

Sabbath Sermon: He Heals the Lepers

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First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries

Torah Portion: Metzora (Leper); Leviticus 14:1-15:33; 2 Kings 7:3-20;

Malachi 3:4-24; Matthew 17:9-13; 26:13-24:2; 30-31; Mark 5:24-34:

<https://tinyurl.com/ymywhptb>.



Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Please turn to your neighbors with a hug or a handshake and say good morning with the love of our LORD Yeshua that dwells within us. —[pause, title screen]— It is a day to recognize our healing, a time for us to get the leaven out of our homes and the sin out of our hearts, a season for our leprous ways to be revealed and cleansed from us so that we can stand with humility before our High Priest and King of kings when He comes to dine with us on the Last Day. Messiah Yeshua is our unblemished healer who took away our sins by His blood, which is superior in every way to clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop, though also foretold by it, for the dove descended upon our Messiah who has cleansed us; He was hung on a wooden cross; His blood ran down upon it—the door post between Heaven and Earth; and He drank wine vinegar from a sponge at the end of a hyssop branch while hanging there to cleanse us from our unrighteousness. His finished work has made us clean so we can walk in His ways with humble confidence all the days of our lives. As one of His last acts as a man, Messiah commanded us to keep the upcoming feast of Passover in memory of His sacrifice and resurrection, but also as a rehearsal for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb that is yet to come, and so this we will do on Monday evening as His disciples once did, obeying His command, keeping the Seder in memory of Him.

It's not an accident that our Torah Portion this week is called "Metzora" or "HaMetzora," which means "of the leper," for without Messiah Yeshua, we are all lepers in the eyes of our Father in Heaven who must be isolated from Him until we are either healed or die apart from Him. According to Leviticus 13, the leper was pronounced unclean by the priests, and upon this declaration, he or she would be removed from the congregation of Israel. We read in Leviticus 13:45-46: "Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." When we continue in sin, our acts of righteous words and actions are like filthy rags, because our iniquities separate us from God. The LORD hides his face from sinners who refuse to repent, especially those who pay Him lip service but fail to do what His Word teaches, but He meets with those who rejoice in the LORD and the salvation He provides and practice righteousness according to the Word of the LORD (Isaiah 64:4-7).

Like a leprous sore that spreads in the skin until it overtakes a whole person and condemns him or her to death, sin is vile; it festers, it grows, and it multiplies until it destroys a person. One man's sin can even spread into a community that tolerates it, contaminating the righteous people who are nearby. Sin has to be removed from the camp, apart from God and His people. We read in Psalm 5:4-6, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; you hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." In Psalm 1:5, the LORD states plainly: "the ungodly

shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” Habakkuk 1:13 explains that God is of pure eyes, and He therefore looks away from evil and wickedness.

Don’t believe these truths are exclusive to the Torah and the Prophets, for God’s Word is consistent throughout the Gospels and Letters as well. John wrote in his prophetic work about the End of Days that “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). And the Apostle Paul, who always returns to the hope we have in Messiah Yeshua at the end of his messages, warned us with gusto in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” This line follows a chapter of admonishment against the congregation in Corinth, because they were worshipping with a man who had committed adultery with his father’s wife, a violation of the law in Leviticus 20:11. The penalty for this sin is death—and both the man and the woman involved are subject to it.

Paul, possibly even referring to Psalm 5, where David wrote, “the boastful shall not stand in your sight,” wrote in 1 Corinthians 5: “You are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.” It is boastful and arrogant to think we can live with sin in our midst and still be acceptable in the sight of God. We ought to mourn sin within us and among us, for it is destructive to ourselves and others. We must work to cleanse ourselves of it. Within the section, Paul adds two additional instructions that can’t be missed: First, “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the LORD Yeshua,” meaning that the man ought to be excommunicated so that the Holy Spirit can go to work on his heart, convicting him of his sin. With the grace of God, perhaps the man would repent and be restored in the shame of separation, and we see in 2 Corinthians 3 that this very thing took place for this particular man. I pray for all who have fallen away, that their hearts are restored to the LORD.

In the context of his first letter, quoting the Torah directly, Paul also said in his second instruction: “put away from yourself the evil person.” He asks, “Do you not judge those who are in the inside?” We ought to be mindful of our own internal thoughts, words and even our actions, and purge ourselves and our congregation of anything that is unrighteous, anything that is unclean. It’s true that we ought to be doing this at all times, but especially in the context of Passover, and it is in the context of Passover preparation that Paul is writing his first letter to the Corinthians. Today’s sermon is going to use two metaphors for sin interchangeably, which is consistent with Scripture; namely, leprosy, which is the subject of our reading this week, as well as leaven, which is significant in context of Passover. Consider Paul’s exhortation to the believers in Corinth: He wrote: “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” In order to keep the feast with sincerity and truth, we must get sin out of the camp, for the truth is God’s Word and it must be our sincere desire to follow it to please our Yeshua who is going to return to dine with His set-apart people, for He is the unleavened bread and unblemished lamb who was sacrificed for His own holy people.

Later in his letter, Paul returns to the Passover theme, continuing his exhortation to the believers in Corinth to cleanse themselves in preparation for the feast. First he writes, “imitate me, just as I also imitate Messiah.” He continues in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”

We know from Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7 that the LORD had brought His disciples together to celebrate the Passover Seder, and it was during this Seder, “on the first day of Unleavened Bread,” that He commanded those who follow Him to celebrate Passover from that point forward in memory of Him. This is where Paul picks up the important instruction that we ought to follow as we prepare our hearts to “keep the feast” ourselves. Right after explaining the same Passover communion memorial Yeshua commanded, so that we might imitate Paul as he imitated Messiah, Paul added: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the LORD’s death until He comes.” Many believe this statement suggests communion ought to be taken often—perhaps every day, or every week, or once per month—and I’m not preaching today to “judge anyone ... regarding food or drink, or regarding a festival,” because Paul said we ought not judge one another in this regard in Colossians 2:16. But we ought to keep the feast, as the LORD commanded and Paul confirmed, and so I will state my interpretation; namely, that the LORD commanded us to memorialize His most holy communion during the Passover Seder and perhaps even during the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread, for the LORD said in Leviticus 23:6, “seven days you must eat unleavened bread.” This is our practice here at First Fruits Ministries, because I believe when the LORD said, “Do this in memory of Me,” He was referring to the Passover Seder communion memorial that He commanded. I believe the LORD’s disciples would have also kept this memorial each day of the feast on account of the LORD’s commandment in Leviticus 23, but again, this is a matter open to interpretation. I encourage you to do what the LORD convicts you to do according to the Word of God.

To me, the following section from 1 Corinthians 11 explains how we ought to prepare our hearts to receive communion, and it also points to the Passover memorial as a special time of year to imitate the LORD’s obedience to His Holy Convocations. Paul wrote: “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.” The key points here are that we ought to examine ourselves, both individually and as a congregation, so we can remove any sin from among us before we come together and sit down at the LORD’s table. Is there any sexual immorality in our lives or have we committed ourselves to be the husband of one wife, or vice versa, or have we committed to celibacy? Are there any idols in our lives, or have we given God our whole hearts? Do we contrive in our own way to practice religion according to our own desires or do we strive to meet with God His way at His appointed times because we love Him? Have any of us become thieves; have we even desired what we do not have, or have we been grateful for what the LORD has given us, rejoicing always and praying without ceasing in thanksgiving and praise? Have we poisoned our bodies with alcohol, drugs or unclean foods, or have we

kept our temple clean so the LORD desires to dwell within us? Have we taken advantage of other people, or have we—with humility of mind—esteemed others better than ourselves? Paul wrote earlier in his letter, “Don’t you know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16)? He then added relatedly in a different section, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:21). And so here, we ought to understand that communion is not a small matter that we ought to take lightly. We are invited to commune together with the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them; the Messiah who came in the flesh, redeemed us from our sins, and paved the way into His Kingdom through His resurrection; and the Holy Spirit who dwells in our midst and helps us walk according to God’s commandments. It is important that we examine ourselves so that we are not judged. It’s important that we come as believers to the LORD’s table, because those who eat the LORD’s supper in an unworthy manner eat and drink judgment upon themselves. We must be discerning during this feast so that we are coming together to worship our God as part of His Body in Messiah Yeshua.

I want to return to 1 Corinthians 6 where Paul wrote about the unrighteous not inheriting the Kingdom of God, because therein He provides a bit of hope that we, with humble and contrite hearts, should carry with us into the Passover Seder. I’m returning here to show you how even Paul himself mixes the metaphors of leaven and leprosy when discussing sin. Regarding the unrighteous ones, Paul added: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua and by the Spirit of our God.” This phrase comes just a few paragraphs after Paul exhorted the Corinthians to purge out the old leaven and take on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. But we are not “washed” of leaven. Leading up to Passover we ought to get the leaven out of our homes and our diets—we ought to remove the sin from our lives. Washing doesn’t fit with the metaphor here. But in his second metaphor, Paul explains that we are washed clean through the death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, and it is important to note that only Messiah can wash us clean from sin. The sin that Messiah washes us from is symbolized by leprosy, repulsive to God and man. As we approach the LORD, we ought to call out like the lepers, “unclean, unclean!” and not assume we belong to the camp of Israel when our hearts have gone astray. We ought to present ourselves before the LORD with the confession of our lips and repentant hearts sealed with an authentic desire to return to our walk of faith with the children of Israel into the Promised Land. When we do this, the LORD cleanses us from all unrighteousness by His blood (1 John 1:9). We need our advocate Yeshua—our mediator—the atoning sacrifice for our sins, to wash away our sins, and when we call upon Him and come to know Him, He will help us keep His commandments and turn away from our sins from that point forward, so long as we remain faithful (1 John 2:4).

There are many patriarchs who exhibit this humble, repentant heart we ought to always possess so we can walk righteously before God, and before we go further explaining the Messiah’s role in cleansing us, I want to share some examples of this heart condition that must precede our cleansing. When the prophet Isaiah stood before the holiness of God, He said, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). From here, a seraphim flew down to the prophet and touched his lips with a burning coal, saying “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.” The fire of God that comes from His altar is His Word, and it is the Word of God that cleanses us through the Spirit of Messiah Yeshua. To receive this cleansing, we must repent—we have

to align ourselves with the will of God. From this place of humility, God sent Isaiah to foretell the coming Messiah, the future hope of Israel. Likewise, Moses exhibited humility before God sent him to bring Israel out of Egypt. Moses declared, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me" (Exodus 6:30). The answer was simple: "you shall speak all that I command you." Obedience is a form of humility, and ultimately Moses succeeded by trusting fully in the LORD's commandments, and the faithfulness Moses ultimately exhibited to the LORD's will is the very purpose of repentance.

Job and Daniel were two of the three men God mentioned through the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 14. There the LORD said that only men like Job, Daniel and Noah would be saved from the calamity that would befall a nation that rebelled against God's commandments, just as ours has done. We ought to pay special attention to the character of these men, for emulating their hearts leads to deliverance from judgment, and judgment is coming if it is not already here. When Job stood before the LORD, He said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Job was not truly self-loathing here; rather he was humbled before the holiness of God. He was undone, a man of unclean lips who could hardly say He fully understood the full extent of God's holiness. This was a man who persevered through every hardship one could imagine—he lost his home, his children, his livelihood and his health, but he never stopped praising the LORD. Even a man this righteous was undone by God's presence and stood humbly in repentance before Him. Likewise, Daniel, a man who lived under the thumb of an enemy dictator who did not know the LORD, never compromised His faith. He stood firm and obeyed God's commandments even when his life was on the line. As an angel of God came before the prophet, ready to provide him with visions of the Messiah, Daniel prayed to the LORD, "O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You" (Daniel 9:8). Rather than exclude ourselves from the depravity of the nation we live in, we ought to embrace our part in it and seek forgiveness and mercy from our perfectly holy God for ourselves and all of our neighbors. This is a calling on our prayer life. In one New Testament example, Simon Peter in the Gospel of Luke expressed this same humility when Yeshua miraculously provided the fisherman with a boatful of fish. They had been fishing all night with no success, but when the LORD commanded him to cast his net on the other side of the boat, his nets were filled. We then read, "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Yeshua's knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). This is the heart the LORD has always desired from us. He said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And then Simon Peter as well as James and John left everything and followed Him. Our humble and contrite hearts enable the LORD to use us for His glory, to fulfill His purposes, and when we submit ourselves fully to the LORD's will, confessing our own deficiencies in measuring up to Him, He provides us with an abundance of mercy and grace, welcoming us into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants us to leave everything behind when we follow Him—all of our sins, all of our doubts, and all of our idols. Just as God removed all of the idols from the midst of Israel as He called His people out to worship Him in the wilderness, so too does He remove the idols from our midst as we prepare to meet with Him and memorialize His feast. We have to be clean of every spot and blemish before we can meet with Him, and today only Yeshua has the power to declare us clean.

Let's circle back to the subject of leprosy then, for we still have a lot to cover in today's message. First of all, leprosy or "tzara-at (צָרַעַת)" in Hebrew, is used in Scripture to describe a physical disease of the human flesh, a physical mildew in a garment, or a physical fungus or mold in a home, and in each case a priest has to be brought onto the scene to both declare a person or object infected and to declare the

person or object clean. On the surface level, the meaning of Leviticus 13-15 clearly demonstrates that we ought to isolate ourselves when we are ill so we don't infect others; that we ought to discard garments covered in mildew so they don't destroy our wardrobe; and that we ought to address mold in our homes to avoid serious health problems. The wisdom of God's Word certainly applies to this basic physical understanding, but the Word goes into much deeper layers than this. The root word of the noun "tzara-at (צָרַעַת)" is "tzara (צָרַע)," a verb which means to be stricken with leprosy. Importantly, "tzara (צָרַע)" also has figurative meaning, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. As I've implied throughout this message so far, leprosy of person, garment or house can also have a metaphorical spiritual meaning tied to sin and spiritual oppression. While physical leprosy brought disfigurement to its host, it also seemed to accompany some form of departure from the perfection of God's will, and thus the physical separation from society required by Torah in Leviticus also represented a spiritual separation from God and from His people. The broken relationships that result from spiritual leprosy are always rooted in sin, and often spiritual influence or oppression from the forces of wickedness are involved. A person who is caught up in demonic influence or oppression must desire to be free and seek freedom from their bondage in Messiah Yeshua through humility and repentance. In the case of a home or object, either can be attached to demonic activity through words or deeds that are rebellious against God. I could preach a whole sermon on how to break these attachments and clean a house from these influences or oppressions, but for now I will simply note that faith in Yeshua, humble obedience to His will, and submission to His authority through patient prayer and fasting are key to freedom from demonic leprosy. In one additional physical realization of Scripture, many scholars have identified Biblical leprosy as Hansen's Disease, a now curable disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*. Hansen's disease causes a loss of sensation in the body that parallels a person or group of people with a seared conscience. Such spiritual lepers have difficulty recognizing sin and humbling themselves to change their deadly course toward the second death, and sometimes they feed off one another to keep one another in bondage. This is entirely related to what we discussed earlier in First Corinthians; how sin must be identified and rooted out of each person who is building a relationship with the LORD and with every congregation that is contributing to God's Kingdom here on earth.

On the plus side, the curable nature of Hansen's disease today has its equivalent in the spiritual healing we can realize through faith in Messiah Yeshua, and this is why it is important for us to work with the LORD in prayer on building a community here focused on humility and repentance, on righteousness in Messiah Yeshua, and on building one another up so that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life can have no affect on us, for the world is passing away with all its desires, but whoever does the will of God remains forever (1 John 2:15-16). This is our primary purpose for gathering together, as the writer notes in Hebrews 10:22-25, where we read: "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Like the priest sprinkled the blood of a clean bird on the leprous host to cleanse them, now the blood of Messiah has been sprinkled upon us to free us from spiritual leprosy.

Let's look at a few examples of leprosy in the Old Testament to further examine how the metaphor is used. First, in Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses out of jealousy, saying "Has the

Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" The LORD responded with a sound rebuke against Miriam and Aaron, stating that Moses had been faithful and had indeed been given a special status as mediator between God and Israel. When He finished rebuking them, "Miriam became leprous, as white as snow." As soon as he realized what had occurred, Aaron pleaded with Moses for healing, confessing the foolish sin of rebellion, which would lead to spiritual death without repentance. "Please do not let her be as one dead," Aaron said. Moses interceded with long-suffering and loving-kindness, asking the LORD for Miriam's healing in prayer, and the LORD obliged, but not without consequences. When we sin, we can expect to endure hardship as a consequence of that sin. The LORD tests us in the aftermath of our confession to make sure our humility and repentance is authentic and that we will remain faithful to Him in the midst of His correction. The writer of Hebrews notes: "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Hebrews 12:7). In the episode with Miriam, the LORD responded to Moses's prayer with this same posture. He said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again" (Numbers 12:14). The LORD's rebuke is related to our reading in Leviticus 15, for anyone who has any kind of discharge—saliva in this case—would be unclean for seven days. Likewise, a leper who is declared unclean must also be set apart for seven days once they have been declared clean, according to Leviticus 14. In Miriam's case, the LORD, not a priest, had declared Miriam unclean for her rebellion against Moses, and He also declared her clean at the request of Moses, but the law would be carried out—she would be excommunicated from the congregation on account of her sin. There is a spiritual significance to this separation. According to the Word of the LORD here, it is wise to separate any rebellious spirit from a congregation to prevent a root of bitterness from spreading. Once a person returns to the body in true repentance, the LORD commands the repentant one to sit out for a week before restoring them to the congregation to ensure the repentance is authentic. Whether or not Miriam truly repented following her rebellion, we can see that as Numbers continues, Miriam's rebellious spirit spread, and this is what we want to avoid. Her challenge to Moses was only the beginning of several rebellions within the Nation of Israel. In Numbers 13-15, 10 of the 12 spies who entered Canaan rejected the LORD's commandment to take the land, and in Numbers 16 Korah led his rebellion against Moses in an almost identical manner to Miriam. Korah and his cohort were taken directly into the depths of the earth to their eternal death. But that wasn't enough to stop this spirit of rebellion, for leading into Numbers 17 the leaders of the other 11 tribes rebelled against God's command for Aaron to lead the priesthood. Only when Aaron's staff budded was there an end to the rebellious spirit that began with Miriam. This is important, for the staff that budded represents our LORD Yeshua who rose from the dead and bore fruit for the Kingdom of God. It is only through Yeshua that sin can be conquered.

I'm going to move quickly through two other examples, which you can study in more detail later. Consider Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the prophet in 2 Kings 5, who was given leprosy for covetousness and dishonesty. Naaman, a commander of the army in Syria, had come to the prophet Elisha in Israel so the prophet could heal him of his leprosy, and when Naaman obeyed the command of the LORD given through Elisha to wash in the Jordan seven times, he was healed. After this, he returned to Elisha, professed his faith in the LORD and offered the prophet a gift, which Elisha refused. The prophet stored up his treasures in heaven, and not in this world. Gehazi, however, ran after Naaman and lied to him, saying his master reconsidered the offer and desired a talent of silver and two changes of garments for his ministry. He also lied to Elisha upon his return, saying that he had not gone out after Naaman. Well, it is foolish to lie to a prophet, who can see what God shows him. Here's how

Elisha replied: “Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.’ And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.” (2 Kings 5:26-27). We can see that Gehazi, who was part of one of the most powerful ministries Israel had ever seen, desired the things of the world more than the things of God, and his covetous and deceptive spirit left him condemned forever with leprosy, which also represents his spiritual demise. Naaman, on the other hand, desired to pursue the LORD to such an extent that He brought back soil from Israel so he could stand on holy ground from afar and worship the LORD in Syria. There is deep spiritual significance to this, but suffice it to say that the leprosy left the foreigner who devoted himself to the LORD and clung to the Israelite who desired to have dominion in this world. The LORD rewards those who put Him first and judges those who don't.

In 2 Chronicles 26, we read about King Uzziah of Judah who ruled for 52 years and did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and as long as He sought the LORD during His life, God gave Him success. Unfortunately for him, as the LORD blessed him for his obedience, he became more and more prosperous and more and more powerful, and this went to his head. We read, “When Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” Though Azariah the priest and 80 other courageous priests urged Uzziah not to sin against the LORD in this way, for only the sons of Aaron were set apart to burn incense in the Temple, the king pressed on and became enraged. At that very moment, leprosy broke out on his head and the king succumbed to leprosy for the rest of his life. Like King Saul, Uzziah did not regard the commandments of God and preferred to worship God his own way. His pride and false religious piety led to a spiritual death for the man who had been faithful to the LORD his whole life. When a righteous man falls away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, his righteous deeds will not be remembered. It's critical that we learn from this, for God does not want us to worship Him like the pagans do, but according to the way He has explained. Uzziah's proud act of rebellion reminds me of Paul's sermon to the pagan men of Athens in Acts 17:24-31, especially where Paul explains, “since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like ... something to be shaped by art and man's devising.” In other words, we cannot come up with our own ways to worship God, or build our own traditions, but rather we ought to worship God—God's way. Now that Yeshua has come to save us from our sins, we have no excuse. He told us to give up everything of value in this life, including our own egos or traditions, and follow after Him, walking in the way He walked.

When we proudly elevate ourselves or our traditions above the commandments of God, we subject ourselves to a spirit of leprosy that will ultimately destroy our souls. Let's read the key piece of Paul's sermon relevant to this point: “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being,...

... as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,

something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:24-31) Uzziah had elevated his own ways above the way that God had commanded. We can't do this, and this relates directly to Passover and preparing our hearts to keep the feast. When we read the Bible, it is clear what God desires His people to do—to keep the feast in the spirit of sincerity and truth. The LORD may have overlooked times of ignorance on account of the great deceptions that have been passed down from generation to generation, but I believe this time of ignorance is coming to an end. I believe the LORD is calling to all who call upon the name of Yeshua to repent and turn toward Him by following Him in all of His ways. By doing this, we remove any leprous practices that isolate us from the true knowledge of God and the relationship that He has called us to build with Him.

In 2 Kings 7, we can see one more episode in the Old Testament that deals with leprosy, but this story exhibits the benefits that come when leprous men develop repentant hearts and turn back to doing the will of the LORD. In the midst of Israel's wishy-washy relationship with the LORD, God had allowed the Syrians to lay siege on the city of Samaria leading to a severe famine. We know that this was a judgement against Israel for sin, because in 2 Kings 6:27-29 we see a discussion about cannibalism described in its gory detail. God promised in Deuteronomy 28:54-57 that Israel would have to resort to such cannibalism when they turned their hearts away from serving Him with joy and gladness of heart. In any case, as the city of Samaria fell into ruin, a group of four lepers stood outside the city gate and debated whether to die at the gate, die inside the city or to chance surrendering to the Syrians so they could eat. The lepers decided to surrender, but upon their entry into the enemy's camp, they found that the LORD had delivered them by chasing the Syrian army away. At first, the four of them raided the camp, taking silver and provisions for themselves, a sign of selfish ambition and hatred toward their brethren, but then they had a change of heart and we can read about it in 2 Kings 7:9: "Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.'" It's unclear whether the lepers' motivation was pure here, for they seemed to act righteously because they feared punishment, and the LORD desires that we act righteously on account of love for Him as well as our fellow man, but there does seem to be a measure of repentance here. We don't hear anything else about these four in the story, so it's unclear whether their action led to healing or not, but one thing is certain: The LORD proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isaiah 52:7)! The lepers in this story did this very thing. In His long-suffering and mercy for Israel, God had ended the judgment of Israel, and He used the lepers to bring this good news of salvation to the city. Though we don't know the disposition of these lepers, we do know that this episode prophetically points forward to the first coming of Messiah Yeshua, who would heal the lepers so they could proclaim the good news of the Gospel.

After Yeshua had finished preaching His sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, we see in Matthew 8 that the first person He encountered was a leper. In Matthew 8:1-4, we read: "When Yeshua had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Yeshua put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Yeshua said to him, 'See

that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” There are a few things we can deduce from this short episode. First of all, the leper clearly recognized Yeshua as the Messiah—as Yahweh Himself in the flesh. The LORD alone is God, and only He can heal and make alive (Deuteronomy 32:39). Secondly, the leper had faith that Yeshua could and would heal him on account of His faith, and this truth bears out in the rest of Scripture. When we turn to the LORD in humility and truly repent, He will always welcome us back into His family. The leper knew His Scripture and He knew His God, and Yeshua delivered just as He promised from the days of old. Thirdly, and perhaps most interesting in this story, Yeshua did not want this healed leper to testify about his encounter with the Messiah directly, but He wanted the priests to declare that the Messiah had come. Allow me explain how that would take place.

Within the text, Yeshua referred to Leviticus 14:1-32, when He asked the leper to present his gift to the priests as a testimony to them. Our reading in Leviticus clearly explains that the man who is made clean from his leprosy ought to present a gift to the priest to be offered up to the LORD, and then the now former leper would be declared clean. This is significant because such cleansing from leprosy was extremely rare, and within Israel it might have only happened one other time to a descendant of Jacob; namely, when Miriam was healed of her leprosy. And in the case of Miriam’s cleansing, she was also healed directly by the LORD through the intercessory prayer of Moses. This is the case simply because only the LORD Himself can heal by His power, and thus we can conclude that the leper’s faith in Yeshua’s healing power was a testimony to the Messiah’s divinity. As I will show you in a moment, it is clear from Yeshua’s request that He was prompting His appointed priests to announce His coming; He was giving Israel a chance to declare the favorable year of the LORD. But would they do it?

The first time the LORD directly announced His arrival as the promised Messiah, His hometown did not accept Him. When the LORD began His ministry in Nazareth, he read from the scroll of Isaiah 61:1-2, which we read in Luke 4, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” When He was done reading, Yeshua added, “today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” and it certainly would be throughout His earthly ministry. Specifically, by healing lepers, Yeshua was setting at liberty those who were oppressed by evil spirits and the physical manifestations of the bondage they held on their captives, but the people in his hometown lacked the faith in Him to enable His work to be done there. This led Yeshua to proclaim, “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27). In other words, only a foreigner was cleansed in Israel by the power of God through His prophet. Ultimately, many more Gentiles would come to believe in Yeshua than Jews, but the time of the Gentiles is coming to a close and many Jews will call out, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD; this will precipitate His second coming.

Before I continue, allow me to point out that the Rabbinical Talmud was written down after Yeshua’s resurrection, and so we can’t be certain that the position I’m going to explain to you was held by the rabbis and priests prior to the time of Yeshua. That being said, considering the context of the passages we’re looking at, it is highly likely that this interpretation predates Yeshua. Specifically, within a litany of interpretations from the rabbis about the coming Messiah, one of the names the rabbis used to identify Him within Jewish tradition was “the leprous one.” In using this name, they were drawing from the

messianic prophesy in Isaiah 53. In Sanhedrin 98b:14, we read, “And the Rabbis say: the leper of the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is [Messiah's] name, as it is stated: ‘Indeed our illnesses he did bear and our pains he endured; yet we did esteem him injured, stricken by God and afflicted.’” In the balance of Sanhedrin 98b, the rabbis discuss the time of Messiah being one of grief and oppression for Israel, even stating quite distinctly in verse 10 that the time of Messiah would be one when the Jews and Gentiles would be considered equally by the LORD, whether for salvation or destruction. The discussion also clarifies that the Messiah Himself would not necessarily be leprous, but that He might bear the pains of His people when He comes. As we covered earlier, the Hebrew word for leprous can also mean afflicted. When our Yeshua died on the cross to atone for our sins, He most assuredly fulfilled this Word in Isaiah 53. The prophet Isaiah made it very clear that the Messiah in His first coming would die so that we could live, He would suffer so we could prosper, even though we don’t deserve it. All who put their trust in Him and follow Him in all His ways would be saved. With this prophesy in mind, we can conclude that Yeshua was in effect giving the priests a powerful sign that the Messiah had arrived when he told the cleansed leper to bring his gift to the priests as a testimony to them.

Another point in the discussion suggests a belief that the Messiah would come high and mighty as a conquering king if the Jews merited it, but as a suffering servant if they did not. We know today that our Messiah would actually come in both ways, because this is precisely what He prophesied. In fact, when John the Baptist was in prison, he asked Yeshua about this question directly. In Luke 7:19, we read the peculiar question, “And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” The question could not possibly be accurately translated here, for we know that John leaped in His mother’s womb when pregnant Mary approached John’s mother Elizabeth. John knew Yeshua was the Messiah his whole life, and he never doubted it for a moment. When he baptized Yeshua, he even called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. There is no contradiction here, just the need for more explanation. I don’t have time to get into the etymological details on this today, but I can assure you I’ve looked this passage in detail. The paraphrased question John asks Yeshua is this: “Are you going to establish your kingdom now, or should we look for a second coming?” In other words, have you come as the conquering king, or the suffering servant? And if the latter, will you come a second time? Yeshua’s answer in Luke 7:22-23 directly addresses this question: “Yeshua answered and said to [John’s disciples], ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’” In other words, He had come as the suffering servant, the one who would redeem the lost and heal the brokenhearted, setting the captives free. This is good news for us, for He had come to save the Jew first, but also the Gentile, and “all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.” Even those trapped in the depths of spiritual leprosy could be cleansed by the blood of the lamb, if they confess their sins and turn to Him with all of their hearts.

The Gospels provide one more example of this wonderful reality in Luke 17, and this passage will tie everything together that we’ve spoke about so far. In Luke 17:11-19, we read: “Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, ‘Yeshua, Master, have mercy on us!’ So when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his

face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Yeshua answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.'" It's unclear from the story what happened to the other nine lepers who didn't return to give God the glory, but perhaps for His own glory Yeshua allowed them to present themselves clean to the priests—specifically to announce His coming. Would these nine be saved into eternal life, though. I don't believe so. The LORD desires that we build a relationship with Him. He wants our hearts. He desires that we humble ourselves before Him and walk in His ways. The leper who returned to Yeshua to give the glory to God was made well by His faith. His wellness was eternal, not just physical. He moved to show the LORD he believed through his actions and didn't just take his salvation for granted. He was presenting a testimony of two: obedience to God by showing his love for Him, and faith in the Messiah who healed him. This is the same testimony we must have as we approach the LORD's banquet table for His rehearsal dinner each Passover year by year. Our Messiah heals us by His blood and reunites us in relationship with God when we humble ourselves by confessing our sins and then decide to walk according to His narrow path instead of our own way, all the way into His kingdom. When we walk in His way, He sanctifies us over time to be more like Him by the power of His Holy Spirit. It is through this relationship with Yeshua alone that we can be healed of our afflictions and freed from our bondage to sin and death. It is through His grace that He saves us. But let us not come to His feast without examining ourselves, for we do not want to bring judgment upon our heads. We do not want to say LORD, LORD, and hear in reply, "depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (John 7:23). Rather, we want to present ourselves with a pure faith acceptable to God so that He will say, "'Well done, good and faithful servant; ... Enter into the joy of your LORD.'" (Matthew 25:23). Brothers and sisters, let us examine ourselves so we will not be judged. Shabbat shalom