of his situation, go where he was not allowed to go, and come before Jesus. Oh, dear friend, please listen. It is true that if you are to go to Christ, you go to Christ alone. But I would have you to hear me this morning and not fear—you will not be alone. Here in this room are many people who will walk with you along that old narrow way to that narrow gate, and you will not have to go alone. We will stand by you and kneel with you in prayer. We will strive and agonize in intercession for you. We will fight in prayer for you that you will not be alone and that Jesus finds you just the way you are and forgives you.

Would you come? Would you be the delight of our hearts this morning, for nothing could delight this poor preacher's heart more than to pray with you and to bring you to the Master Himself and watch you be made whole.

## **C. His Faith Influenced Him to be the First Leper to Come to Jesus.**

I did a careful study, and I put the chronological reports of the Gospel together in the order in which they occurred and discovered that up to this point in Matthew 8 there is no record of a leper being healed by Jesus. Not one. He healed the blind and the lame and cast out demons, but not one leper is recorded. Had we been the leper, I know we would have reasoned within ourselves and said, "It seems that Jesus is quite able to heal the blind. It seems to be one of His specialties, but I've never heard Him healing a leper. Also, I've heard Him healing the lame, and I've even heard He has the power to cast out demons, but evidently since He's healed no leper His power is not strong enough for this." Although there had been no reports of lepers being healed by Jesus, he did not let that discourage Him. He determined that if it is possible, he would be the first.

You may be from a family where there are no true, regenerated Christians, do not let that hinder you from coming to Jesus. Do not reason within yourself that Jesus has passed over your family and because of your name you will not be acceptable to God. No, have the faith of this man to get up and go and find out.

There are some of you who sit here today and reason that God cannot forgive you because of what you've done or who you are. "I'm too vile for Him. I understand why He's saved some of you in this room, but my case is much too severe. I'm too hard of a case for Jesus. You don't realize how perverted I've been. You have no idea how wicked I've been in my thoughts and the evil desires I've put forth and the evil fruit it has produced. You cannot mean Jesus would receive me." Oh yes, absolutely we do! Take encouragement from this story. Even though no leper had ever before been healed by Jesus, this man would not be discouraged by that fact. He came nonetheless and did not leave disappointed. Neither will you.

The arguments which now fill your mind, keeping you from coming, do not originate from this pulpit, nor this Book, nor from heaven, they come from the pit of hell itself. You are listening to a preacher that comes from an evil place, who means nothing but harm for you. I pray that you will not listen to that voice but accept it as lies and deception. So deceiving is sin. Sin causes us to think perverted and wrong things about our God and ourselves.

This man is impressive because although he had never heard of a leper being healed, he did not let that stop him.

#### **D. His Faith Drove Him to Worship Jesus as Lord.**

*"And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'" (Matthew 8:2)*

This is a man who is not a follower of Jesus. He has not heard many sermons, if not any, from Jesus. Why? He's a leper! He can't get close to the Lord. He can't run with the crowds that are following Jesus; he has to keep a safe distance away. Yet, what was granted to him—that seed of faith—bore amazing testimony of who Jesus Christ was. What little he knew, he believed. This is amazing because even Jesus' apostles at this point are still wrestling with who this Christ is. Yet this man comes to Him and worships.

*"Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.'" (Mark 1:40)*

That is an act of worship. He addresses Him as Lord—Adonai, the Lord God. What is it this man could see from a distance and heard with his ear that told him that Jesus was also God? He could see this was the Godhead in flesh. He would bow down before Him and cry out Adonai—the Lord worthy of worship and allegiance.

Friend, you too can be cleansed from your sins and made a new person if you too would come and bow down before the Lord and worship Him.

It's not saying the word Lord that somehow magically forgives you of your sins, no, for even in the chapter preceding this Jesus warns that on the Day of Judgment there will come many who will say to Him, "Lord, Lord," but to them He says, "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, for I never knew you." It's not in the word itself or parroting the word Lord that saves. It's the recognition that He is Lord and the rightful master of your life. It was the humbling of himself before the Lord that was the act of faith and repentance.

I exhort you even now to humble yourself before the Lord. Give your life to His allegiance. Once again we see the deceitfulness of sin, do we not? Sin convinces us all we are masters of our own fate, captains of our destiny. That's not true. You may rebel and do as you please but there is a God whom you sin against in all that you please. In your willful rebellion, you have violated your own God and Creator, your lover and maker.

The Bible says someday you will bow the knee, and your tongue will confess Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, then there will be no mercy, no pardon, no forgiveness. Now! Right now, sir, is the moment you can come and bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will forgive you and remove your sin as far as the east is from the west! What hinders you from right now going to Jesus and pronouncing Him your Lord and Master? Tell me, what good argument do you have to resist the lovingkindness of God?! What reason do you think is logical and right that you would withhold yourself from God who can set your life right and give you a hope that not your education, your wealth, your career, could ever give you or afford? No, He is Lord, and He will not be denied Lordship over us all whether it's here or in the time to come.

I must hasten to my second point.

## **II. The Leper's Limited Faith**

### **A. His Faith Believed Jesus Was Able but Unsure If Jesus Was Willing.**

*"And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'" (Matthew 8:2)*

He is saying, "I know You're able. I know You can do it. I'm just not sure that You will." Is this not the hindrance to all of our faith most of the time? I confess it is to mine. I know God is capable. I know God can do whatever He wants to within the confines of His nature. Nothing is impossible with Him. If God wanted to save us all this morning, if He wanted to bless us in phenomenal ways that are unheard of, well, He could do it. He could heal everyone in this building that is sick and infirmed. He can make wealthy barons, landowners, real estate moguls, financial titans—He could do so if He was so inclined.

He could take some of us who can't sing like the praise team and make us sing like sweet birds, like the angels in heaven. He can take your deformity and make it normal. There is nothing God cannot do within the confines of His nature. But I have to admit that though I know that I sometimes am hindered in my faith to believe God because I just don't know that He will do as I ask.

## **B. This is Always a Hindrance to Faith.**

This is where this man was. His faith was able to take him to Jesus, knowing Jesus was *able*, but He had no certainty, He had no way of knowing that Jesus *would*.

Isn't that where you are this morning in your prayer life, in your faith life? You know He can but you don't know that He will.

I want to suggest to you that from this story and throughout the New Testament the Bible tells us that unless you're persuaded that He will, you cannot trust Him that He will. Faith is persuaded that God not only can but will. Faith that is full and complete, the faith that honors God the most, is a kind of faith that is able to believe God, knowing what His will is in a particular matter and pray knowing that by your faith, you will be the instrument of it coming to pass.

Let me show you Scripture to prove this principle.

In Mark 11, the disciples are beside themselves with amazement that the fig tree that Jesus had cursed the day before was now dead. He explains to them, starting in verse 23,

*“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and **does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.**” (Mark 11:23)*

The principle is clear. If you know what the will of God is, then you can pray in full assurance that what you're asking will be done. That's the kind of faith God wants to move us all into. It's the kind of faith recorded in Hebrews 11:1,

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)*

You don't have it, you can't see it, it's not physically material yet, but it is nonetheless real. It's the kind of faith we are to have.

*“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mark 11:24)*

The English really doesn't do justice to the Greek in which Mark wrote these words, citing what Jesus said. The words “believe that you shall receive them,” is really in the aorist tense that means you have received them, you are continually receiving them, and you will have them.

When will you get what you are asking for from God in faith? Do you get it before you believe or after you believe? Anybody can believe God for something once they've received it. Even the devil can do that so don't brag. Once you have it, you can believe God gave it to you, but Jesus is saying, "No, you are to believe before you receive it because believing is the very act of receiving it and then you'll have it." Faith does not doubt but knows what God's will is in a matter and believes God for it.

Listen to these verses from I John 5. Nothing could be clearer and this should solve the issue for us all.

*"Now this is the confidence (notice the word) that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*

The principle is, God hears you. "I thought He heard everything?" He does. You're correct. So John is not saying God is audibly hearing you, it's a euphemism, a way of stating that God is not going to just hear but hear and respond. "Hear us" means "answer us." What is the key for God to answer you? That you ask according to His will. If you have any doubt about that, then read the next verse:

*And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (I John 5:14-15)*

We know, we are persuaded, there's no question about it, no wavering. You know that you know you have what you asked for! This dear leper did not have that kind of faith. Though his faith had been impressive up to this moment, it lacked something. He did not know the will of God about his healing, and he did not know the will of God because God had not yet spoken and revealed His will about his healing.

The reason you cannot believe God for something is because God hasn't spoken it. You can only believe God for that which He speaks from the Word into your heart by the Spirit. If God has spoken by His Word and you refuse to believe, it is the hardness of your own heart. It is not God's fault.

Let me give you an example of what I'm trying to say. In the ninth chapter of Matthew, the chapter after our text, it's illustrated by a dear woman who had an issue of blood for 12 years. She had spent all of her money on physicians and medical care and still had no remedy for her condition. The Bible says that she went to Jesus, who was thronged by people all around Him, somehow made her way to the Lord and touched the hem of His garment and the moment she did she was healed.

So amazing was this event that Jesus stopped and said, "Who touched Me?" because He felt power go out of His body and into this woman. Matthew records what this woman said to herself before she went to Jesus and touched the hem of His garment:



*“For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.’” (Matthew 9:21)*

Not “maybe,” “I hope,” “perhaps,” but I *will* be made whole. Where did that come from? A word of faith put into her heart. God had spoken. Whether she realized it was God or not mattered not. She was convinced and persuaded that this is what she was to do and if she did it she would receive it. That’s the kind of faith you are to approach God with. You must first know what God’s will is concerning a matter. And how will you find that out? Through the Word of God.

Though his faith was limited, the leper’s faith was determined. Let me finish this message and address this for a few moments.

### **III. The Leper’s Determined Faith**

#### **A. The Leper’s Faith Was Limited but Determined.**

He was determined to exercise his faith in Jesus to get an answer to the willingness of Christ to heal him. He took what faith he had and approached Jesus with that faith to get an answer of what God’s will be concerning his healing. That’s what we must do.

You say your faith is pitifully small, may I remind you what Jesus said? “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed—one of the smallest seeds in botany—you can say to this mountain to be cast into the sea and it will be done.” You say, “My faith is smaller than that! You don’t know how small my faith is and how discouraged I’ve been in it.” Well, here’s the remedy. Here’s the answer. Take even that pitifully small, microscopic faith and exercise it to gain an answer from Jesus about what His will is concerning your situation.

#### **B. Faith Must Be Exercised to Gain the Answer.**

When we do not know the will of God about a matter of concern, we are to use our faith to get an answer about God’s will. Let me assure you, if you do that He will tell you. He may not tell you the first day you ask, He may not tell you when you want to know, but He will tell you. Why? Because this is the principle of God’s Word. This is what He’s revealed about Himself.

For example, the classic verse under which all verses flow into that tells us that God always reveals His will to you so that you can join Him, cooperate with Him by prayer and faith. The verse is Amos 3:7. I love Amos 3:7.

*“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”  
(Amos 3:7)*

You say, “That’s an Old Testament verse and I’m not a prophet.” Oh, I beg to differ. It is an Old Testament verse, yes, showing that in the Old Covenant, before God did something He revealed it to the few He had appointed and separated into the position of prophet. The Bible

tells us that this is the age of the New Covenant where the Spirit of God has been poured upon all flesh so that your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Good morning, prophets of the living God! The principle continues into the New Covenant. God does nothing unless He reveals it to His servants.

Are you a servant of the Lord? Then God wants you to know what His will is concerning a matter, the thing in question is this: do you have enough faith to stay before God until God answers you as this man did? Notice what happens in verse three:

*“Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” (Matthew 8:3)*

If you’ve been struggling about direction or guidance in your life, you don’t know how to pray about a particular matter, well here’s the objective lesson of faith from this event. Go to God with the faith you possess that knows He’s able and stay before the Lord until you get an answer.

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17)*

Stay before the Lord. Keep it before Him. Do not give Him rest about that matter until He has spoken concerning that matter and you are persuaded beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is the will of God. My dear friend, your faith will be able to stand and doing all to stand. This is how you should approach this.

I must bring this to a conclusion. You must be determined. As I conclude, I want to once again address my lost friends not yet in the kingdom. If you remember, at the beginning of this message I said that throughout Scripture leprosy is a type of sin, an illustration God-appointed to teach us certain things about sin and redemption.

Here was a poor leper who knew that this God-Man was more than just a prophet and had the ability to hear him, but he wasn’t sure because Jesus had never cleansed a leper. So he goes to Him. I want you to hear the answer of the Lord. I want you to hear the voice of Jesus as if it was directed to you as I believe it is.

“Is it true that You can really receive me? Is there hope that today might be the day You might cleanse me of my sins and make me new? I wish it were. I’ve longed for that. I don’t want to die in my sin. I don’t want to continue living the way I’m living. I know there’s something more. I know there is something to Christianity, but all I have is a knowledge of it, but I don’t have it in my heart. There’s no reality. I fear it’s because God doesn’t love me like He loves others.” To you who feel this way I say, pray, “Lord, are You willing to save me?”

What will His answer be? Listen to our Lord’s answer to the leper who represents the vilest sinner, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

This whole event, this man's whole life was ordained to preach this message to you today. God had this leper come to Him, and it has happened and been recorded in Holy Writ to say to all lepers of the soul, to all sinners who will come to Jesus—He is willing to forgive! He is willing to cleanse you! He is willing to make you whole! He is willing to pick you up and strengthen your legs and your hands and set you on a path of righteousness that you have dared to try but have failed a hundred times over. He is willing.

There is no impediment. There is no hindrance today. Do not delay. Don't wait. Don't put it off until next Sunday. Don't wait for a more opportune time. Now! You've heard the call of God, and you've heard His reply, "I am willing; be cleansed." Answer the Lord this morning. Come and bow down and submit to the Lord. Profess and accept Him as Lord. From this moment forward you can be clean. May God help you. Amen.