

Healing the Sick

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Preacher: Keith Knowlton

[0:00] Children of the congregation here, we thank you for Junior Church, for all who work there with them, all who love to serve you in that way.

Different religions as something that could interest them, but Lord, we pray that you'd bless them, bless Christian teachers. Lord, we pray that you would be with our children. Again, we pray for a youth conference and we thank you for today.

And Lord, many can look back on their experience as they've been to youth conferences in the past as they grew up and can identify with the blessing that they have been as they've grown up in the church and been blessed by the times of fellowship with young believers as they've grown up in our church.

So, we'd remember that work and we thank you for all who are organizing the program this year. And we pray in maybe another blessed time of being aware of God's presence with them this, in the coming Easter time.

So, Lord, we pray you'd bless us now as we continue to worship you this evening. We thank you that we can sing your praises and we can pray to you.

[1:48] And we aren't praying to an unknown God. We're praying to a God who has revealed himself to us and continues to reveal himself to us in a special way.

Lord, bless Keith as he preaches to us this evening. Again, Lord, may he be aware that you are speaking through him. Thank you for the gifts you've given to him.

And Lord, we thank you that we're here this evening. So, may the whole evening of time of worship be a blessing to us. These things we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we'll continue to worship God singing this evening. Killing the leaders in Psalm 103, 1 to 4 and 8 to 11.

And the verses are on the screens. Amen. Praise God, my soul, with all my heart.

[3:00] Let me exalt his holy name. Forget not all his benefits.

His praise my soul in song proclaim. The Lord forgives you all your sins. And heals your sickness and distress.

Your life he rescues from the grave. And crowns you in his tenderness.

And crowns you in his tenderness. The Lord is merciful and kind.

To anger slow and full of grace. He will not constantly reprove.

[3:59] Or in his anger hide his face. He does not punish our misdeeds.

Or give our sins their just reward. How great is love as high as heaven.

Towards all those who fear the Lord. Towards all those who fear the Lord.

Sorry, is that better?

That was my mistake. User error. It's good to be with you this evening. I was preaching at S Valley earlier today. And while that's a blessing, it's always good to be back with your own people. So if we haven't met before, my name is Keith.

[5:10] We'd love to be able to speak with you after the service. Now we turn to the preaching of God's word. We're going to be continuing our study through the book of Matthew. We're going to be in Matthew chapter 8 tonight.

This is on page 972 of the church Bible. We're going to be looking at verses 1 through 13. This passage that records this trio of miracles of Jesus. The very first ones recorded in the gospel. But by way of introduction, if we can go back in time to May of 1940. There was a new election for prime minister. And Churchill comes to power.

We're only eight months into World War II. And the Nazis have pretty much moved unopposed through much of Western Europe. And there's this fear growing in the UK. Will the Nazis reach the island?

Is there any way to stop Hitler's advance? And of course, Churchill was not shy in voicing his opposition of Hitler and the Nazis. Reiterating his plan to secure victory however long the road may take.

[6:12] So even just a short time, a mere few weeks into his position as prime minister. He gives this very famous speech. And I'm sure many of us even know the words to on 4th of June 1940.

And he speaks of though even though much of Europe has fallen. He goes on to say this, that we shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France. We shall fight on the seas and the oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender. Of course, we know Churchill was a rather famous orator.

A rather gifted one. And while these words are very inspiring in this speech, they would have made no difference to the British people had they not been backed up with action. When Churchill came to power, he quickly asserted his authority.

[7:15] He quickly authorized Operation Dynamo, which rescued 300,000 troops from the beaches of Normandy, brought them back to the UK.

He reorganized military leadership. He committed financial resources to this ongoing struggle. He prepared a nation for what was going to be real sacrifice. And so we see here that his words were not simply empty rhetoric, but they were backed up by decisive and costly action.

So what we see in this passage, where we are in Matthew right now, we see this relationship between words and actions. We're at this shifting point in Matthew because leading up to Matthew 8, we have Matthew recording the Sermon on the Mount for three chapters, Jesus teaching.

And we see that he's describing this new ethic on the Sermon on the Mount, this new way of living, this new way of thinking. And we recognize that people were taken aback.

They were astonished at this teaching, teaching they'd never heard before. But as we arrive here in chapter 8, we witness this shift. Because Matthew is pointing out Jesus is not simply a wise teacher, not just an inspirational speaker, not just some wise sage who's trying to garner attention.

[8:29] But he is this promised Messiah who comes with all power and authority to establish a new kingdom, to overthrow the reign of the evil one.

So let's look at our passage, Matthew chapter 8, starting in verse 1. When Jesus came down from the mountainside, a large crowd followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you are willing, make me clean.

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, See that you do not tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priests and offer the gifts Moses commanded as a testimony to them.

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help. Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly. Jesus said to him, Shall I come and heal him?

A centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.

[9:37] I tell this one, go, and he goes. And that one, come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

I say to you that many will come from east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then Jesus said to the centurion, Let it be done just as you believed it would. And his servant was healed at that moment. When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.

He touched her hand, and the fever left, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him. And he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

And this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He took up our infirmities. He bore our diseases. This is the word of God. Will you pray with me? Lord, as we come to the preaching of your word, we ask that you give us eyes to see Jesus clearly.

[10:56] Not just as a teacher of truth, but as a compassionate king. We ask, Lord, that you cleanse our hearts, that we may have understanding, that you strengthen our faith to trust in your word.

That you may soften our wills, that we may respond in obedience. May we sense this evening the nearness of your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, as we dig into this passage, as we consider these three miracles of Jesus, I think it's worth considering miracles more broadly. Why did Jesus perform miracles?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' miracles are commonly referred to as acts of power or mighty works in the Greek. And they're not meant to simply highlight physical transformation, but to point out deeper spiritual reality.

And so what I think these miracles reveal to us here is something about the true identity of Jesus. As I mentioned, if you're new to the Bible and you only read the Sermon on the Mount, and you knew nothing else of Jesus, you'd probably conclude he was some wise teacher.

[12:07] But Matthew is going much further than this in his Gospel. He wants us to gain a true understanding of Jesus' real identity. Even to the point that it leaves the disciples saying later in Matthew, what sort of man is this?

And so when we consider these miracles today, I want us to consider what they reveal to us about Jesus. Three things I want us to focus on. First, the compassion of Jesus. Second, the authority of Jesus.

And third, the mission of Jesus. So let's think first about the compassion of Jesus. We see right off this leper comes to Jesus and is asked to be made clean.

I think it's important that we understand the cultural context and what is taking place here. Those who were around Jesus who saw this happen, their minds likely would have gone to Old Testament law.

Law that talks about the leper in Leviticus 13 and 14. Leprosy was this all-encompassing term that includes this wide variety of skin diseases. It really defined who that person was.

[13:10] And in a way, there was no other disease that was treated the same in the Old Testament. So if a leper touched a cup, that cup would be unclean. If you were to touch someone's clothes, those clothes would be unclean.

If you were to touch the wall of a house, that house would be unclean. He was a social outcast with no place among God's people. He was instructed to dwell outside the camp.

To leave behind friends and family. To go off and live by himself. So he wasn't allowed even to come and worship in the temple. This is what it says in Leviticus 13, 45. It says, The leprous person who has this disease shall wear torn clothes and let his hair on his head hang loose.

And he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, unclean, unclean. I think what we see here in this description of this disease is really what God thinks about sin.

That because of our sin, we are unfit for fellowship with God. Unfit for fellowship with his people. Unfit for fellowship with his people.

[14:41] Rather in a sense of desperation, he says, Am I God to kill and make alive? You see, he was equating this cleansing of leprosy with the raising of the dead.

And so we see this symbolic, this disease having this symbolic meaning. It goes far beyond just a skin condition, but it really goes to the heart. To the corruption of our whole nature, which requires divine intervention.

If we're truly going to be healed and cleansed of our sins. And so this all the more should help us understand how wonderful this being the first miracle in the gospel. The first miracle that Matthew records.

And so think for a second. What's the mindset of this leper? He knows that if he were to have even a casual interaction with somebody, he's going to make them unclean. He knows that culture and the law tells him to stay away from people.

But what does he do? He comes toward Jesus. And so we should see the significance of this action. Just how audacious, just how brazen he's being here. And how does Jesus respond?

[15:45] It says in verse 3, He stretched out his hand and he touched him. Again, this is a man who is an outcast from society. Legally, culturally, physically, he's unclean. And what does Jesus do?

He doesn't reject him. He touches him. I think we see here is an act of identification on Jesus' part. He's willing to identify with his leprosy, identify with his defilement, even to identify with his sin. We see similar interactions that Jesus has then with this centurion in verse 5. Jesus entered Capernaum. Centurion came to him asking for help. Lord, he said, my servant lie at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.

Again, just like this leper, I think it's important to understand the cultural context of how this Roman soldier would have been viewed. This is a Gentile man, someone outside of the circle of Judaism. Even more so, he's a Roman soldier. The Romans were the ones who were oppressing and occupying the Jews. The Jews were praying that the Messiah would come to free them from Roman occupation. And so, just like this leper, this Roman soldier would have been considered unclean.

[16:58] He was associated with idolatry, worship of false gods. He was outside of God's covenant people. He lacked access to the temple for cleansing and sacrifice. So, there would never have been a good and faithful Jew who would ever want to associate with a Roman soldier.

But what does Jesus do? He offers not only to associate with him, he offers to come to his home. An act that a Jewish person would have thought would have made them unclean.

Jesus moves in compassion, willing to identify with his Gentile. Willing to identify with an outsider. Identify even with an enemy. We move to verse 14.

Jesus came to Peter's house. He saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. So, a third time, Jesus is going against the cultural norm.

In that day and age, a Jewish woman would have held a lower social status than a man. So, if this woman was lying sick in bed, it would have been totally against culture and custom for a man to approach her and be near to her.

[18:02] But Jesus goes and touches her. And something even unique about this one, because in the first two instances, the leper and the centurion come to Jesus. In this one, we see Jesus not even being asked, moving in this woman, moving toward this woman, seeking to restore her health.

And so, in each of these encounters, we see this incredible, miraculous compassion. And so, I wonder, in our day and age, when people outside the church think of this Christian God, what is their opinion of him?

How do they characterize him? Probably many would think, well, he's just this distant, harsh, oppressive God who's just waiting for someone to mess up so he can bring down the hammer and judge us.

Thinking of someone we've got to do enough good in order to gain his love. We have to be constantly obedient. We've got to kind of twist his arm in order that he accept us. We see something very different in this picture in our passage.

It's the compassion of Jesus that he moves toward the outcast. He identifies with their illness. He desires to bring restoration. And so, I wonder, even to those of us who are in Christ, if we sometimes doubt this.

[19:22] Because I think we can get this false idea in our head that we still have to earn God's favor somehow. That we, especially when we fall into sin, we think, well, we've got to get ourselves back in order.

We've got to get back on the straight and narrow before God will truly desire to forgive us.

Sometimes we just want to wallow in our shame and the embarrassment of our sin.

We don't think we can approach God, and so we just grow more and more distant. But this is a simple truth that we see in our passage. That Jesus loves you.

Jesus loves you and desires to shower you with his compassion. In our sin and in our filth, in our shame and in our guilt, he moves toward us in his compassion.

And so, I urge each of us this evening that we may have the same audacity of this leper and centurion to move toward Christ. If you've never done that before, to recognize that he loves and he cares for you.

[20:26] For those of us who have experienced his love, may we never forget his constant compassion. His desire to bring cleansing to us. So that brings us to our second point.

Not only do these miracles highlight Jesus' compassion, but they also highlight his authority. Many of you saw my parents who were visiting over Christmas. It was a blessing to have them here, but on the way here, they had some traveling difficulties.

They were supposed to fly from Florida to New York to Edinburgh, but because of some bad weather in New York, their plane never arrived in Florida, and they were going to miss their flight to Edinburgh, so they had to get their flights rebooked for the next day.

The problem was they had already checked in their bags when all this was rearranged, and so they had to wait for their bags to come out so they could collect them so they'd go back home and then come again tomorrow. But long story short is they waited in the airport for six hours in order to get their luggage.

And they went to the desk, and they explained the situation, and the woman was, of course, kind and trying to explain that they'll be out shortly, so they waited some more. And they go to the desk again and say, We need our bags, and the lady's trying to express some sort of sympathy and says, Yes, they'll be out soon.

[21:38] She expressed her apologies in turn, but still no bags. So we see that this airport personnel at this desk, they tried to express compassion, but they had no authority to actually bring about change.

My parents didn't want sympathy. They wanted their luggage. So I think in our passage, we see something very similar, because the compassion of Jesus would have been worthless if it wasn't accompanied by his authority.

These individuals that Jesus healed would have cared very little if he came up to them and simply said, I'm sorry. I really feel bad for you. I wish you well.

But instead, what we see is that they recognize his authority. This centurion says in verse 8, Lord, I do not deserve to have you even come under my roof, but say the words and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go, and he goes. This one, come, and he comes. I say to the servant, do this, and he does it. The centurion recognized the supernatural authority of Jesus.

[22:48] He was not a mere man. He was not simply a wise teacher. He was the divine Messiah with the ultimate authority to bring about immediate and complete healing.

And so notice the ease at which Jesus heals here. With his mere touch, he heals the leper and Peter's mother-in-law. Doesn't prescribe any medication.

Doesn't say, well, come back in a week, we'll see how you're doing. And even to the centurion, he doesn't even have to be present. At a distance, he provides healing. And what we see in each situation, the healing is immediate.

We see that creation here does not hesitate to respond to the commands of the creator. Think about how these miracles were a bit different from what we see in the Old Testament.

These, again, are the first miracles recorded in the New Testament. If we go back to the Old Testament and think again about Elisha and Elijah, it records that both of them brought a child back from the dead.

[23:51] But in both instances, it tells how they did this. It says they cried out to the Lord, that they prayed to the Lord, and the Lord answered their prayers and brought these children back to life. The power to heal was external to them.

We see here something very different. Jesus does not pray. He doesn't need to summon some sort of external power. For he is God. And in himself is all power and authority.

And of course, we see this authority not only demonstrated in this power, but really throughout Matthew's Gospel. He heals the sick. He casts out demons. He calms the sea. He raises the dead. Even himself.

Raising himself from the dead. He rose from the grave. Leading us to what we see at the very end of Matthew, where Jesus proclaims before his ascension, all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.

All authority. Not just the authority of the natural world. Not just the authority over sickness. All authority. Over the supernatural. Over the spiritual. And so these miracles, they're not simply just acts of compassion.

[24:57] They really prove the arrival of the king who has come to make right all that's been broken by the fall. And so we, what happens when these people recognize the authority of Jesus?

How do they respond? It says they respond in faith. Faith that's even far greater than anything any Jesus had seen of anyone else in Israel. And so a question for us is, do we share in that faith in the compassion and the authority of Jesus?

I think oftentimes our circumstances may cause us to doubt the compassion and authority of Jesus. Maybe we can see in this passage, okay, Jesus is asserting his authority in his earthly ministry, but what is he doing now?

Because we may know people who are ill. Or maybe we, you or I are unwell ourselves or struggling in some way, physically or spiritually or emotionally or some other hardship that we're facing. And we might ask, God, you healed this leper. Why can't you heal me? And we begin to wonder, can we trust God? Is he really in control?

[26:15] We think about our dear brother Duncan, battling cancer for years and moved to hospice this week. And we as a church have been praying for him for years and years and doesn't seem that healing is gonna come.

So what are we to do? Are we to doubt the compassion and the authority of Jesus? No. We remember that Jesus' miracles point to a deeper spiritual reality.

That he did not come merely to bring physical health, but spiritual life. Cancer is only a symptom of the fall.

And Jesus didn't come simply to treat symptoms. He came to fix the root of the problem, our sin. Paul says in Ephesians that we are dead in our sins. But because of God's great love for us, he made us alive with Christ. For by grace, you have been saved through faith.

[27:33] And so do we respond with this faith that the centurion man had? To recognize that we can't save ourselves, that we do not come with any sense of worthiness to Jesus thinking that we have merit on our own.

But do we place our trust in Jesus as the only one who can save? That brings us to our final point. That these miracles reveal to us the mission of Jesus. Think again about Churchill. What was his mission in becoming prime minister?

Was it to appease the Nazis? Was it to broker and negotiate some peace treaty? No. It was absolute, unmitigated victory for the United Kingdom.

We see a very similar thing in our gospel. Matthew often speaks of a kingdom, a different kingdom, the kingdom of God.

[28:36] And so how is this kingdom brought about? Look in verse 16 and 17. We see a rather surprising Old Testament reference. The centurion says to Jesus, Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof.

Just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself a man under authority with soldiers under me. Let this one go and he goes and this one come and he comes.

How does Jesus respond to this? He says that he hasn't seen such faith in anyone in all of Israel. And so looking back at verse 17.

It goes on to say that he healed the demon possessed and all who were all who were sick he healed. And this is to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

He took up our infirmities and he bore our diseases. This is what a passage from Matthew 53 what Neil read for us earlier.

[29:44] It's a passage that probably are familiar to many of us. It's a suffering servant passage. Many times this is actually referenced often

in the New Testament. But it's funny that each time it's referenced in the New Testament it's always pointing to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Only here in Matthew 8 is it linked to this healing that Jesus performs. Why is that? Because Jesus sees that our sickness is caused by our sin.

And that doesn't mean that we get sick because of our sin in this day and age and we need to repent and then we get sick again and we need to repent. No, he's saying that our sickness and sadness our suffering and death enter the world because of Adam's original sin because of the fall of man.

And so by linking this prophecy to our passage Matthew's really emphasizing that our sin must be dealt with. This is why Jesus came into the world. These miracles point they point us to the cross where Jesus identifies with our fallenness where he takes up our sin.

This is the mission for why Jesus came to shed his blood on the cross for the payment of our sins that we might receive his righteousness as he takes on our guilt that we may be seen as cleansed and pure inside of the Father.

[31:03] And so each of these miracles each of these miraculous healings of Jesus they should point to the future of each person whom Christ saved. And so you may ask well who is it that Christ saved?

The Jews in that day they were hoping and praying that this Messiah would come thinking they alone God's people would be saved. Not the Gentiles not the Romans but them. But Jesus has a very different understanding which he says in verse 10.

He says I say to you that many will come from east and west and will take their places at the feast of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown out into darkness and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps I wonder if Jesus was thinking about another prophecy from Isaiah as he said these things.

Isaiah 25 it speaks of this worldwide celebration that takes place on Mount Zion and it says there on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make all his people will make for all his people a feast of rich food a feast of well aged wine and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil that is spread over all nations and he will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away every tear from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from the earth.

[32:38] This offer of life that Jesus provides is not simply for the Jewish people it was God's plan from the beginning of time to save his elect from every people and every nation salvation is available to all who come to Christ in faith.

but it says the wrath of God is reserved for those who reject him. And so we see in these miracles of Jesus these messianic deeds of salvation they point to this eternal reality that Satan's power has been broken that the kingdom of God has come to bring redemption from all evil restoration for the whole body.

And so how do we respond to this truth? The Dutch theologian Hermann Ritterbach he puts it this way he says a miracle of Jesus as much as his preaching in its sense that it brings it shows us the revelation of God the kingdom of God is a confrontation which necessitates a decision.

It's a confrontation which necessitates a decision for or against Jesus as the victor of the evil one and the bearer of the spirit of God.

If you're here and you've never made that profession of faith to recognize Christ as the victor I invite you to receive this grace from a compassionate Messiah who has all authority to cleanse you of your sins and welcome you in as a citizen of his kingdom.

[34:22] If you're here and you've already experienced that cleansing may we long for the day when this mission is accomplished and when the kingdom of God is fully consummated.

this is what's described in Revelation 21 when God dwells with his people and God himself will be with them as their God and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away and he Jesus himself he who is seated on the throne says behold I am making all things new.

This is the mission of our Messiah to bring about complete healing to all of creation. May it be so.
Let's pray.