

Your Will Is My Command

Mark 1:39-45 March 19, 2025

In 1904, Russia was at war with Japan. That October, Russia's Baltic Fleet set sail for the far east. The warships didn't even make it out of European waters before making a terrible mistake. In the distance, they sighted what they *thought* were Japanese torpedo boats. They were, in fact, simply British fishermen who had no way to escape an attack or defend themselves.

The Russians ignored proper naval identification procedures and opened fire. Then, in the confusion and chaos, they also started firing on themselves. The only thing that kept this from becoming a major bloodbath was that the Russian sailors were so inept, they could barely hit a target. One of the battleships fired more than 500 shells without hitting anything.

In the end, three British sailors were killed, six others wounded, and on the Russian side, one sailor and a chaplain were killed, with damage to multiple ships.¹

This terrible error led to the weakening of the Baltic Fleet and the delay of their mission. It also very nearly sparked a *separate* war with England. All because, in their haste, they would not follow the procedure they had been given. In the moment, they were convinced they knew what to do.

Many of us aren't that worried about "instructions," are we? *I* can assemble that bookcase. *I* can get this piece of tech up and running. *I* can find my way from here to there. How hard can it be?

When we bring that self-reliant, I-can-do-it-my-own-way attitude into our walk with the Lord, we are most definitely going to cause problems for ourselves and for others and for the work of God.

That's exactly what we see in tonight's text. Here we're witness to an amazing miracle - the healing of a leper. Our hearts are stirred by his boldness and his faith. We are captivated by the powerful, personal compassion of Jesus. But then, as the story ends, we are shocked at the disobedience, not only because of how brazen it is, but at how detrimental it is to Jesus' work and purposes.

Mark 1:39 - ³⁹ He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

In the very last verse, Jesus specifically said that *this* is why He had come - to preach the Good News of salvation not just in one place, but all over the region. His primary goal was *not* to heal people physically. He did a *lot* of that, but that wasn't why He came. His aim was to set people free with the *truth* of His word and to prepare them for the future Kingdom, which was at hand.

Mark 1:40 - ⁴⁰ Then a man with leprosy came to him and, on his knees, begged him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogger_Bank_incident

When we read about leprosy in the Bible, we think immediately of what we call Hansen's disease today, but it refers to a variety of skin diseases. At the time, leprosy was one of the most dreaded afflictions.² It was essentially incurable. And not only was this a terrible *physical* plague, most of you also know that it was just as lethal to the social and religious aspects of a Jewish life.

A leper could not worship in the temple. They could not live among the "clean" members of society. They would be outcast, isolated, desperate, living out a prolonged and agonizing death.

As word of Jesus spread, this leper heard whispers and tales of what this Nazarene might be able to do. To him it was more than *gossip*, it was *hope*. Certainly this Man Who commanded demons and drove out fevers and healed all manner of sicknesses and sufferings could also help a leper.

We should be inspired by his faith here in verse 40. It is brave. It is humble. It is sincere. It is bold. He broke with convention and came to find Jesus. Lepers like this weren't supposed to mix with healthy people. Rather, they were to go about wearing torn clothes and letting their hair hang loose as they shouted out, "Unclean! Unclean!" to people passing by.³

But he found Jesus and dropped to his knees. He believed Jesus *could* heal him. The question was whether Jesus *would* or not. That's not a question of ability, it's one of empathy. One commentary put it this way: "It is sometimes easier to believe in God's power than in His mercy."⁴

We still struggle with this question. We know God is merciful, but sometimes doubt creeps in. Does God actually care enough about *me* to help? Is He concerned with my life?⁵ Do I matter to Him?

You *do* matter. You are one of His *beloved*. You are a special, chosen object of His unending, unyielding, hands-on love. His eyes are on you. His affection is toward you. You are not abandoned.

The leper asked the Lord to make him *clean*. It didn't just mean fix his skin problem. In this case, it meant to make him physically clean, ceremonially clean, and socially clean. A comprehensive purification that would impact every aspect of his life. Not just a treatment, but total transformation.

That *is* what God wants to do for us, by the way. Not just fix one problem or two in our lives - not just solve the heaven/hell problem - but to *transform* our entire existence for this life *and* the next.

Mark 1:41 - 41 Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. "I am willing," he told him. "Be made clean."

The question was, "Are You willing?" And Jesus' answer was, "Yes, I *am* willing." To us, what we're "willing" to do is usually something we'd rather *not* do, but we compromise and go ahead. But that

² R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

³ Leviticus 13:45

⁴ Frank Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

⁵ Clifton Allen *Broadman Bible Commentary: Matthew-Mark*

is *not* what Jesus was saying. The word He used is defined in Bible dictionaries as something someone desires, something they take pleasure in, their *will* for a situation.⁶

Christ *wanted* to heal him. It was His Divine will that it happen. That willingness flowed from Christ's *compassion* - a powerful outworking of His lovingkindness. Now, if you're reading the NIV, your text probably says that Christ was "indignant" in this moment. There are a few manuscripts that use that term and linguists spend a lot of ink arguing over it, but the vast majority of copies speak of Christ's compassion.⁷ And even if Christ felt righteous anger at the effects of sin in this situation, clearly His compassion is still on display as He reaches out to touch this diseased, repulsive specimen.

Notice the *personal* nature of Christ's willingness in this situation. He was "moved with compassion" not to delegate, not to grandstand, not to paper over the problem, but to reach out Himself - to do the unthinkable: *Touch* a leper! This was an absolutely unheard of act of sympathy and grace.⁸

Did touching a leper make Jesus unclean? Nothing can defile the Messiah. He takes our sin and bears it away. We do not *defile* Him, He *delivers* us.

Mark 1:42 - ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

All the way. His body was healed. His future restored. Now he had hope. He could go back to family and friends. He could return to the family of faith, bringing offerings to the Lord in His house.

Bible teachers are quick to point out that leprosy is a good illustration of sin in the Bible. Sin defiles us, slowly destroys us, isolates us, separates us from fellowship with God and others. It numbs us and shames us, but we're powerless to overcome it. God must intervene and *He has*. Just as Christ cleansed this man from his leprosy, He cleanses Christians from their sin.

Titus 2:14 - ¹⁴He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.

We are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb - redeemed from an empty and hopeless way of life to enjoy grace and power and the presence of God day by day so that we can serve Him.

If you're a Christian here tonight, your cleansing was accomplished by Jesus, but now you participate in the ongoing cleansing of sanctification. The Lord continues to do His work in us - He continues to wash us and purify us and make us whole. We participate by submitting to the washing of the word. 1 John tell us we participate in the cleansing process as we confess our sin. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians that we cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and the spirit in the fear of God.⁹ The cleansing continues as God's work in us continues.

⁶ *Dictionary Of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*

⁷ James Brooks *The New American Commentary: Mark*

⁸ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

⁹ 2 Corinthians 7:1

Mark's wording suggests that the people watching this healing could actually see his symptoms vanish.¹⁰ *Hopefully* we can look at our lives and see the symptoms of sin dropping away from us, as well. Maybe not as dramatically or immediately as this man experienced, but growing in holiness, growing in Godliness, becoming more and more Christlike *is* the work Jesus wills to do in us.

But what *else* did Christ will?

Mark 1:43-44 - ⁴³Then he sternly warned him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴telling him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

This was a very clear directive. Jesus gave him a four-part assignment: Say *nothing* to anyone, go, show, offer the prescribed sacrifices for this very situation.

Why? *Because this had maybe never happened in all the centuries of Israel's history!* Perhaps this happened in Miriam's case, but it's not very clear. *What an opportunity! What a unique chance.*

Jesus asked this man to do this so that he could be a living testimony for the priests. He wanted him to be a *martyrion* to them - *proof* that God was doing a new thing, that the Messiah was here.

Jesus also wanted to demonstrate that He was not *against* the Law. When interpretations and regulations concerning the Law conflicted with the Law of Love, Christ always sided with love. But He was not anti-Law. Here He said, "You're healed, but you need to go do the ceremonial stuff in order to be fully restored to Jewish life and worship."

And the Lord was *really* serious about it. That word, "sternly" is a term that refers to the snorting of a horse.¹¹ Part of why He was so serious was because He did not want to bring the pandemonium of endless crowds if they heard Jesus was there to do miracles. Miracles were *not* what He wanted people to focus on. But, let's be real: Would you rather hear a sermon or be able to have your diseased family member healed? Our desires and the Lord's desires often don't run parallel.

Mark 1:45 - ⁴⁵Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news, with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But he was out in deserted places, and they came to him from everywhere.

The man did the *opposite* of everything Jesus commanded him. He didn't go to the priest, he didn't bring his offering, he didn't keep his mouth shut. No, he decided that instead of being a *martyr*, he was going to be a *preacher*. He went out *proclaiming*, which is the same word used of what Jesus had been doing at the start of this passage. But he had his *own* message and his own method and his own priorities that mattered to him.

¹⁰ France

¹¹ Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

We sense that he thought he was really helping out Jesus - that he was this great missionary, spreading what people needed to hear. One source says he was going out, "blazing abroad" with his message.¹² But what was the result? What did his choice to go his own way lead to?

At the beginning of the passage, we see Jesus going *in* to the towns of Galilee to proclaim eternal life them. Now, after this man does his thing, Jesus is seen being driven *out* of the towns, pushed out into deserted places. The *opposite* of what Jesus wanted.

It's so astonishing that a few verses ago the man was so concerned with what Jesus' *will* was. "If it's Your will." And now, he had no concern *at all* about the will of Jesus. The Lord specifically and directly revealed His will to this man, and off he went to do what *he* thought was best.

This isn't a problem unique to this man. We read of Moses and how he struck the rock. Hezekiah thought it would be a *great* idea to show the Babylonian envoys all his treasures. But what was the *Lord's* will in those situations?

We suffer from this same affliction. We recognize that we're helpless without God's intervention in our lives. But so often we're then tempted to go our own way. After all, who could know better about how I should do things than me? Well, ask the seven churches Jesus wrote to in the Revelation. How many of them had wandered off onto some path of their own design, just like this healed leper. And when we do that, it does not *honor* the Lord, it does not *benefit* us or others. In fact, it clearly *delays* the progress of God's will in our lives and our communities! Jesus would say it plainly to Peter: "You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns."¹³ And when we do that we are *not* helping God, we're helping the Devil!

But even in this moment of failure, look at the shining grace of Jesus. He, of course, *knew* that the leper would disobey. It was no surprise to the Lord. He knew that this act of supernatural compassion would result in *His* having to go out to the deserted places - to be delayed in the mission He was so focused on. And yet Jesus healed the man anyway.

The aftermath was an stunning irony: A leper was doomed to slowly die *out in deserted places*, apart from friends and family, apart from fellowship with the Lord. But the Lord took that on Himself so this man could be made whole.¹⁴ Jesus took this exile on Himself *willingly*. Just as He was willing to bear *your* sins and *my* sins as He carried the cross to Calvary. To be tortured and killed so that we could live. He was willing. Because of His compassion. Because of His grace. Because of the love that He has for us. He was willing. And despite our failure, He *still* has a love and gracious will for us.

So what is God's will for your life? We don't want to be off on some trail that hinders God's work in and through us. *His* will is what matters. Not what I want or what I think is best but *His* will. Do you know what God's will is for your life generally? What about specifically? In each example of

¹² *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words*

¹³ Matthew 16:23

¹⁴ France

Scripture, we don't see God saying to Christians, "Just do whatever and I'll catch up with you later." We see that He has specific plans, specific callings, a life of faith tailored for you. Our job as Christians is *not* to do what we think is best, *not* to be self-reliant, but to be Spirit-reliant. Transformed by the cleansing power of God so that we can discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.