

# Jesus, Our Healer

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 May 2021

Preacher: Rev. Jeff Simpson

[0:00] Well, good morning. It is great to be back with you, but to be back with you in a different building.

This is my first time worshiping with you all here, and it's so great to be with you this morning. Thank you to Church of the Advent staff and parish council for the kind invitation to come here this morning.

It's so great to see so many old friends that I haven't seen in a while. So it's just a joy and privilege to be here this morning. We are going to be in Matthew chapter 8, the gospel reading that was just read by Lisa.

And it's just four verses, but there's a lot packed in here. And I'm excited to read through it and to look at it with you. We're going to look at three things from Matthew chapter 8, this gospel reading. We're going to look at who Jesus heals. We're going to look at how Jesus heals. And finally, we're going to look at what that means for us. Before we do that, let me just read the passage again real quick.

[1:03] Matthew 8, 1 through 4. When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will be clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a proof to them.

So first, I want us to notice who it is that Jesus heals. In verse 1, it says that a man with leprosy came to Jesus. Now, leprosy is this condition.

It's this infectious skin disease that causes nerve and muscle damage. And sometimes it can lead to a loss of a sense of touch, which can allow infections and wounds to happen easily.

And we don't know how long this man had this, but it wasn't just his skin that was affected by this. It was his whole nervous system. In order to prevent the spread of this disease, the Old Testament law actually had prescriptions for how to deal with it.

[2:10] So Leviticus 13, if you're looking for a way to fall asleep some night, there's actually a whole chapter on how to deal with infectious skin diseases. There were a number of things that a person had to do.

First, they had to change their physical appearance. So they had to wear out, they had to grow out their hair. They had to wear, they had to wear torn clothes.

They also, when anyone got near to them, they had to cry out, unclean, unclean. So that way they would know to stay away so that the infection wouldn't pass. They also had to live alone.

They had to live in isolation outside the city, away from the rest of the community. And they became ceremonially unclean. Which means that they were unable to worship with the people of God in corporate worship.

And so imagine for a moment what life must have been like for this man. The only thing that we hear about him is that he had leprosy. But let's imagine what life must have been like for him.

Physically, he was dealing with a pain and suffering of living with a terrible disease.

[3:13] Socially, he was isolated from his family, his friends, his community. Emotionally, he probably felt some degree of psychological pain, maybe shame, self-contempt. And spiritually, he was disconnected from the people of God.

He couldn't worship with his spiritual family. And so for a lot of these reasons, people in the first century who had these kinds of leprous diseases were some of the most vulnerable and isolated people in first century society.

And yet, despite this man's incredible vulnerability, he shows us, he's a model for us for what it means to have great faith. He's incredibly bold in how he approaches Jesus.

In verse 2, we're told that he kneels before Jesus in front of a crowd of great people. A large crowd of people. And so imagine this scene. Imagine what it would take for you to get up in front of a large crowd of people and kneel down in desperation.

Like, how desperate a situation would you need to be in to risk the vulnerability of that moment? It's a pretty incredible thing. And he kneels before Jesus and he says, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

[ 4 : 24 ] This isn't just a request for healing. This is also a beautiful, bold confession of faith. He says, And so this man shows us that the prerequisite for experiencing the healing power of Jesus is our own neediness.

Jesus only heals those who understand their need. Who understand that they can't heal themselves. And they're willing to come to him with empty hands. So that's who Jesus heals. Now I want to look at how Jesus heals. How Jesus heals this man. Verse 3 says that Jesus stretched out his hand and touched this man. Now we should feel the drama and the emotion of this moment for a couple reasons.

And the first is that this is a man who Jesus should have been repelled by. It was a risky thing to go near or to touch a person with leprosy. So you'd risk not only getting affected, but you would risk becoming ceremonially unclean yourself.

And so you can imagine the gasps in the crowd that might have occurred as Jesus, this man, comes before him. And he doesn't back away, but he gets closer to him and actually stretches out his hand and touches him.

[ 5 : 43 ] We should also feel the kind of drama and emotion of this scene for another reason. And that is because I wonder how long it had been since this man had been touched by another human being.

Part of the prescription was that he had to live alone by himself. How long had it been since he had had a hug? How long had it been since he had had a handshake, a fist bump?

I don't know if they did fist bumps back then, but you can imagine. Had it been months? Had it been years? Years, we know that we shrivel up spiritually and emotionally when we don't have physical touch.

You may have seen a couple articles come out in a couple different outlets this past year about people, numbers across the board of people who were struggling with mental health during COVID. Because the isolation of the quarantine kept them from having the regular kind of physical touch that they normally had in life. And that was a side effect of living in isolation, living in quarantine, is when we don't have physical touch, we shrivel up.

[ 6 : 55 ] Here's the other thing. Jesus could have just said, be healed. He could have just spoken it. And in fact, he does this all the time. In fact, he does this in the next two stories after this passage.

Like, he heals the servant of the centurion. And they're not even in the same zip code. Like, Jesus says, like, just be healed. And he's healed. And what's so powerful and beautiful about Jesus right here in this moment is that he meets this man's vulnerability with his own vulnerability.

Humanly speaking, he puts himself at great risk. It is this moment where Jesus combines great power with great love. He reaches out and he touches him.

And he not only heals him, but he gives him something that no one else could give him. The power of the physical touch. And then something happens next in verse 4. And Jesus says to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a proof to them.

What is happening right here in this moment? Well, the passage that we read that is in Leviticus 13 that talks about the protocols for how to deal with an infectious skin disease says that if a person was, in fact, healed, that they had to go to the priest at that time.

[ 8 : 18 ] And that the priest had to make a sacrifice of atonement. And to pronounce that this disease had been healed. And this pronouncement wasn't just for the person who had the disease.

It was also for the whole community. This pronouncement was a message that this person could worship God again in the covenant community. They could, again, hang out with their friends and family.

And, like, this guy could hug his kids and hug his wife and, like, give people, you know, handshakes again. He no longer had to hide in shame. And so when Jesus heals this man, he heals him physically, yes.

But he also heals him socially. He heals him emotionally. He heals him spiritually. And this is a sign of the kind of healing that Jesus wants to do in our lives.

He wants to heal us holistically in every way. It is a sign and a foretaste of the kingdom of God that God has come to heal the world. That he has, in the words of Isaac Watts in his famous hymn, Joy to the World, that he has come to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

[ 9 : 25 ] And in the verses that follow, Jesus tells us two more stories of Jesus healing people. And then he makes kind of a beautiful editorial comment at the end in verse 17. And he says, And here he's quoting Isaiah 53, which prophesies about the Messiah who would come and bring salvation to Israel.

And Matthew is saying, What Isaiah prophesies in Isaiah 53, Jesus is fulfilling right now in these stories. He's the Messiah who came to heal a world that is sick with sin and all its consequences. By taking upon himself the sickness of the world through his death on the cross. So Jesus heals this man through his own vulnerability. He heals him holistically, physically, socially, spiritually, emotionally.

And he heals him as a sign that the kingdom of God is here as a living, present reality. And so next I want to talk about, finally I want to talk about what this means for us.

Because this, I don't know about you, but stories of healing in the Bible are sometimes the stories that I feel most distant from. But I think this has a number of implications for us today. So what does this mean for us?

[ 10 : 38 ] I want to look at three things. The first thing is that I think that stories of healing in the Gospels raise a question for us. And that is, one of the questions it raises is, Is the healing that Jesus comes to bring, Is it primarily physical or is it primarily spiritual?

And there's a tension here that I want to address. That on one hand the Gospel is the good news that Jesus has come to forgive and deliver us from sin and death. But on the other hand, no one can read this account in Matthew or any of the stories of Jesus' healing And deny that Jesus has also come to heal our bodies too.

Other people, I think in general, we kind of attempt to either over-spiritualize Jesus or under-spiritualize him. I think some people are tempted to, we were tempted to under-spiritualize him By seeing him as just a good moral teacher who cared about the poor and physical and social healing.

Others are tempted to over-spiritualize him and to focus only how Jesus brings spiritual healing Through the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. But we have to avoid both temptations. And this is because in Jesus Christ, there is a deep connection Between the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the world.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world And he's also the one who sits on the throne and says, Behold, I am making all things new. And the reason for that is that sin is the underlying disease for all the symptoms that we see in a fallen world.

[ 12 : 06 ] The symptoms that we see of things like disease, things like violence, injustice, death, poverty. All of these are symptoms. They're symptoms of the disease of sin.

They're symptoms, but they're not the disease itself. And Jesus Christ is the great healer who doesn't just treat our symptoms. He comes to treat the disease. You don't just go to a doctor and say, go into the doctor's office and say, Okay, are you going to treat my symptoms?

Or are you going to treat my disease? Like if you were to ask the doctor that question, they would look at you like you're crazy. They would say, well, of course I'm going to treat your symptoms. But you better bet that we're going to go after the underlying condition that's causing your symptoms. It is because Jesus cares so much about the healing of our bodies that he comes to heal our sin through his suffering and death on the cross. The other thing that I want to talk about, about what this means for us, is a little bit of an elephant in the room when it comes to passages like this.

And I think that one of the elephants in the room for us when we read a passage like this is, if Jesus is able to heal, like if he was willing to heal this man, why doesn't he always heal?

[ 13 : 24 ] Why didn't he heal my family member? Why doesn't he choose to heal me? Like if he's willing, what's he waiting for? Right? And the first thing that I want to say is, I don't know.

I'm not God. And I think to offer a rational explanation for that would not only be proud, and to assume a level of knowledge that none of us have, but also it would be unloving. As Christians, our response to suffering is not to explain it away, but to grieve it.

We don't explain away suffering. We lament and weep over it. But in the midst of this lament, we can also have incredible hope. Kelly Kapik is a theology professor at Covenant College, and he wrote a book called *Embodied Hope*, a theological meditation on pain and suffering.

It's a great book. I'd recommend it. It's not like an intellectual abstract book about the problem of evil. It's actually a personal pastoral meditation on his experience of walking through pain and suffering himself and with his wife.

And in this book, he shares the words of a friend who suffers greatly physically, and yet who still has profound hope in the midst of it because of Jesus. And I want you to hear these words.

[14:36] His friend says, Yet these realities point me to my greater need of being restored spiritually to fellowship with my Heavenly Father, before whom I am hopelessly disabled by my sin, apart from his work to redeem me through Christ.

I view my disabilities as reminders of my utter dependence upon Christ for salvation and life, and I am sure that in eternity he will restore me to wholeness. By carrying me through the trials in my life, he has given me a longing for the coming new creation, when he will restore me physically as I behold him in restored communion, unhindered by my sin, which he will have eradicated forever. The coming resurrection gives me hope that a day is coming when I will be made like Christ, and freed from the curse of sin. Secondly, I rejoice in the hope that he will give me the gift of the resurrected body, free from physical infirmities I have wrestled with my whole life.

There will be a day when I will be able to bend my knee, and the first time that I do so will be at the feet of Jesus when I see him face to face, and bow down before him as his redeemed child. On that day I will love and embrace him with a resurrected heart, made whole by his touch, and freed from the power of death forever.

Oh, for that day to come. Incredible words. I don't understand why God heals sometimes, and why he doesn't heal other times, but here's what I do know.

[16:42] I want to have resurrection hope like this man has, regardless of what happens in my life. What we get in Jesus Christ is not a vending machine or a good luck charm that cures us from temporary pain and suffering.

What we get is something infinitely better. We get one who has destroyed the power of sin, and who will one day give us resurrected, restored, healed bodies. And he stands resurrected as the ascended Lord, and he longs to give us glimpses and foretastes of that ultimate healing even now. And so that leads into my final point, which is that I want to kind of talk about what it would be like, what it looks like to experience those glimpses and those foretastes of Jesus' healing power today. What does it look like to access the healing power of Jesus in our own lives today? I think there's a lot we could talk about. I'm relatively familiar that this church has just started a healing prayer ministry, and I think that would be a great application to learn more about that or be involved in that. But what I want to do is to draw our attention one more time to how this man approaches Jesus. He comes to him on his knees with utter dependence and vulnerability.

[17:57] And I want you to think about that image as you think about places in your life that you long for Jesus to bring his healing power into your life.

Maybe you have a deep wound from your past. Maybe you have places in your life where you feel shame and guilt, and that feels suffocating. Maybe you have a broken relationship.

Maybe you have a pattern of unwanted behavior that you don't know how to stop. Whatever it is, I want to suggest this morning that the power for healing that comes through vulnerability.

It comes through vulnerability with Jesus, and it comes through vulnerability with people that we trust that God has placed in our life. And this is both a direct insight from this text, and it's something that a lot of Christian counselors who I respect would affirm.

Whether we're going to the doctor or whether we're going to a counselor for help, the healing process can't begin without vulnerability. It can't begin unless we admit that we're needy.

[19:00] If we want to experience the healing in the deepest parts of our life, we have to let Jesus and people that we trust into those places. I think a lot of us, myself included, are a lot better at retrospective vulnerability than real-time vulnerability.

Like, it's a lot easier to say, yeah, I struggled with that three or four months ago, three or four years ago, and God helped me with that, and I'm better. What's harder to say is, my life is a wreck right now.

And there's this thing in my life that I don't know how to control, I don't know what to do, but I just want someone to know. That takes a lot more boldness, a lot more courage. This is a very, it's a scary thing to do.

It's one of the things that we fear most. One of the things we fear most is that we would be vulnerable, that we would open up our lives, and have someone know something about us, and not love us.

And to reject us in return. To either not know what to do, to kind of leave. That we would be deeply known, but not loved, is one of our deepest fears.

[ 20 : 06 ] And for many of us, it's sadly been some of our realities. But the beauty of the gospel is that, in Jesus Christ, we have a God who meets our vulnerability with his own vulnerability.

Like, he takes the initiative in being vulnerable with us. In his incarnation, he made himself open to all kinds of pain, and rejection, and suffering that we experience. And we see the fullness of this vulnerability on the cross.

He opened himself to a shameful, humiliating death. His body was exposed and naked, dying for us, and for the whole world. There is no one who has been more vulnerable with you than Jesus Christ.

And it is through his vulnerability that the healing power for the world comes. Like, that is how God heals the world, is through the vulnerability of Christ. And there is no one who loves you and delights in you more than him.

Our respected Christian counselor, Dan Allender, says that the only antidote to shame is the word and the touch of someone who delights in us.

[ 21 : 16 ] The only antidote to shame is the word and the touch of someone who delights in us, and that is what we get in Jesus. And every week, we get the opportunity in the Eucharist to be reminded that Jesus loves us and delights in us and that this is not an abstract reality.

He made himself utterly vulnerable to show us this. His body was broken for us. His blood was spilled for us. And his vulnerability is an invitation for us to be vulnerable with him and with people that we trust.

And so as we close, I want you to hear Jesus' words again from Matthew chapter 8. That as you think about the places in your life where you long to Jesus come and bring about restoration and healing, I want you to think about those places.

And I want him, I want you to hear him say to you, I am willing. I am willing. I am willing. I am willing to go there. I am willing to touch that.

I am willing to heal that. I am not repelled by that thing in your life. It doesn't make me cringe. I'm actually drawn to it. Like that's the thing in your life that I am most drawn to because I love you and I delight in you.

[ 22 : 35 ] And I know that for most of us, healing will be a process, maybe even a lifelong process. And I don't know where that journey will take you, but I do know that this is where it starts.

This is where it starts. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.