

Mark 1:35-45 — Jesus Changes Places With A Leper

November 4, 2018

We are studying our way through the Gospel of Mark and we have a lot of exciting stuff in the book of Mark this morning. Last week, we studied the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. It was an amazing healing. Jesus stood over her in bed. He took her by the hand, and he lifted her up. As he lifted her up, he lifted the infection and fever out of her body. He restored her to health completely and instantaneously. Jesus' healing was not like the recoveries from sickness we experience today. Jesus' healing was an instant creation miracle.

Last week, I hoped to cover a few bridging verses in our study, but I didn't get to those verses. This morning, we are going to look at those bridging verses, then study the next of Jesus' miracles. We have a fair amount to cover, but I am confident these verses will keep you on the edge of your seat. Let's read the text, then we'll jump into the study.

Read Mark 1:35-45

This divides up into two big pieces. The first is a window into Jesus' quiet time and Bible study. The second is how Jesus traded places with a leper.

Just like Jesus, we need to carve out time with God to avoid drifting off mission and into sin.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. Mark 1:35 (ESV)

The key to understanding these verses is to remember they come after the verses we studied for the last two weeks. In the Gospel of Mark, for the last two weeks we only looked at one day in Jesus' life. In the morning he preached the sermon in the synagogue. I can guarantee you that is tiring. I want to take a

nap after preaching. In addition to preaching, he cast a demon out of a demon-possessed man during the sermon. I guarantee you everyone wanted to talk to him after the service when he did that. I can't begin to imagine the amount of social energy spent by Jesus in talking to people after he preached a sermon plus cast a demon out of the synagogue. Lunch was late that day because he went to Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. He healed her instantly and completely. I am sure everybody wanted to talk to him after he did that. That was even more draining. That night, after dinner, we saw the entire town brought sick people to Peter's so Jesus could heal them all with a touch or a word. This continued late into the night. Nine, ten, eleven, midnight. This was even more social energy with no time for a break. This was a seriously long day.

What would you do the next morning? If I was Jesus, I would sleep in and get my beauty rest. I would need a break. That wasn't Jesus. He was up early in the morning. He was up so early that it was before light. When he got up in the dark, he hiked to a desolate place. The word desolate in the Greek is the same word used to describe the wilderness where Jesus was tempted. It means a place in creation that is untouched by human development. The hillsides around the city of Capernaum where Jesus stayed were all farmed. This meant that Jesus took a very long walk in absolute darkness to get to a desolate place in the woods that was far away from Capernaum so he could get some quiet time to pray.

There is something important for us to see. The more intense Jesus' schedule became, the harder he fought to have quiet time with his father. You

see, when our schedules become extremely busy, we start to become more responsive to the demands of the crowds around us instead of the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit within us. It is only when we take time to be alone, read God's Word, pray and think that we can hear the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit in us, convicting us of sin and prompting us about how we should live.

If Jesus, as the Son of God, needed to fight for times of quiet to pray, we certainly need to do the same, lest we be reduced to people who merely respond to the demands of everyone around us. Look what Jesus says about his relationship with his heavenly father.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.**" John 5:19 (ESV)

How could Jesus say this unless he took the time to listen to the Father? Jesus needed to take time to listen to his father instead of just responding to the demands of the people with their phone calls, text messages and e-mails.

The Bible gives us little windows of insight into Jesus' alone times with the Father. Three times in Mark we find Jesus withdrawing to a secluded place to pray. Before important choices, Jesus prayed. For example, Jesus prayed all night before choosing his disciples. Before especially stressful situations, Jesus prayed, such as before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

My simple point is if Jesus needed to fight to find time with his father so the demands of the people didn't drown out his father's quiet voice, we certainly need to do the same. If Jesus needed to take extended times in prayer before making important decisions and facing stressful times, we certainly need to do the same. If Jesus needed to find a place is isolation and quiet to hear the voice

of his father so he could be sure to be doing the works of his father, we certainly need to do the same.

By way of application, I ask you, do you have regular time of quiet where you can pray, read God's Word and hear the Holy Spirit speak to you and guide your heart? If you don't, chances are that you are reacting to the demands of the people around you more than living by the guidance of the Father who loves you.

Here are some practical tips.

1. Have a place in your life that avoids electronics. If you have only one room, don't put a TV or game system in that room. It is too easy to get distracted.
2. If you are looking for alone time, put your phone away. Use a paper Bible instead of an electronic Bible to help you focus.

3. Develop the discipline of getting up early. Is it wrong to pray at night?

Absolutely not. I must admit that I think it is instructive that the Holy Spirit saw fit to include the details of Jesus' early morning prayer habit. I think he provided it to give us a pattern to follow.

4. Before making important decisions or facing stressful situations, get alone to pray and read God's Word. In those times, not only will God give you peace but he will often guide you in the way you should go. He will shape your attitude.

Our passage continues.

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. Mark 1:36–39 (ESV)

We don't know what time it was when Peter and the rest of the posse found Jesus. They found him alone and praying. They immediately came with the demands of the crowds. "Jesus, everybody is looking for you. We have a lot more healing scheduled today at Capernaum." I picture Peter acting like a doctor's secretary. He was scheduling healing appointments for Jesus. "Jesus, we have a healing scheduled for 10:30. We then have you scheduled for a coffee break. Your next healing is scheduled for 11." Remember, Peter was a business man. He was already thinking how to market and manage Jesus.

Jesus had a different plan. This plan was his father's plan for his life, not Peter's plan for his life. Knowledge of this plan and the ability to live in alignment with his father's plan only came because he took time to listen to his heavenly father. Jesus said, "We are done with Capernaum, at least for the moment. We are not setting up shop and having office hours. We are packing our bags and going to the towns around the Lake of Galilee to tell them the gospel message, to heal their sick and kick out their demons."

Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, tells us there were 240 small towns around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' plan was to go to them so they heard the good news and could experience the power of Jesus' kingdom breaking into the world through healings and the casting out of demons.

I want us to notice Jesus' priority. His priority was not healing people. His priority was telling people the good news of the kingdom. Healings, while important, only served to prove Jesus' authority. They weren't the primary reason Jesus came. The problem with every healing is it only lasted a few years. Healed

people get sick again. Healed people die. But the ramifications of the gospel message last forever.

When people repent of their sin and trust in Jesus, they are forgiven of their sin forever. They are made into new people like Jesus from the inside out, beginning with their hearts. They will live with God the Father eternally and eventually even be given a resurrection body that is like Christ's resurrection body that will last forever. Do you realize the change in someone's life when they hear and respond to the good news of Jesus is far more potent and far reaching than any of Jesus' earthly healings? Jesus' earthly healings take care of earthly sickness and only last a few years. The changes of the gospel address the source of all sickness and death. The healing God provides through the gospel message lasts forever.

Folks, we cannot perform earthly healing like Jesus, but we can share the message of the gospel like Jesus. The gospel message is more potent than any earthly healings Jesus performed. The gospel message changes hearts and lives forever. Remember that earthly healings are external and they only last for a few short years while gospel healing is internal and lasts forever. It changes our destiny from the Lake of Fire to reigning and ruling with Christ forever.

Jesus healed lepers.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Mark 1:40 (ESV)

Jesus' plan was to preach the gospel and heal the sick in the towns surrounding Capernaum. What happens next, with the healing of the leper, is one of the miracles Jesus performed in a town surrounding the Sea of Galilee that he

visited after he left Capernaum. Incidentally, the Bible tells us Jesus healed all the people who came to him.

And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. Luke 6:19 (ESV)

While the Bible tells us Jesus healed many lepers¹, the Bible only records the healing of two lepers. One of those accounts is the one we are studying this morning. The other account is found in Luke 17, when Jesus healed 10 lepers at once. The healing of this particular leper is so important that it is recorded in three of the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why was this healing so important? This leper's healing was so dramatic that Jesus' popularity instantly skyrocketed so high that Jesus could not enter a town without crowds mobbing him and his disciples. Next week, we will see the crushing power of the crowds when he returns to Capernaum. After dramatically healing this leper, Jesus was forced to do his ministry in isolated places because he became insanely popular.

As we begin to study, I need to warn you. Studying this miracle will be uncomfortable. To understand what makes this miracle so powerful we need to study one of the most dreaded diseases in the ancient world, leprosy.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Mark 1:40 (ESV)

How does leprosy effect people medically?

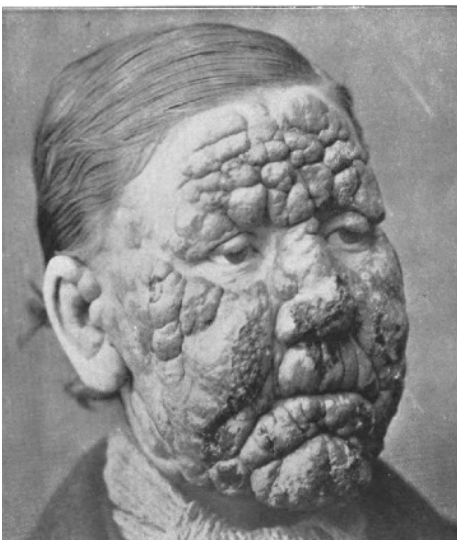
Leprosy comes from the Greek word leprous, which means scaly. It refers to the scaly appearance of a leper's skin. In the biblical world, there were 72 different types of skin diseases that fell under the category of leprosy. Chronic eczema, ringworm, and other skin fungal infections were all called leprosy. The

¹ Matthew 11:5

most serious form of leprosy, which is the type of leprosy talked about in our passage and is way we use the term leprosy today, is now known as Hansen's disease. It is a devastating bacterial infection that disfigures a person's appearance and debilitates a person's nervous system, leading to a slow and painful death over a period of 10-30 years.

Medical historians believe Hansen's disease originated in Egypt since they found the bacteria that causes this disease in at least one Egyptian mummy. Hansen's disease was one of the most feared and dreaded diseases in the ancient world. It could spread through the air or by touch. It was only in 1982 that a cure for the disease was developed. Prior to that, it was a matter of managing symptoms and quarantining the infected. This is why leper colonies existed.

The disease starts as a small red patch, usually on the face. As the bacteria spreads, it tumors develop under the skin on the face. They swell and disfigure the face. The eyebrows and eyelashes fall out. Soon



the bacteria spreads to the internal organs through the blood supply. These tumors show up internally and cause the blood supply to exterior limbs to diminish. This causes the bones to deteriorate. The fingers and toes lack blood supply so they begin to deteriorate and

are reabsorbed into the body as the bacteria cuts off blood supply to the extremities. When the bacteria invades the eyes, they also begin to rot. When the



bacteria

invades the mouth, the teeth rot and fall out.

When the bacteria invades the nose, it rots off your face. When the

bacteria invades the sex organs, they also rot and you know what happens.



The disease weakens the immune system so lepers are often sick with other diseases because the body is unable to defend itself.

As the flesh rots, lepers develop a distinct, repulsive smell. Have you ever smelled rotting flesh? Do you know the sudden urge to vomit when you encounter that smell? Welcome to the smell of a leper. They are known as the walking dead. Leprosy also attacks the vocal cords as leprosy tumors develop on the larynx, leaving the leper with a distinctive horse-grating voice.

Mark simply told us this man was a leper. Luke, the medical doctor, when he wrote about this miracle in his gospel, provided the medical details a doctor would notice. He wrote in Luke 5:12 that this man was full of leprosy. He was covered in this leprous, disfiguring disease from head to foot.

Picture this man covered in leprous tumors over every square inch of his body. He was disfigured beyond recognition. He was a repulsive freak show to see with the eyes. His fingers and toes would have been gone. His nose would have been a hole in his face. His ears would have been missing. His teeth were few and rotten. Emanating from his body was the revulsive smell of rotting flesh everywhere he went and a bath couldn't change the smell. Everyone ran from this man in horror. Imagine what it felt like to be this man.

In spite of this incredible disfigurement, as a leper, he felt almost no physical pain. Leprosy attacks a victim's nerves, making them incapable of pain. As such, lepers unintentionally destroy themselves because they do not know when they damage their bodies. A leper may take a hot pan out of the fire and not realize his hand is being severely burned when holding it because he can't feel pain. A leper may work all day with a shovel and not realize a splinter in the handle of the shovel is tearing deep into his flesh, shredding his hand to pieces and introducing a serious infection which will result in the loss of his hand. The whole time, he can't feel a thing. A leper will walk on sharp rocks, cutting his feet to pieces and introducing infections that will lead to the loss of a leg, but he can't feel a thing so he takes no measure to stop the damage or heal the infection. Those who treat leprosy in third world countries always tell lepers to keep a cat in the house. If they don't have a cat, it is a common for rats or mice to nibble on their rotting limbs, even chewing off fingers during the night. The leper wakes up to find a finger missing because it was chewed off by a rat while they slept but they felt nothing. This leads to even more disfigurement.

How does leprosy affect a person socially?

Leviticus 13 and 14 give us extensive biblical instruction on handling skin diseases and lepers in particular. Let me show you a little of these instructions.

“The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. Leviticus 13:45–46 (ESV)

Priests in ancient Israel were the medical guardians of the community.

Once the priest determined someone had official leprosy, the ramifications were immediate and permanent, to keep the disease from spreading. Lepers were permanently sent away from society to live in the wilderness.

Imagine a 25-year-old woman. Perhaps she was married to her husband only a few years before. She has hopes and aspirations in front of her. Maybe she is a mother with a few small children at home. One day she notices a small red patch on her face. She went to the priest and after a period of time it was determined that was the beginning of leprosy. What would happen to this young woman? She would be taken away from her husband and children and sent to live by herself in the wilderness. She would never return to a walled city. She would never return to the temple. She would never hold her husband or her children. She would live alone in the wilderness as her body slowly transformed from stunning beauty to a hideous sight as the leprosy spread. She would feel no human touch from that point forward until the day she died, except perhaps from another leper. The closest a leper was allowed to another person without leprosy

was 50 feet on a calm day², but you needed to stay 150 away on a windy day. Imagine the pain of knowing your husband and your children continued life without you. You could see them but only from a distance. While you saw them you could not touch them or be with them lest they catch your leprosy. The Jewish Mishnah called lepers the living death. That is an apt description. Imagine how this disease tore apart families. Imagine the horrid damage leprosy did to a person's mental state beyond the physical damage. There was no hope. Leprosy was considered incurable. The only times leprosy was cured in the Bible was as a miracle by the hand of God.³

To help avoid contaminating people, lepers were to make themselves look as hideous as possible. While they already looked hideous from the standpoint of physical disfigurement, they were to make themselves look even more hideous from the standpoint of dress disfigurement. They were to not comb their hair. They were to tear their clothing so it would always be in rags. Torn jeans are stylish today. In that time, it meant you were a leper.

A leper was to cover his upper lip and everywhere he went for the rest of his life, when he ran across another person he had to cry out in his raspy voice, "Unclean, Unclean." This was to make sure they didn't inadvertently infect someone with the disease. Imagine what this did to a person psychologically.

Now that we understand leprosy, let's get back to the leper in Mark.

...came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." This leper violated all social customs. He didn't stay

² Some say it was 6 feet.

³ 2 Kings 5

50 feet away from Jesus. He ran to Jesus. He knelt before Jesus and begged Jesus to make him clean. When Luke recalled this event, he wrote this leper didn't just get down on his knees. Luke said he literally fell on his face, begging Jesus to make him clean.

Incidentally, in the Bible, only Hansen's disease is described as something from which people need to be made physically and ceremonially clean. The other lesser leprous-type diseases, like ringworm and eczema, are described as something from which people needed to be healed. It was only true leprosy from which people needed to be made literally and ceremonially clean. This is how we know this man was dealing with a full-blown case of Hansen's disease and not something else.

I love the way this leper approached Jesus. He didn't demand Jesus to heal him. He approached Jesus, submitting himself to Jesus' will but begging Jesus for merciful healing.

Can you imagine the reaction of the people around Jesus to this leper? In the ancient world, when a leper came too close, people would grab long sticks or poles to poke and push the leper away from the crowd back into the wilderness to keep him from infecting others. This disfigured leper was lying face on the ground in front of Jesus. Jesus didn't run. He stood there. Where were the crowds? I am sure they scattered like cockroaches when the lights go on. They were probably gathering sticks and poles to push this leper away.

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 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.” Mark 1:41–44 (ESV)

Jesus saw this leprous man and it says he was **moved with pity** toward him. Some of your translations may say filled with compassion. A very small number of ancient manuscripts say Jesus was angry. That seems strange. It would seem that filled with pity and angry would be opposite reactions. Why would some ancient manuscripts say Jesus was angry? The key is understanding what Jesus was angry about. He was not angry with the leper. He was angry at what leprosy had done to the leper. He was angry at the disfigurement and the family that was torn apart by this disease, which is essentially the same thing as saying Jesus was filled with pity for this man.

Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. Understand this man had leprosy for perhaps 20 years. For the last 20 years he lived alone. He had not felt the touch of another person for maybe 20 years of his life. Imagine the feeling of Jesus touching him. Everyone else for 20 years ran from him in horror. Jesus felt pity and reached out to touch him. Can you imagine this moment?

Are you getting a sense of Jesus’ heart toward this man? Are you getting a sense of the pity in Jesus’ heart toward us when we are suffering? Now imagine the moment you hear Jesus say these words as he has stooped down on his knees and put his hand on your skin, **“I will; be clean.”**

The Bible says **immediately the leprosy left the man, and he was made clean.** In a moment, the leprosy left him. Remember the extent of this man’s disfigurement. Hands that were shriveled stumps had fingers instantaneously regrown. Toes that were no longer on feet instantaneously appeared. His hands,

feet, legs, face, and abdomen were instantly and completely restored. The rotting on hole in the center of his face that used to be a nose was instantly and completely restored to a nose. The ears that were gone instantly appeared. The tumors that covered his face and his body leaving him scaly and disfigured were instantly replaced with smooth, soft, warm skin that was as smooth as a newborn baby. In a moment, the smell of rotting flesh vanished from the air. All the teeth were restored in his mouth. When he breathed, one moment he was gasping for breath because his throat and vocal cords were covered in leprous sores. The next moment he took a deep breath, a clean breath, a full breath as the leprous sores were instantly gone and he was restored to full health. That was the first unlabored breath he took in years.

In your mind's eye, picture this moment. This was a miraculous healing on the order of a creation moment in Genesis.

Now by way of application, I want to think something through with you. This healing, like all of Jesus' healings, was done instantly and completely by nothing more than his touch or his word. When it comes to Genesis 1 and 2, the Bible tells us God created this universe instantly and completely in six days with only a word. Many people struggle with the creation account in Genesis. They claim each day must represent thousands of years during which God slowly evolved things. The problem is this gradualistic creation approach is not in sync with Jesus' miraculous and instantaneous healing approach. If Jesus re-created this leper's body miraculously, instantaneously and completely with only a word, certainly God can created the universe in six literals days with only a word.

Jesus doesn't need gradualism. He can do things instantly and completely, and when he does, he can even give them the appearance of age. When this leper's limbs were restored, they were restored to have the appearance of age. If Jesus could restore this leper's body and give that body the appearance of age with just a word, he can certainly create this universe out of nothing in an instant and give it the appearance of age with just a word.

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 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." Now the gears change. When it says Jesus sternly charged him, in the Greek, the word sternly charged is one word. It is a very strong word. It means to snort, like a horse. Jesus strongly tells him to keep this miracle quiet. Do NOT go running around telling people about it.

It also says that Jesus sent him away at once. This is also a very strong term in the Greek. Jesus commanded him to do something. Jesus gave him a very strong negative command and a very strong positive command. The negative command was to be quiet and don't tell local people about this healing. The positive command was to go to the priests and offer for cleansing what Moses commanded for the cleansing of a leper as proof of your healing.

Here is an interesting observation. Jerusalem was about a 100-mile walk from Galilee. It was only because this man was so completely healed and his feet were completely restored that he could make this walk in the first place. In addition, Jesus wanted to use this man to help spread the gospel. Jesus

commissioned him as a miracle missionary to the priests. At this point, the priests in Jerusalem were hearing about Jesus and his miracles but they did not know what to think about Jesus and his miracles. Jesus' plans were for this man to go to the temple and offer the sacrifice for a cleansed leper found in Leviticus 14. He was to vouch for his healing before the priests. The priests would know that the only way a leper was healed was as a miracle by the hand of God. This would be a witness to them that Jesus and his power came from God.

Jesus' plans were to use this man's incredibly miraculous healing as a strategic way to spread the gospel in Jerusalem. What happened?

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. Mark 1:45 (ESV)

This guy did the exact opposite of what Jesus told him to do. He didn't go to the temple as a witness to the priests about the truth of Jesus. Instead, he told everybody in Galilee. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town without being mobbed. From this point forward, because of this man's disobedience to Jesus after he was shown amazing grace by Jesus, Jesus' ministry in the 240 towns and villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee was seriously diminished. He had to stay outside in the desolate place and have people come to him. He needed to stay by the Sea of Galilee and get in boats so he could preach to people without being crushed by the mob.

1. It is easy to not obey Jesus after we receive amazing grace from him.

How many of us have come to Jesus just like this leper with our lives in shambles? How many have come to Jesus desperate and hopeless? How many of us have come to Jesus when we realized there was nothing we could

do to save ourselves? Many of us have called out to Jesus, asking him to save us and he did. He gave our lives back to us and he gave them back to us in ways that are better than we imagine or deserve. After Jesus has shown amazing grace to us, it is so easy to be like this leper and forget about this grace and live for ourselves rather than live for Jesus and obey his word. In doing so, we miss the great work God planned for us. Remember the mission God had for this man was to be a powerful missionary to the priests in Jerusalem. By forgetting about the grace he received in his life and not obeying the words of Jesus after he was healed, he actually hurt the mission of Jesus instead of helped it. It is easy for us to do the same. One of our prayers should always be that we do not lose sight of the grace God has given so we live in obedience to him.

2. **Jesus made this leper a new creation. Jesus can make us a new creation.** One way to think of this is the sin in our lives makes us more disgusting than a leper. What amazes me is that just as Jesus loved this leper enough to take away his leprosy, Jesus loves us so much that he wants to take away our sins, which are more disgusting than leprosy. Jesus died in our places for our sin. When we repent and ask Jesus to forgive our sin, he literally changes places with us. He takes our sins, which are more disgusting than leprosy, and he puts them on himself, and he died for it. Then he takes all of his righteousness and beauty and he gives it to us. Jesus then makes us into new people from the inside out. The miracle of being born again is even more miraculous than the healing of this leper. It is a miracle on the

order of creation itself that the Bible says takes place in our hearts when we repent in our hearts and trust Jesus to forgive our sin. The apostle John described this miracle as someone being literally born again. The apostle Paul described this miracle as being made into a literal new creation the moment we repent of our sin and trust in Jesus to forgive our sin.

If you haven't trusted in Jesus, today, would you trust in him and be made into a new person taking away your disgusting sin and being made completely whole and new, just like this leper? It doesn't matter how filthy your sin. It doesn't matter how disgusting your leprosy. Jesus promises to make you a new person the moment you turn to and trust in him.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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