

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Special Guest Bruce Marchiano's Message of December 20, 2009
"The Goodness of Jesus"**

[Jesus' love reaches out to every one of us personally, as retold through the story of the blind man.]

[Topics: The Love of Jesus; I Am Willing]

Excerpt: Bruce remembers when he previously spoke here a few years ago. He can specifically remember the message because he recalls hearing himself say something that he never had thought of before. And as he was saying it, he was thinking, "Wow, that's pretty profound. I need to write that down." It's something that Bruce has repeated countless times since and even wrote it in one of his books.

After Bruce has been born again for a couple of years and did the Matthew video, he was thrust into the public spotlight and into a speaking ministry. It was during this time that he received a call from Joseph Tkach, who invited him over to lunch. During their conversation, Bruce was asked to share Jesus with our people. That was the beginning of a tremendous relationship between Bruce and our denomination, as he describes it.

Bruce is an actor by profession. But, the last 15 years, by the grace of God, he has been more active in ministry all around the world. He's also written several books about Jesus. This all started because he portrayed Jesus in the Matthew video. As Bruce puts it – he got a cutting education in him – Jesus and who he is because of doing that role.

All across the world, in every denomination, in every culture, one's Christianity can so easily become about other things – about good things, about wonderful things. But things that are not about him. For example, conservative talk radio interweaves politics with Christianity.

Our Christianity must be about Jesus. And if he's not at the bulls eye or the core of what we are talking about, or if he's not what we are sharing with people we meet, or if Jesus is not who people see when they meet us then something is wrong. Or if when they meet us, they see politics or condemnation, then it's YIKES! (Bruce included himself in this as well.)

The great heartbreak of all is the exercise of condemnation from the mouths of Christians, because that's not what Jesus is about. Jesus is about grace, forgiveness beyond forgiveness. This led Bruce into a talking about the point of revelation he had when he was here last time.

Bruce was talking about how Jesus healed the leper. 2000 years ago, a leper was a picture of dirt. He was the physical representation of a sin-wracked life. He was the physical representation of making all the bad choices. He was the symbol of everything gone wrong.

Now he approached Jesus. And the only thing he had to offer Jesus that day was his leprosy. We tend to think we have to come to Jesus with this or that or all cleaned up or

obeying all kinds of rules and regulations. All that guy had to offer Jesus that day was his dirt. He had nothing else. He didn't come saying, I've cleaned up my act." Bruce just pictures this guy coming to Jesus with his body wracked with open festering sores. He just depicted total hopelessness and desperation.

The thing we try to avoid the most is desperation. Yet, it's desperation that leads us to be where we need to be all the time and that's to Jesus. When we look at the Gospels, Jesus encountered basically two types of people: those who thought they had it all together and those who were desperate for God.

Across the board, the people who got healed, the people who had life-changing encounters with Jesus, they were the people driven by desperation, the people who were at the end of their rope. That's a new line for Bruce in his prayers. "I'm at the end of myself, Lord. I have literally zero to offer. I just need you." Bruce said he has even zero to offer to himself and to others around him. That includes his skills and his "wisdom."

So this leper is at this place. He had zero to offer Jesus. He was at the end of himself. As a leper, he's been kicked out of his family; he had been removed from society. He's watching his life deteriorate before his eyes. Now before he became ill, he probably went to the synagogue, knew the Torah, sacrificed doves. In other words, he was doing all the right things, but in the end, it wasn't working.

All the things he was doing wouldn't give him one more hour of life. And with his condition, he was at the end of himself. What is so interesting is that all of us are at that place. Only we don't want to face it. Our country faced it on 9-11. Our security was exploded sky high.

Is Bruce the only one who can't figure out why the entire military might with its power and technology can't take out 50 guys in a cave? It's a heart breaking reality. Can we just picture the living God sitting on his throne and saying, "When will my children just stop and cry out to me? When are they going to get it?" Yes, we are trying to build the tower of Babel over and over again. At the end of the day, it's going to get us nowhere.

During a live radio interview, Bruce was asked a question he wasn't prepared for. He was asked, "What's your definition of Christian maturity?" Bruce hadn't thought ever about it before. But the good Lord dropped an answer into his head. Bruce answered, "Growing in dependency on God." And this means, "I am nothing and he is everything."

Those were powerful words of John the Baptist, "I must become less, so he can become more." That sums up the process of spiritual maturity. This guy, whose body was racked by disease, was the most spiritually mature of all the people around Jesus – because he was the one that totally understood, "I got nothing to offer."

We read in the Bible what he said. "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." And in some of our Bibles that is expressed in a very Shakespearean way, "Lord if thou art willing." Now the reality of this situation was that there was a man desperate for God. A man confronted with his own brokenness that all he could think to do was to cry out to Jesus – which was the best thing he could have ever done.

He offers Jesus his wounds. How many times do we make the heart-breaking mistake of trying to hide our wounds from God, trying to pretend we have none, and trying to present to him some cleaned up polished thing that just doesn't exist?

Bruce's retired pastor – Jack Hayford said something one time that just struck him profoundly. Bruce said that he was going to write a book one day, called, "One Liners that Changed My Life." Jack Hayford said, "We live in a broken world filled with broken people, who cut each other up with the jagged edges of their broken behavior."

In those hard times, our tendency is to turn our anger on God when things don't work out. Most if not all of us have that impulse. Yes, we live in a broken world with broken people starting with you and me. The apostle Paul said, "I am the chief of sinners." Bruce would love to hear one of our well-known Christian leaders stand up today in front of people like on "Larry King Live" and say, "I am the chief of sinners." Where is that brokenness and the need for God?

That leper probably threw himself before Jesus and just blurting out – "Lord" – because it's his last chance. When Jesus healed that leper, there were two miracles that day. The easiest one, the smallest one, the one we should pay the least attention to is the actual physical healing. That one was easy. Jesus was God. That one was a breeze.

But the huge miracle, the miracle that God wants us to really grasp in our understanding, is that Jesus, who is God, stopped everything he was doing that day to act. He didn't tell that guy that he was too busy or that he was too dirty, or he didn't ask the guy if had been studying and memorizing Scriptures. He didn't tell that guy to go clean himself and then come back. Jesus didn't tell that guy that he wasn't rich enough or that he wasn't this or that enough.

We live in world where people are very busy. When the president's motorcade drives by, try to get him to stop. People are so important. But we're talking about God. The whole world is walking by this guy starting with you and me. His physicality is the physical representation of the state of our spirit pre-Jesus. Just racked with filth and wounds and terrible things.

And the living God, the most important figure in the universes, stops everything he is doing. That's the miracle. He doesn't have to stop – he's God. Jesus could have said, "Look, I just finished the sermon on mount, I'm very tired, you've been a leper for five years, what's another day? Why don't you come around tomorrow and we'll sort it all out then. Right now, I'm hungry and tired."

Now that sounds kind of funny doesn't it? But what's even funnier is that he doesn't do that. He's God. If we weren't so familiar with the story and so accustomed to Jesus being meek and mild, we tend to lose that this is God. He doesn't have to stop for nobody. Jesus is as big as one gets. He can think one thought and take things out. He's big time.

You know, sometimes we see these self-important figures on various talk shows where they are so proud of themselves and they promote their books. And Bruce sometimes pictures them that day, standing before the living God when all their proud talk turns into whimpering and tears.

And so with all his bigness, Jesus turns to that guy without asking for built in requirements. Built in requirements are not a part of the Bible. The only requirement is that you come to Jesus. Jesus turns to him and says, "Yes, I am willing." You don't have to do anything, you don't have to look a certain way, you don't have to be a certain kind of person, you don't have to be a perfect husband, or a perfect wife, you don't have to be a perfect anything."

Jesus stopped merely because the leper asked. Jesus stood on the mountain and said, "Ask, and you will receive." Was he kidding? Or did he really mean it? Can we see the tears that poured down Jesus' face when he saw the leper?

We have nothing to offer – but all we need to do is ask. And Jesus answered, "I am willing. Be clean." Then in a blink in a moment of time, he was healed. In the world of actors, there is a saying – the heart of a man is recognized in his actions and his choices. The Son of the living God stops for that guy? And the Spirit of God whispers to us, "Know me through that choice. Please know and understand who I really, really am."

The Son of the living God gets down in the dirt with that guy. We can read in **Philippians 2** that Jesus made himself "**nothing**." It's a remarkable statement. Of all the words Jesus could have said that day to the leper, he chose to say, "Yes." And the Spirit of the living God says to us, "Please understand who I am, for you will be clean."

Hebrews 13: 8 says, "**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.**" In other words, as he was for that guy that day, so he desires to meet everybody in this room. You may be going through a broken thing right now or you may be walking on the clouds, no matter where anybody is at in this room, we all need Jesus.

[We then saw a three minute clip of excerpts from the Matthew video of Jesus healing and interacting with various people.]

Bruce commented on the last scene in the video where the blind man put his hands on Bruce's face. He and the crew were in a rural 3rd world village in Morocco. This guy represented one of the blind beggars on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. And for these small roles they actually hired locals.

And this guy was actually in real life a blind beggar in this forsaken, forgotten village. And the director tells Bruce that this guy had been blind his whole life, and that he needed to put himself in this guys shoes, where he's been living in darkness. Now, in the scene Jesus heals him. And so this guy, was told to be so overwhelmed that he could now see, that he was going to place his hands all over Jesus' face.

Did you notice in the clip how filthy this guys hands were? That wasn't "prop dirt." That was the real thing. That was the result of a guy living on the streets for many decades. Bruce could smell that guy from thirty feet away. You could only imagined what Bruce smelled.

And it was all over his hands. Bruce asks us to forgive him of his squeamishness. But when the director told him that this guy was going to put his filthy hands all over his face, Bruce knee jerked a little bit. He immediately thought – how do I get this guy to wash his hands without offending half the village? But, he didn't do it. He just asked God to protect him from whatever was crawling on his hands.

When the director called action, Bruce started to move through the scene and what you saw in the video clip was shot in one take. And Bruce got down to be eye level with that guy and was so overcome by his brokenness. Hopefully that came from his research and his trying to walk in the mindset and the understanding of Jesus. Bruce was so overcome with this man's life lived so dramatically distant from God's perfect intent for him.

And so Bruce took these hands, that he was so afraid of, and kissed them. It was not a scripted moment. It was something that happened in the moment. And when he did that not one of the hundred or so people standing around dared breathe. In the moment after they yelled, "cut." Bruce exploded in tears. And he wrapped his arms around this guy and wept. And wept for the brokenness of a precious, precious person.

And in the van on the way back to the hotel, everyone was very quiet. And the guy sitting next to Bruce was their technical advisor – a Messianic Jew. He said, "You know I've walked with Jesus for a long time. But I never got it until I saw what happened today."

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. He's the Son of the living God.

Friday night, Bruce was at a worship service at a friend's church just worshipping God. And in the middle of it, it hit him that thousands of people are standing in the cold for two hours and paying money to see this movie Avatar. And he gets to worship the living God for free. It's like, what are they thinking?

And a hundred percent of the time, Jesus has one attitude toward everybody in this room, no matter what attitude you have towards him – he is the Son of the living God and he loves you. He just loves you.

You, who think there's nothing to love. You who suffered human rejection so many times that you consider yourself unworthy of love. You, who have been beaten down by the broken things of this life. He's the Son of the living God, and he just loves you. He loves you. He loves you.

Obviously at this time of year, we should stop, take pause and just lift our eyes to Jesus, to Jesus. May God bless you and your families. May God just overwhelm you in your lives and in your hearts and in your private thoughts with the fullness of all that he is. May he answer every question. May you actually experience him, whispering to you, "I am willing, I am willing – be clean."

May you husbands and dads have the courage and the strength to arrest your family in the name of Jesus, to step up to the plate and say, "we're going to stop and honor God here." May God just bless you and bless you and bless you.

To those who are older and alone, may God just pour out understanding oh his favor on you and his continuing purposes for you. May everybody in this room, just be filled with the goodness of Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

General Group Question: What do the miracles of Jesus – the healing of the leper and the blind man tell you about Jesus?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. How did the leper feel about himself? Why did he feel that way?
2. Have you ever felt that you were in a desperate situation? Briefly explain your circumstances. How was your situation resolved?
3. What do you think Bruce's answer means when he said that spiritual maturity is "growing in dependency on God"?
4. How much do we have to offer Jesus when we go to him in prayer? Briefly explain.
5. What was Jesus' answer to the leper? What is so significant about it?
6. Does Jack Hayford's statement, "We live in a broken world filled with broken people, who cut each other up with the jagged edges of their broken behavior" resonate with you? Why?
7. What were the two miracles that occurred when Jesus healed the leper? Which was greater? Why?
8. What touched you the most about Bruce's on-location story in Morocco?
9. What message was Bruce emphasizing to us about Jesus' relationship to us? How important is that understanding to you? Why?