

Christ's Authority for Outcasts

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[0:00] Well, if you'd open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 8, we're resuming our preaching through the Gospel of Matthew. Children, we are so glad you're joining us this morning.

If you would, we've got a passage that is so vivid. Would you write, would you draw some pictures for me of what we're about to read and what you're going to hear me preach?

It is absolutely amazing. This is Matthew chapter 8, verses 1 through 17.

When he came down from the mountain, preaching the Sermon on the Mount, 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.

[1:12] When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him.

But the centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me.

And I say to one, go, and he goes. And to another, come, and he comes. And to my servant, do this, and he does it. But when Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.

In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment.

[2:20] And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she rose and began to serve him.

That evening, they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons. And he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Well, it's New Year's resolution time. You know that time of year when a person turns over a new leaf?

It's time to change in some ways. And a new year is a great opportunity to set some things in motion. So what are your New Year's resolutions?

Well, let me suggest one this New Year's. It's a life resolution. In light of who Jesus is. In light of what he's done for you.

[3:26] Would you make a resolution today to follow him? All of your days. In all that he commanded.

The Gospel of Matthew is about the kingship of Jesus. And at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus has died and has been raised from the dead, that's the climax of the whole book.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus, in the Great Commission, announces that he has been given all authority on heaven and earth. Jesus is the rightful King of all.

Lord of lords. King of kings. And as his disciples, we are to humbly submit to his authority by obeying all that he commanded.

Jesus says, All authority has been given to me. Go make disciples of the nations. And one of the big parts of fulfilling the Great Commission is to teach those who believe in Jesus after we share the Gospel with them.

[4:27] And then they believe to teach them all that Jesus has commanded. So that they too obey. The Gospel of Matthew is about the kingship of Jesus.

About his authority. So what is authority? Authority is the right to exercise power and to require obedience. Parents exercise authority over children.

Teachers exercise authority over students. Governments exercise authority to make laws and to enforce laws with citizens. And in this morning's passage, which I just read, we're going to see Jesus exercise his authority to heal.

It's a series of healings. There's actually four little segments here. And children, if you're drawing me a picture, Jesus is going to heal a leper. He's going to heal a centurion, which is a soldier. He's going to heal a sick woman. And he's going to heal groups of people that are brought to him one night. In initial reading of this passage, we may cause you to draw the conclusion that what all these healings have in common is that they point to Jesus and that they reveal he is the Messiah.

[5:44] And it's true. They do. And he is. But there's something else being emphasized here. These four healings have something else in common.

It's about who Jesus exercises his authority for. So here's what we're going to do. We're going to walk through this passage and take a closer look at these four encounters in which Jesus exercises his authority to heal.

And at the end of this, I'm going to make a point of what this passage is all about. The point's going to come to the fore as we move through it. And then, to close, I'd like to try to apply this passage by way of three New Year's resolutions.

So let's walk through it. The first encounter we read about is in verses 2 through 4. Jesus and a leper. Now when you hear the word leprosy, you may be thinking of a certain kind of disease. It's known as Hansen's disease. It's when a bacteria attacks the nerve endings in someone's hands or appendages. And it results in some horrible deformities and pain.

[7:00] But when we talk about leprosy in the Bible and what the Mosaic Law considers unclean is not just Hansen's disease. It's all different kinds of skin disorders.

And so what you need to know is that according to the Mosaic Law, if you have Hansen's disease or some other kind of skin disorder, you are considered ceremonially unclean.

And if you touched someone who had a skin disorder, you were ceremonially unclean, which means you were unfit to come into God's presence to worship.

In fact, to protect others from becoming unclean through contact with lepers, the Mosaic Law would require a leper or someone with a skin disorder to, when approaching other people, to cry out, unclean!

I am unclean! I am unclean! Could you imagine that? The effect that that would have on you over time? There would be the hardship of the disease.

[8:06] Suffering Hansen's disease would be brutal enough. And then there's the spiritual hardship of being prohibited, if you're a Jew, to enter into other Jews with the worship of God. And then there's the social hardship.

Could you imagine being isolated socially from the people that you love? And then there's the psychological hardship. What effect would it have of going from town to town, walking among people, and having to say, I am unclean!

And just watching people scurry from you. So when we read here in chapter 8, verse 2, that a leper approaches Jesus, what you need to know that this leper on all accounts is an outcast.

In verse 2 we read this leper falls down before Jesus and addresses Him as Lord. Now he could have just been saying, being polite and saying, Sir, but given that he's fallen down before Jesus, when he calls Him Lord, he is saying, You've got authority.

And in verse 2, what we read is that this leper has no question about Jesus' ability to heal Him. What this leper has a question about is Jesus' willingness to exercise His power to heal Him.

[9:33] Lord, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean. It's like He's saying, Lord, are You willing to exercise Your authority to heal an outcast like me? Are You willing?

And in verse 3, we see Jesus' response. You know what? I love being a follower of Jesus. And I love being a follower of Jesus when I read things like this.

In Matthew 5, 6, and 7, we see the authoritative preaching and teaching of Jesus and it's phenomenal. And when we get into here in Matthew 8, we see Jesus encountering other people. He shows us how God would interact with people because He is God. and I love it. I love seeing Him. I love seeing what He's about to do. He's my Savior and Lord.

This one we're about to read about, He's your King. This is who you're following. Look what He does in verse 3. He reaches out and He touches this leper.

[10:37] He stretches out His hand and touches Him. Nobody in Israel would have dared to touch this leper out of fear of contracting the disease, out of a desire not to become ceremonially unclean.

They don't want to be banished, but not Jesus. He doesn't shrink back from this leper. He's not afraid of this leper. He's not disgusted by this leper. He moves towards the leper.

And when He touches him, instead of Jesus being made unclean, Jesus cleans the unclean. Jesus could have just healed them with words.

When He heals the centurion's servant in just a minute, it's just with words. He could have healed them with just words, but He touches them. When was the last time this leper was ever touched by another human being we don't know?

But the first one to touch Him was God incarnate. Jesus. He reaches out and touches this untouchable outcast saying, I am willing to be clean.

[11:56] And immediately, His leprosy clears. He's been healed. He's been made clean. In the words of D.A. Carson, Jesus' authority immediately accomplished what He wills.

And He willed this leper clean. And then in verse 4, we have some interesting things Jesus says to him.

Jesus essentially says to this former leper now, hey, what I just did to you, keep it on the down low, buddy. Don't tell anybody, please. Now, you might wonder why He's doing that.

Well, Jesus didn't want to gain a following for just being a healer. He didn't want to make His, give Him less opportunities and make His ministry more difficult by stirring up all sorts of crowds.

In fact, in Mark's account of this healing, Jesus tells the leper, don't go tell anybody. And then the leper goes and tells everybody. And what Jesus has to do in return is, He's no longer able to enter town freely to preach.

[13:02] And so He's got to now go to the outskirts of towns. And so Jesus wants access to towns to preach the good news. And so He told this leper, don't go blabbing this around.

I've got other things to do. But then He says something else to this leper. He requires this cleansed leper to go show himself to the priest and offer a gift of Moses.

Moses required. The priest He has in mind is a particular piece. He would have been like the QC priest. Quality control. This priest would decide whether or not someone was truly healed of a disease so that they could reenter their social world.

And so what Jesus is saying here is abiding by the law of Moses. He says, go to the priest, show them that you're healed, offer your gift, and return to your relationships.

What this points to is not just an immediate healing, but a complete healing. Jesus says, go get checked out and go back to your family. What we learn from this little passage is that Jesus has authority over disease.

[14:19] And when He exercises His authority over disease, it results in immediate and complete healing. But the surprise is that Jesus exercises His authority to heal an outsider.

Someone who is an outcast. A leper. By touching this leper, He doesn't become unclean. His touch cleanses the leper.

The second encounter is between Jesus and a centurion. And this is in verses 5 through 13. Now, a centurion was a Roman soldier of rank.

If you hear the word century in the word centurion, it makes you think of 100. A centurion had responsibility for 100 soldiers. And centurions were considered the backbone of the imperial army of Rome at the time.

You want to get things done, you get your centurion on it. Now, we read in verse 5 that Jesus is entering Capernaum, which is basically kind of the town of His ministry headquarters at the time.

[15:31] And in Capernaum at the time was a Roman garrison. And so, if you're in Capernaum, seeing Roman soldiers would not have been uncommon, but what you need to realize is that there would be Jews who viewed them as unwelcomed invaders.

What you also need to know about a centurion is that they were vested with the very authority of the emperor himself. And so, when a centurion commanded a foot soldier to go do something, that foot soldier would obey it as if the emperor was commanding him.

So, centurions were men who God understood authority. But there's also another really important note to make. Centurions were Gentiles.

They were non-Jews. And so, we're not told whether this particular centurion who comes to Jesus, whether he's Roman or he's Syrian, what we do know, he wasn't a Jew.

He was a Gentile. Gentiles were to be avoided by pious Jews because they'll make you unclean. Gentiles were unable to fully participate in Israel's worship of God.

[16:54] They were considered outsiders. So, in verse 5, upon entering Capernaum, this centurion appeals to Jesus, actually beseeches him by addressing him as Lord.

The centurion has somehow heard about Jesus and his ability to heal, and he's asking him to heal his servant. So, we have a Gentile asking a Jew to heal his servant.

And we learn that this centurion servant is at his home paralyzed and suffering terribly. Now, the question that we're starting asking is, is our Jewish Savior going to go to this Gentile's house and heal his servant?

In verse 7, Jesus responds to the request. He says, I will come and heal him. And some scholars think that Jesus is actually asking a question here as like, would you have me come and heal him? As in knowing that I'm a Jew, you're a Gentile, if I come to your house, you know, this isn't going to look good. Whether he is making a statement or asking a question, Jesus is willing to go.

[18:21] Let me try to help you understand kind of the scale of this. Do you remember in Acts chapter 10, Peter goes to Cornelius' house in Joppa.

Cornelius was a Gentile centurion. And when Peter walks into Cornelius' house, that would have been the first time Peter walked into the house of a Gentile at any point in his life.

first time, Gentiles were outsiders. And so for Jesus, a Jew, to go into a centurion's house, in verse 8, the centurion replies, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

And this isn't flattery. He goes on to say in verse 8, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. This Gentile centurion recognizes that Jesus, that Jesus is able to speak an authoritative word that will heal his paralyzed servant from a distance.

That's what this Gentile centurion knows. That's what he believes about Jesus. And he goes on in verse 9, say, hey, I get the authority thing. I too am a man under authority.

[19:47] I say to a soldier, go, he goes. I say to a soldier, come, he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and they do that. I get authority. But this Gentile centurion is saying that Jesus has an authority that supersedes the emperor's authority.

Jesus has the authority to heal someone paralyzed from a distance. that is an authority of God. And so at the end of verse 10, well, excuse me, in verse 10, Jesus' response, we read this.

When Jesus heard this, what the Gentiles said, he marveled. He was amazed. Jesus was amazed. the only other time that this word is used for Jesus in relationship to somebody else is when Jesus marveled at the unbelief of his fellow Jews in Nazareth in Mark 6.

6. And so when this word is used of Jesus, it's used of his marveling at the unbelief of fellow Jews regarding him, and he's marveling at the belief of this Gentile in relationship to him.

[21:20] At the end of verse 10, Jesus turns to those Jews who were following him. He was being followed by multitudes of primarily Jewish people. And it's like he hears this and he turns to them and he says,

truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

This Gentile's belief about Jesus stands out even among Israel. This Gentile centurion believed that Jesus possessed the authority of God.

Seemingly, the fellow Jews were having a hard time with that. This Gentile knew that Jesus just needed to say the word.

Just say the word and my servant back at my house is going to be healed. You just say the word, Jesus. Only God can do something like that.

In verse 11, Jesus takes the opportunity to clarify something. Jesus is going to now go high altitude. He's going, going to go talk about something in the future and he's going to go high altitude.

[22:39] Look at verse 11. He says, I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.

First, I want you to notice future tense. He goes into the future tense. I tell you, many will come. The sons of the kingdom will be thrown.

What's he getting at? Jesus is taking the opportunity to talk about who populates the kingdom of heaven.

He's got a teaching moment here. He says, I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. The many he's talking about are Gentiles.

Many Gentiles, many non-Jews, many non-Jews from east and west, what he's talking about is all around the world. They're going to come and recline at table with the patriarchs of the Jewish faith.

[23:46] Now, the reclining at table is a reference to the great end-time banquet of the people of God. Jesus is saying there are going to be Gentiles from all around the world who are going to be at the table of the great banquet feast, which is also known as the marriage supper of the lamb, Revelation 19.

The promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would bless all the nations of the world through his seed is being realized in Jesus Christ.

the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are not restricted to Jewish ethnicity. Jesus has thrown wide open the doors of the kingdom to all who would believe that he is the Messiah, whether Jew or Gentile.

Jesus is making clear that the outsiders, Gentiles, who believe in who he is, are welcome inside the end time banquet feast.

But, those who are insiders, the sons of the kingdom, the Jews, by rejecting Jesus, are cast outside the feast.

[25:11] Look at verse 12. While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That sons of the kingdom is an idiom referencing Jews.

And what Jesus is saying here is that those insiders who think that they're insiders, the sons of the kingdom, quote unquote, by rejecting Jesus as Messiah, they're going to be cast out into the outer darkness, the darkest of darkest places, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's torment. He's talking about hell. He's talking about rejecting Jesus as Messiah has eternal consequences. And by the way, it's not just for Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah.

It's for Gentiles too. For those Gentiles who believe and for those Jews who believe who Jesus is, who we claim to be, they are welcomed into the great banquet feast at the end of the time.

For those who reject Him, they will be cast out into outer darkness. So Jesus takes this moment, standing in front of the Gentile centurion to inform those listening about the true nature of the kingdom.

[26:28] Admission to the kingdom has everything to do with what you believe about Jesus, not your ethnicity. So in verse 13, Jesus turns back to the centurion and says, go, let it be done for you as you believed.

And we learn that the Gentile centurion's servant was healed immediately. They must have figured that out when they all reunited at the centurion's house. They're all there and like, okay, my sundial, when Jesus said that, it was at this, wait, wait, wait, you're saying that he was healed at that time?

Immediate, complete healing from a distance. So what do we learn? We learn that Jesus has authority to heal by word only, something that only God can do.

We learn that Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven as about believing in him. It's not about ethnicity, it's about Jesus. The kingdom of heaven is populated by Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus.

And of course, we see here Jesus exercising his authority for an outcast, a Gentile. The third encounter is between Jesus and a woman with a fever.

[27:44] We see this verses 14 and 15. And not just any woman, this is Peter's mother-in-law. Peter was married and had a house in Capernaum and his mother-in-law was living with him.

They were taking care of her. In this, the first encounter we saw the outsider was a leper. The second encounter, the outsider is a Gentile.

And in this third encounter, the outsider is this woman. being a woman in the first century would have been considered a second-class citizen, even in Israel.

Women would not be able to fully participate in Israel's worship of God for a variety of reasons. But look at what Jesus does. As soon as he walks into Peter's house and he sees his sick mother-in-law, he goes to her.

He doesn't call a girlfriend to go check on her. He goes to her. He's not put out by her illness. He's not put out by her gender. Like with a leper, Jesus touches her and she's immediately healed.

[28:55] And the completeness of her healing is demonstrated by the fact she gets right up and starts serving Jesus. It points to not only an immediate healing, but a complete healing.

God's love. So we see Jesus caring for women in other places in the Gospels as well. In John 4, Jesus has a very interesting encounter with a Samaritan woman.

So much so, Jesus' disciples were like, Jesus, shouldn't you come get something to eat with us and not talk to her? And in Luke 7, a woman of the city, another way of talking about a prostitute, she crashes a dinner party that Jesus was at, not just any dinner party, he was at a Pharisee's house named Simon.

And this prostitute walks in and she walks right to Jesus, anoints him with some very expensive ointment, and then starts washing his feet with her hair and her tears.

And you know what Jesus does? He doesn't flinch. He welcomes her doing that. He allows her to worship him. Meanwhile, Simon the Pharisee's flipping out.

[30:07] Jesus dignified every woman he encountered. And Peter's mother-in-law here represents another kind of outsider. And Jesus exercises his authority to her.

He heals her. The fourth encounter is between Jesus and many who were demonized and sick. We see that in verse 16. those demon possessed, those sick were considered unclean by pious Jews. They would have been avoided, but Jesus welcomes them. Bring them. And what we learn is that not only does Jesus welcome them, He casts out demons with a word.

Verse 16. He heals all who were sick that were brought to Him. nowhere in this passage does Jesus turn away any outcast, any outsider seeking Him.

He welcomes them all to Himself. He welcomes and heals them. Jesus once again exercises His authority for those who are avoided, for those who are marginalized, for the outsiders.

[31:23] after what was most likely a really long day, Jesus welcomed and healed more outsiders.

And then in verse 17, Matthew says that Jesus healing all these people was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.4. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

This is the famous passage of the suffering servant. God, God's man, His mighty arm of salvation providing deliverance for people caught up in sin in the most shocking and humble ways that God Himself would suffer and die in their place.

What Matthew is doing is by quoting Isaiah 53, Matthew is saying this Jesus is God's suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and He has gone to the outsiders.

He has come for the outcasts. And He's come to heal us of our greatest problem. It's not a skin disease.

[32:36] It's not an ethnicity problem. It's not a gender problem. It's not a problem of demon possession or being just overwhelmed with illness. Our chief problem is sin sickness.

And Jesus has come to heal that. So here we have four encounters between Jesus and outsiders. And so what's the point? Well, it's clear that Jesus has authority over disease. But that's not the point. The point is that Jesus exercises His authority over disease for outsiders.

That's the point. The emphasis is not just on His ability to heal, but on who He heals. A leper, a Gentile, a woman, demon possessed, sick.

Jesus has a heart for outsiders. Jesus came for the outcasts. The kingdom of heaven is made up of outcasts and outcasts outsiders who see themselves as they truly are, poor in spirit, and they see Jesus for who He really is.

[33:52] The Messiah, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, the suffering servant. He possesses the authority of God because He is God. So let's wrap this up with three New Year's resolutions.

Ready? New Year's resolution number one. keep Jesus the main thing. Jesus is the issue. What you believe about Jesus matters. Who do you believe Him to be? Only God in the flesh has the authority to heal someone paralyzed from a distance and only God in the flesh has authority to forgive sins.

Jesus is God in the flesh. We need to keep the main thing, the main thing, and the main thing is Jesus.

Secondly, the second resolution is rejoice. If you're a believer, rejoice. And here's why. He came for you.

[35:02] you are an outsider and He sought you out. We're all outsiders. Each of us have been separated from and placed outside a personal relationship with God and sin is to blame.

But Jesus became a man and He came to us outside in order to, by His grace, bring us inside into a relationship with God. And He exercised His authority to heal you of your greatest disease.

Isaiah 53 talks about by His stripes, you have been healed of your sin sickness.

And we didn't go looking for Him. He came looking for us. Out of His great love for you, He sought you when you were an outsider and He brought you in.

If you're in the kingdom of heaven, you're in it because you're an outsider. By His grace, rejoice. He sought you when you were an outsider.

[36:10] Resolution number three, value every person in your life as an image bearer of God. The kingdom of heaven is made up of outsiders.

And we are to see others who have yet to encounter Jesus the way that Jesus sees them. He wasn't put out by a leper or a Gentile or a woman or a demon possessed person or suffering illnesses.

He wouldn't be put out today by someone who's transgender or politically obnoxious or someone who's homeless or someone who is mentally ill. It wouldn't throw him. He'd move towards them because He sees them as image bearers.

And we are to see them as image bearers too. Who in your life do you need to see as an image bearer? Who in your life could it be this year that God reaches out, saves them by the blood of Jesus, and they will be placed next to you at the final banquet feast of the Lamb?

Jesus possesses the authority of God because He is God and He exercises that authority to outsiders and we're all outsiders.

[37:33] Do you know how someone should respond to Jesus when you recognize Him for who He is? You become His disciple. You start following Him, obeying all that He commands and that's the greatest resolution you can ever make.

Let's pray. God in heaven, we do thank You so much for Jesus and who He is. Lord Jesus, thank You for coming for me. Thank You for coming for each of us who claim Your name, who have been rescued and cleansed by Your blood.

We are Yours, Lord Jesus. We will follow You where You lead us. You are our King of kings. It's Your fame that we desire above all else.

God, help us to see others the way You see them. God, would You bring more outsiders into Your kingdom of heaven? Would You build this church?
Cause Your grace to go out in power and save. God, make us a people who are distinctly followers of Jesus from variety of backgrounds.
[38:43] We know that would bring You great honor and praise, Lord Jesus.
It's Your name we pray. Amen. Amen.