

# Our Compassionate Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[ 0 : 00 ] Well if we could, with the Lord's help, and for a short while this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the Gospel according to Mark and chapter 1.

Mark chapter 1, and we're going to read again at verse 39. Mark 1 and verse 39, where we're told, And he, that is Jesus, he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling, said to him, If you will, you can make me clean. Moved with compassion, 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.

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.

[ 1 : 16 ] Life shouldn't feel normal right now. Life shouldn't feel normal right now.

That was the message from the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, this past week. Life shouldn't feel normal right now. And for many of us, it doesn't.

Life doesn't feel normal. Life doesn't feel the same. Life, as we know it, has completely changed. And in the space of only a few short weeks, the landscape of our nation has dramatically and decisively shifted, to the point that life doesn't feel normal right now at all.

Because, you know, it's not normal for us to live in isolation. It's not normal for us to have our nation in lockdown. It's not normal for us to have church closed on the Lord's Day.

It's not normal for us to have our routine so rapidly and so radically different. It's not normal for us to see the world in chaos and confusion.

[ 2 : 23 ] And it certainly isn't normal for us to receive a daily press release from our Prime Minister. Life doesn't feel normal right now. And because so much has changed in such a short space of time, from, well, what was our busy life with all our work and school and hobbies, to everything is now, it's now closed and everything's shutting down and grinding to a halt.

And, you know, all these sudden changes, they make us nervous. They create within us fear. They create alarm. They bring about worry of what the future could hold for any of us.

Because as the days go by, well, we're being encouraged. And in some cases, we're being enforced to self-isolate, to increase social distancing, to be realistic about the risks of catching or even spreading the coronavirus.

And, of course, we're already living in fear because of all that we've heard about the coronavirus spreading and affecting other nations in our world. And we're well aware of the fact that as the virus spreads, the death toll rises.

And as we see with our NHS, it's already on our knees. There's already anxiety. There's fear. There's worry. There's panic as to what this virus could do and the impact it could have upon our homes and our families and our communities.

[ 3 : 50 ] You know, my friend, it's not for good reading, is it? It's not for good reading. But, you know, as we hit rock bottom as a nation and as our backs are now against the wall and all our resources are reaching their limit, life as we know it is being turned upside down.

And the question we need to ask ourselves is, well, to whom else can we go? Who else can we turn to? Who else can we look to for our help in this time of trouble?

Who else can we turn to but to Jesus? Because, you know, what our chaos, our crisis and even our confusion, what it all ought to reveal to us is that no one else can speak into our situations and circumstances like Jesus can.

No one else has anything of substance to say apart from Jesus. No one else is able to bring comfort and consolation when we feel lost and at our lowest but this Jesus.

And, you know, that's what I want us to rediscover this morning as we come to this passage in Mark's Gospel. Because it's here that we see and witness this leper having an encounter with Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 07 ] I want us to see that there are some similarities to our situation which we can draw out from this passage. But I want us to see three things from this passage. I want us to see a contagious condition, a compassionate Christ, and a confessing Christian.

So, first of all, a contagious condition.

We see there in verse 39, we're told that Jesus went throughout all Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling, said to him, If you will, you can make me clean.

Now, Mark chapter 1, it sets the scene and the trajectory for the rest of the Gospel. Because Mark tells us from the outset what he's writing, and he tells us who he's writing about.

Because he says, as we read earlier in verse 1 of chapter 1, he says, The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And with that, Mark informs us that his message is good news.

[ 6 : 21 ] He has a Gospel message for us. And it's a good news message, because it's all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But you know, what Mark wants to make absolutely clear, is that his message is not simply that the Gospel is about Jesus Christ.

No, Mark wants to tell us that the Gospel is Jesus Christ. Because as you know, my friend, the Gospel isn't a set of rules to follow.

The Gospel isn't a denomination to believe in. The Gospel isn't a creed to recite. The Gospel isn't a prayer to repeat. No, the Gospel is a passion. The Gospel is a passion to love, and look to, and lean upon.

The Gospel is Jesus Christ. The Gospel is a passion to love, look to, and lean upon. And you know, as Mark sets the scene for us, he tells us that when the Gospel appeared, when Jesus Christ appeared, he appeared, proclaiming the Gospel.

The first words of Jesus that Mark records in his Gospel are in verse 15, where Jesus says, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.

[ 7 : 41 ] Repent and believe in the Gospel. Turn from your sin, he says, and believe in Jesus Christ. And you know what's so beautiful about that statement is that when Jesus Christ appeared, he appeared preaching Christ.

Christ was preaching Christ. My friend, the greatest preacher that ever lived, when he appeared, he appeared, proclaiming the greatest person that there is, Jesus Christ.

Jesus was both speaker and subject. He was preacher and proposition. Jesus was expounding and expositing himself. Christ was preaching Christ.

And he appeared, proclaiming to those who were in the hearing, he proclaimed, repent and believe in the Gospel. Turn from your sin and believe in Jesus Christ.

because the Gospel is Jesus Christ. The Gospel, my friend, is a person to love, look to, and lean upon. And the wonder is, he's the remedy to our wound and he's the solution to our sin.

[ 8 : 51 ] But what's more is that Mark emphasizes throughout his Gospel that as the Son of God, Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.

And his authority is such that when you read through his Gospel, you see that Jesus has authority over Satan, sickness, sin, storms, and sorrows.

My friend, that's why Jesus is good news. Jesus is the Gospel. And that's what we see in this passage as a man with a contagious condition has an encounter with the Gospel.

He has an encounter with Jesus Christ. And as we read, the contagious condition of this man was leprosy. Because as a disease, leprosy is infectious.

It can be spread from one person to another. And as a contagious condition, leprosy, it causes nerve damage and when left untreated, it will often result in disability or loss of limbs or even blindness.

[ 9 : 56 ] And although there's an effective cure that has been produced for leprosy, it has only been around since 1982. But you know, in the ancient world, there was no cure for leprosy.

And in the ancient world, there was no cure for this man who had a contagious condition. And because leprosy is and was a contagious condition, lepers were often stigmatised and they were often made to be outcasts in society.

In fact, if you contracted leprosy, it robbed you of everything. It robbed you of your family. It robbed you of your home. It robbed you of your friends, your occupation and even your identity.

Because if you were diagnosed as a leper, you were required, according to the book of Leviticus, you were required to wear torn clothes, to have unkempt hair, to cover your face just like a mask and you were to live all alone.

You were to, in many ways, to self-isolate from your family and your friends and your work colleagues and the rest of your community. But you know what, a leper with a contagious condition, he was not only required to self-isolate, they were also to exercise social distancing.

[ 11 : 18 ] Because a leper, as a leper would move from place to place throughout their community, they were required to alert people to the fact that they had this contagious condition and they were to alert them by repeatedly crying, unclean, unclean, unclean.

And for the leper, it would have been very hard for them not only to isolate themselves from their family, but it would have also been very hard and very degrading to announce to everyone that they came into contact with, to stay away from them because they were unclean.

And you know, in some measure we can relate to all this with all that we're going through with the coronavirus. Because as we've been repeatedly reminded by our government and even the media, the coronavirus is a contagious condition.

And we're to exercise social distancing with people, we're to keep that two metre distance apart at all times. And I'm sure you're well aware of all these government restrictions that have been tightened further and further.

They've insisted that we have to reduce our contact with people, we're to reduce our contact with our family and with our friends and even our work colleagues by staying at home and working from home.

[ 12 : 41 ] We're not to go shopping just for the essentials, we're only to leave home if it's to care for someone who's vulnerable or to get medical care or if it's absolutely necessary.

But you know, even if we start showing symptoms of the coronavirus just like this leper, we're to declare that we're unclean and we have to self-isolate for two weeks.

And you know, with all that's going on with this coronavirus, in a way we can understand how this leper with a contagious condition would have felt in themselves.

Because having to ensure social distancing and declare yourself unclean and then self-isolate for a period of time, those physical measures, they would inevitably have an impact mentally.

Because, you know, there's always a danger that lengthy periods of isolation and a lack of physical contact, it can have an impact upon our mental health.

[ 13 : 44 ] And even for a leper, a leper who was often self-isolating and socially distant from everyone and always shouting unclean, a leper often had low self-esteem.

They often had feelings of unworthiness. They often felt that they were unwanted and that they were unclean. And you know, that's the worry many people have about the coronavirus and the need to self-isolate.

Because if people are isolated from their family and their friends and their community for a long period of time, the worry is that it could affect their mental health.

Especially for those who are elderly or those who live on their own or those who are vulnerable and they're confined as the government guidelines give us, they're to be confined for up to 12 weeks.

disease. My friend, this contagious condition of coronavirus, it may have an impact upon us, not only physically, but also mentally. And yet, you know what I love about this passage, and what I'm reminded in this passage, is that even though we are being confronted with a contagious condition, the gospel always presents to us a compassionate Christ.

[ 15 : 07 ] And that's what we see secondly. We see a compassionate Christ, a contagious condition, and then a compassionate Christ, a compassionate Christ.

We read again in verse 40. And a leper came to him imploring him and kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean. 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. Now I don't know about you, but I find these words some of the most comforting words in the Bible.

Because here you have this lonely leper, and he's now stigmatised and he's an outcast in his society, all because of his contagious condition. And he's doing as the law requires, he's exercising social distancing, he's announcing that he's unclean, he's living in self isolation away from his family and his friends and his work colleagues, and because of all that, he feels completely unworthy and unclean and unwanted.

But you know what's so beautiful? Is that just like you, my unconverted friend, just like you, this lonely leper has heard about the gospel.

[ 16 : 29 ] In fact, you could even say that like you, he came to discover that Jesus is the gospel. And like you, he witnessed what Jesus is able to do in the lives of others.

Because I'm sure that for yourself, you've witnessed what Jesus is able to do in the lives of others. I'm sure that maybe even for those you're living with in your own home and in your own family, you have witnessed Jesus change their life and their experience.

Of course, you might question whether Jesus could do the same in your life and with you. Because maybe like this leper did, you feel unworthy to come to Jesus.

You feel unwanted because, well, you know you're a sinner, a filthy sinner. And up until today, you can say that you haven't lived the life you should live and you haven't attended church the way you should attend church.

But you know, my friend, when it comes to the good news of the gospel, gospel, and when it comes to having an encounter with Jesus Christ, you know, it's today that matters.

[ 17 : 41 ] It's today that matters. The past doesn't matter because the past is the past. Today is the day of opportunity. Today is the day of salvation.

And as your Bible affirms to you, now is the accepted time to come to Christ. Now is the accepted time to close in with Christ.

And you know, that's what this lonely leper came to discover. Because there were many who would have made this leper feel unworthy and unwanted and they would have been unwilling to help him.

But when this leper heard the gospel, when he heard that Jesus was passing by, he took today's opportunity. He took the opportunity that was afforded to him that day and he came to Jesus.

And how did he come? He came on bended knee, calling out to him and asking for cleansing, saying, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean.

[ 18 : 44 ] Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. And my friend, what this lonely leper realised was that it wasn't about him being unworthy or unwanted or Jesus being unwilling.

It was all about the good news that Jesus is a compassionate Christ and he's compassionate towards lost sinners. Do you know what a prayer?

Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. And Mark tells us in verse 41, moved with pity or moved with compassion, compassion.

Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. I will be clean.

You know, my friend, Jesus is more willing to forgive you and cleanse you and make you his than you are to ask him. That's how compassionate this Christ is.

[ 19 : 48 ] He's more than willing to save you if you will only ask him. If you will only ask him. And you know, this word compassion, it's more than just pity.

Compassion is an expression of love. It includes emotions and feelings. Emotions and feelings of sympathy and empathy. And we're told about Jesus, he moved with compassion.

Don't you just love that phrase? He moved with compassion. compassion. He moved with compassion. I had a great auntie who lived next door to my parents and she had been a Christian for many, many years.

And I remember going to visit my great auntie one night to have worship with her. And as I sat with her, she handed me her Bible to find a suitable passage to read from and have worship with her.

And as I turned the pages in the Gospels, and as I turned the pages in our Bible, we went through the Gospels, and I noticed as I turned the pages that she had repeatedly highlighted this phrase, he moved with compassion.

[ 21 : 03 ] He moved with compassion. He moved with compassion. And when I pointed it out to her, she said to me, and I'll never forget it, she said, Murdo, don't you just love that phrase?

He moved with compassion. And you know, my friend, that's the good news of the Gospel. That's who the Gospel is. The Gospel is Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ, he moves towards the unworthy and the unwanted and even the unwilling, and he moves towards us, how? With compassion. He moves towards us with compassion.

And we see that time and time again in the Gospels, where Jesus moved with compassion, not only towards this lonely leper with a contagious condition. But Jesus, he moved with compassion towards a tax collector.

He moved with compassion towards the sick and the suffering. He moved with compassion towards the dying and even to the prostitute. My friend, Jesus moved with compassion.

[ 22 : 03 ] He moved with compassion towards the multitudes. Matthew tells us he moved with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. My friend, there's nowhere and there's no one to whom Jesus is not willing to go.

No one is exempt. No one is excluded. No one is rejected. No one is refused. Because the glory of the Gospel is that this compassionate Christ, he doesn't turn anyone away.

He won't turn you away. Because that's his promise. He who comes to me, I will in no wise cast out. My friend, this Jesus, he moves with compassion and there's no boundary and there's no barrier that will keep him from you.

Not even the boundaries and barriers of your own home will keep this Jesus from you. You might feel like this leper today, my friend. You might feel far away from your family or your friends or even the community that we're in.

You might feel far away from your church family. You might feel all alone in self-isolation, exercising, social distancing and being cooped up in your own home.

[ 23 : 18 ] But you know the wonder of the gospel today is that Jesus is passing by your home. Jesus is passing by your home.

And with Jesus, he's not bound by barriers. He's not confined by coronavirus. He's not restrained by all the restrictions that are upon us. No, this Jesus, my friend, he's able to meet you at your point of need because he's more than willing to forgive you.

He's more than willing to cleanse you. He's more than willing to make you his. He's more than willing to move towards you this morning with compassion and have mercy upon you.

If you will only ask him. If you will only ask him. Oh, my friend, ask him. Ask him as he passes by.

Ask him as he passes by. My friend, it was only when this lonely leper with a contagious condition, it was only when he came to a compassionate Christ that he became a confessing Christian.

[ 24 : 29 ] And that's what I want us to consider lastly, a confessing Christian. We've seen a contagious condition, a compassionate Christ and a confessing Christian.

A confessing Christian. Look at verse 43. 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.

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.

You know, as soon as this lonely leper was healed from his contagious condition, we see there in verse 43 that the character of Jesus changes.

And it changes from being a compassionate Christ to being a concerned Christ. Because as we read in verse 43, Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once.

[ 25 : 41 ] And that phrase, he sternly charged him, it doesn't mean that Jesus was angry with the leper just after he had cleansed him. It means that Jesus was concerned. Jesus was concerned that this new Christian convert was going to, wasn't going to follow his command.

He was concerned that he was going to ignore his command and just do what he wanted. because Jesus' command was simple. Verse 44, he 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. Jesus urged this new Christian convert not to say anything to anyone, but go to the priest and follow the prescribed protocol for cleansing.

because according to the Mosaic law, the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, there was a prescribed protocol when a leper was cleansed from their disease.

And you can read about this prescribed protocol. It's set out in Leviticus chapter 14. You can read it for yourself, where a lonely leper would have to go to the priest in order to be declared clean and then slowly reintroduced to society.

[ 27 : 01 ] But you know, of course, the glaring question which comes to everyone's mind when they read verse 44, the question that comes to everyone's mind is, why did Jesus command this new Christian convert not to tell anyone about him?

Why did Jesus say that to him? Because surely as Christians that's what we're meant to do. Surely as Christians we're meant to tell those in our homes and in our families and in our community we're meant to tell them about Jesus.

Surely as Christians we're to testify to what Jesus has done in our lives. So why did Jesus command this new Christian convert not to tell anyone about him?

Well, it was actually by going to the priest that the leper would have verified to his whole community and his family that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

But instead what we see is that this new Christian convert who once had a contagious condition, he now had in many ways you could say he had a contagious confession where he couldn't keep it to himself.

[ 28 : 12 ] He wanted to tell everyone and anyone that he was now a Christian, that he had been healed, he had been cleansed and that Jesus is this wonderful saviour that everyone needs to know and come and trust in for themselves.

And you know my friend, you look at the zeal and the passion of this man and you ask yourself, well, do you remember those days my Christian friend? Do you remember those early days of your Christian experience when you had that passion and that zeal to tell everyone and anyone about Jesus?

Do you remember those days where you were faithful and fearless in telling people about their need of a saviour? You know, that's what we need more of. We need more of that in our day and generation.

We need more confessing Christians who are willing to stand up and speak out for Jesus. We need more of people who are willing to say something, to nail their colours to the mast and speak a word in season.

We need more confessing Christians to have a contagious confession where they can't keep Jesus a secret because they want everyone and anyone to know about him so that they will come and follow him.

[ 29 : 32 ] And you know, my friend, I believe that that's why Mark explains what happened between Jesus and the leper. Because he explains it in the closing verse, in verse 45.

He said that the leper 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.

You know, in that concluding verse, Mark tells us that Jesus and the leper, they exchanged places. Jesus and the leper exchanged places.

Because the leper who had at the beginning of the passage, he had been lonely, socially distant and self-isolated. And now he is free. He's free from all restrictions.

But with the leper now a confessing Christian who's spreading the good news of the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ is the gospel, it's then that we see, as Mark explains in verse 45, we see that Jesus could no longer enter into communities.

[ 30 : 42 ] Jesus had to then become socially distant. He had to self-isolate. He had to become lonely, go to lonely places. And you know what Mark is doing?

He's explaining to us that Jesus and the leper have changed places. And Mark is showing us that this is all because Jesus is the gospel.

Jesus is the gospel. And the gospel is good news because Jesus, he willingly and voluntarily exchanges places with sinners.

And is that not where the climax and culmination of Mark's gospel is going to bring us? It's going to bring us to the cross, to the place of the great exchange. My friend, the climax of Mark's gospel is going to bring us to Calvary's great transaction, where sinners, sinners can say at the cross, the worst about me was laid upon him and the best about him was laid upon me.

My sin was transferred to Christ. His righteousness was transformed to me. My friend, we can say today that it was at the cross. It was at the cross that bearing shame and scoffing root, in my place condemned, he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

[ 32 : 03 ] Oh, hallelujah. What a saviour. My friend, that's the good news of the gospel today. That Jesus Christ is the gospel.

Jesus Christ is the gospel. And what the gospel is calling you today, my unconverted friend, it calls you to be a confessing Christian.

The gospel calls you to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and saviour. Because, my friend, your Bible promises you that if you believe in your heart and you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, then you will be saved.

That's what the gospel promises you today. That if you believe and confess, you will be saved. The gospel is calling you to be a confessing Christian.

But, you know, and with this, I will conclude. It was only when this lonely leper with a contagious condition, it was only when he came to a compassionate Christ that he became a confessing Christian.

[ 33 : 18 ] But what if this lonely leper with a contagious condition, what if he hadn't come to this compassionate Christ when he did?

Well, he wouldn't have been a confessing Christian. And he would have probably died in his condition. And because, you know, because of the contagious condition of leprosy in the ancient world, the death toll was always rising, just like the death toll of the coronavirus is rising daily. But, you know, what was so sad about lepers in the ancient world and those with coronavirus in the modern world? What we often hear these news reports, what we're hearing and what's so sad is that they're dying alone.

They're dying alone. Because of their contagious condition, they're not allowed their family or their friends near them. and they're left to die alone.

Of course, we all know that we have to face death alone because we can't take anyone with us. But, you know, it must be awful to die alone. And yet, the good news of the gospel to us today is that not even death is a barrier to Jesus.

[ 34 : 41 ] Because it's Jesus, the good shepherd. shepherd. It's Jesus, the compassionate Christ, who promises us that when we trust him and when we confess him, when we confess him as our Lord, when we confess him as our shepherd, he assures us that even if we have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will be there.

He will be with us. Because he's with us. As David said in Psalm 23, he's with us with his rod and his staff. And they are there to comfort us.

My friend, that's why you need to be a confessing Christian. That's why you need to confess Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Because you'll never have hope in life.

And you'll never have peace in death until you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. So, my friend, you come to this compassionate Christ.

Christ. You come to him on bended knee. And you come and confess your sin and your need of this wonderful Saviour. You come, as this leper did, saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

[ 35 : 54 ] And I assure you, my friend, when you come to him wholeheartedly, this Jesus will move towards you with compassion. And he will say to you, I will be be clean.

You come, my friend, you come. And may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the wonder of the gospel, that the gospel is good news.

And it's good news about a wonderful person, a person who moves towards us with compassion. And we thank thee, O Lord, that his name is Jesus. That they called his name Jesus because he would save his people from their sins.

And we marvel, Lord, that even today, that we have this wonderful opportunity for Jesus to move towards us with compassion and cleanse us from all our sin.

O Lord, we ask that thou would us create within us that clean heart and renew a right spirit within us all, that we may come to Jesus and know him and love him for time and for eternity.

[ 37 : 05 ] all, Lord, do us good and we pray. Bless us, we ask. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.

Amen.