

The Healing Touch of Jesus

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 8. Let's read in Matthew chapter 8, page 813.

We're going to read from verse 1, and I think we're going to read to verse 17. It's down to verse 15 here, but change my mind, I want to read verse 16 and 17 as well. When he, that's Jesus, 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, or if you are willing, 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.

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

[1:16] But the centurion replied, Lord, I'm 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. 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.

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.

[2:25] 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. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. The power of touch is vastly underestimated.

During the COVID pandemic, if you remember, we weren't allowed to touch one another. I wonder whether those months of isolation affected us far more than we realize.

Because touch brings people together. Touch cements our relationships. Psychologists assure us that when someone we love touches us, it promotes the production of feel-good hormones.

[3:39] It can ease the extremes of grief, depression, or anxiety. By contrast, we know that unwelcome touch can foster emotions of fear and paranoia.

Fear or foul, touch and trust go hand in hand. Well, what about the touch of Jesus? In Matthew 8, verses 14 through 15, we read about an episode where Jesus touches someone who is sick and makes her well.

In her instance, it was a physical touch. I wonder what it must have felt like to be touched by Jesus, to have felt His hand upon us. What was that hand like?

It was probably fairly rough from all the carpentry He'd done in His earlier years, but it was probably also very tender, and as Lois reminded me last evening, very kind.

For there was never anyone as tender as Jesus. Rough hands are often very kind hands. Hands like Sandy McDonald's or Andy Murdoch's.

[4:49] Rough hands, but very kind hands. The hands of Jesus were rough enough to turn over the tables of the money changers in the temple, but gentle enough to place them on the heads of children to bless them.

If ever a person is to be truly healed, they need the touch of Jesus. Only if He should touch us shall we be clean.

The healing to which we refer, of course, as Irene said, isn't physical, it's spiritual. And the touch to which we refer is not physical, but spiritual. The physical Jesus is today seated on the throne of God in heaven, and it's therefore by His Spirit and Word He touches us.

Has Jesus touched you? Do you want Jesus to touch you? Do you want the healing touch only Jesus' hands can provide you with?

You know what I know, that if ever a society needed the touch of the Lord, it is our society, and that's what we're working for, and that's what we're praying for in our Wednesday prayer meetings here at Crow Road Free Church.

[6:00] I want us to briefly consider three things today from Matthew 8, verses 14 and 15, and the touch of Jesus. It's a touch that calls, it's a touch that heals, and a touch that serves and changes.

Touch that changes. Touch that calls, heals, and changes. And again, I ask you, have you been touched by Jesus? Perhaps today is the day when, for the first time, you experience the rough, yet tender, gentle, and kind touch of the Lord God of heaven and earth.

First of all then, it's a touch that calls, a touch that calls, and when Jesus entered Peter's house, He saw His mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. Now, for all we think of Peter as being impulsive and loud-mouthed, he really did love Jesus.

He, along with the apostles James and John, was one of Jesus' closest friends. Perhaps episodes like this one, recorded here, cemented Peter's love for his master.

And we learn two things about Peter here. First of all, he had a house, because Jesus entered his house. Having been brought up in the seaside village of Bethsaida, Peter moved, presumably to be closer to Jesus, to Capernaum, where we believe that Jesus also had a house.

[7:25] What happened to Peter's house after the resurrection of our Lord, we do not know. But the other thing we learn about Peter is that he was married. He had a mother-in-law, and by definition, that means he must have been married.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 9 verse 5 that Peter's wife often accompanied him on his missionary journeys. According to one of the early church fathers, Peter's wife was martyred for her faith in Jesus.

It strikes me as somewhat ironic that given Peter was the first pope in Rome and he was married, that all popes since then have required to be celibate.

So, it's the wife of Peter's mother who was sick in bed with a fever. We don't know what the precise nature of her fever was, but most likely, given the time and the region, it was a bad case of malaria. You know, still today in our world, 600,000 people die of malaria every year. And back then in Jesus' day, it was all but a death sentence. In the original language, fever is not translated.

[8:33] The word means burning. She's got a burning within her. She's extremely unwell. There's no paracetamol. There's no antibiotics in all likelihood. She's not going to survive.

Throughout the Gospels, we read many people like that in similar situations. There's a man with leprosy of whom we read at the beginning of chapter 8 who comes to Jesus. Then there's the servant of a centurion who's paralyzed and greatly suffering.

After this, we read of many who were demon-possessed who came to Jesus. Whereas we live, by and large, in healthy communities, back then in Jesus' day, health was extremely fragile.

Sickness and death was a daily reality. You couldn't avoid it. For some reason, though, Jesus seemed to attract many sick people to him, perhaps because he was known to be a healer.

Wherever he went, he was surrounded and swamped by those with great needs. He didn't live in an isolated tower of the desert unaffected by the problems common to humanity.

[9:43] He lived with the sick, he lived with the struggling, and he lived with the suffering. Well, no wonder the common man heard him gladly because they knew that in Jesus they had a friend who wouldn't walk away from them in that hour of greatest need.

Have you thought that perhaps in his earlier years, Jesus, having been bitten by a mosquito, also suffered from malaria? A great high priest who suffered like us and who therefore sympathizes with us in all our weaknesses.

So, Jesus enters Peter's house and there's Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed, burning up, and she's delirious. She's in no position to ask for Jesus' help. In previous accounts of Jesus' healing, we read of those who pleaded with him to heal them.

But in this situation, Jesus receives no such request because Simon Peter's mother-in-law is so very unwell. Now, we know nothing about this woman. Was she a good person?

Was she a bad person? Did she believe in Jesus? Did she not believe in Jesus? So, we have a healing which is unsought and undeserved. She has done nothing to deserve Jesus' healing touch, and she's done nothing to ask for Jesus' healing touch.

[11:02] His healing touch is entirely a function of his merciful initiative. Jesus takes the first step. He always does.

He makes the first step when he is unsought and undeserved. The mercy of Jesus always comes first. Always. And I really want us to understand this today.

In many of the accounts of Jesus' healing touch, those in need came to him begging for help. But here Jesus takes the first step. Theologians call this prevenient grace.

You know how you have convenient? It comes with. Prevenient means it comes before. It's the grace that comes first.

Prevenient grace. Jesus sees the need. He doesn't wait to be asked for help. He takes the initiative. He always takes the initiative. And is that not the whole story of the incarnation of Jesus?

[12:04] God saw us in our need and before we'd asked for help, he sent his son. Unsought and undeserved, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Unsought and undeserved, Jesus healed the sick and ministered to the needy.

Unsought and undeserved, he gave himself upon the cross to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. Unsought and undeserved, Jesus rose from the dead to destroy death and open the gates of heaven to lost sinners like us.

Well, now Jesus is in heaven. He's seated in the throne of glory at the right hand of the Father and his touch is no longer physical. Rather, he touches us by his Holy Spirit as he speaks to us through his word.

And here he finds us sick. Sick, not so much with physical fevers brought on by malaria or some other such disease, but sick with a disease altogether more serious.

We were conceived in sin. We were born as sinners. We have sinful natures which are in full-scale rebellion against God. We are strangers to God at his grace.

[13:16] We are without God and without hope in this world. We stand under his righteous condemnation as those weighed in his balance and found wanting. The Apostle Paul will later say, we were dead in our transgressions and sins in which once we used to live.

We were spiritually delirious, driven to spiritual insensibility by the cares and pleasures of this present world. We were rather like Peter's mother-in-law, delirious and driven to insensibility by malaria.

We did not go looking for Jesus. Jesus came looking for us. Jesus saw us in our need and love. He took the first step.

He did not wait for us to cry out to him for help, for if he'd waited, we'd never have cried out to him for help. We didn't even know who he was and we cared even less for our state as sinners lost to God and under his condemnation.

Jesus found us and by his Spirit he touched us. Later, when we became Christians, we looked back and we realized that before ever we had searched for Jesus, he had been searching for us.

[14:37] You know, today, Jesus is searching for you. Through his Spirit and Word, he is looking to touch you and through that touch to bring healing, forgiveness, and hope into your life.

He is here in this place at this time by his Holy Spirit. Will you let him find you? Will you open your heart and say to him, Lord, I am here.

I am listening and I am waiting for you to reach out with your mercy and your grace. I need you. So even so, come, Lord Jesus.

A touch that calls. Secondly, it's a touch that heals. A touch that heals. We are thankful that modern medicine has moved on immeasurably since the days of the first century.

I read the other day of a drug which may, and for this we pray, cure Alzheimer's disease. the treatments for cancer, thankfully, as Walter will tell you, as Tricia will tell you, are becoming ever more ingenious, ever more particularized, ever more effective.

[15 : 54] Malaria is no longer the disease it was, but even now it takes time for our cures to work and they don't always 100% work. But in verse 15 we read, he touched her hand and the fever, the burning within her, left her.

The burning fire in her system which came so close to death, that malaria which still kills 600,000 people in our world today, that murdering, cruel disease, with just a touch of his hand, Jesus takes it from her.

With no medicine, no injection, just the touch of a rough, kind, and tender hand. With no delay, with no time lag, with no after symptoms, the malaria leaves her and she's perfectly cleansed.

What no medicine or hospital can do, Jesus does with a mere touch. Now malaria, you know, is a disease spread by mosquitoes, so there's no danger of a person-to-person contagion.

But even so, Jesus did not become sick by touching her. Rather, He putified her by His powerful touch. A couple of verses after this, we read of a quotation from Isaiah 53.

[17 : 12] He took our illnesses. He bore our diseases. It is as if Jesus absorbed her malaria. It's as if Jesus bore her burning fever.

He took it upon Himself so that it no longer infected her, but rather cleansed and purified her.

Completely and perfectly healed. Now, we read these words in the Bible and take them for granted, but I want you to think through what really happened that day in Simon Peter's house.

Imagine yourself there. Right? Put yourself there. You are filled with anxiety because you can see that little old lady burning up. No doubt you've spent all morning pressing wet, cold towels on her forehead to cool her down in the hope that the fever would break.

But throughout the day nothing seems to work. She's getting worse, not better. She's crying out with delirium. You fear this will be her last day on earth and that by the end of the day you'll be burying her.

The door opens and in walks Jesus and He takes one look at her and unsought and undeserved He touches her.

[18 : 31] For a moment you think to yourself how futile and foolish the act because you've been touching her with a cold wet towel all day and nothing has happened. But in an instant in the twinkling of an eye the old lady's eyes open.

Her temperature drops. Her delirium goes and she sits up and serves straight into the eyes of her Savior. You have never seen anything like this before.

It is remarkable and miraculous. You can't quite get your head around what you have just witnessed. Was it an illusion? No, because you know that one moment she was close to death and now she's never been more alive than she is.

You conclude rightly that the difference is that touch of Jesus and taking your eyes from the woman you stare into the eyes of the man whose hands you know has changed her world and you say to him Jesus will you touch me also?

For as long as you live you'll tell everyone you know about what happened that day and how with a mere touch of those sandy and andy type hands those rough tender and kind hands Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law.

[19 : 59] You know when someone is touched by Jesus through his spirit and word for the first time it's no less dramatic because in the space of time it takes for your heart to beat once everything changes.

Once you were spiritually dead now you're spiritually alive once you were spiritually blind but now you can see in Jesus a glory and a love you hardly thought possible once the word of God washed over you didn't really understand it but now you were thirstily drinking it up the light has gone on and everything is new like a newborn baby which we hope will happen with Rachel this week you take your first breath of air and it tastes like nothing else you've ever tasted before nothing else matters to you other than to take that next breath and then that next breath and then another breath and then to keep breathing until that point you never knew you needed the saving touch of Jesus you thought you were alright you thought you had everything you could ever have needed there are tens of thousands hundreds of thousands of people in our city who have been lulled to sleep by the comforts in which they live they've got big houses they've got fast cars they've got good jobs they've got perfect families they've got good health they've got great pension forecasts they think they need nothing but then

Jesus comes and he touches them and for the first time in their lives they had something their money couldn't buy them do you want to experience the saving touch of Jesus in your life today of course no one who hasn't first been touched by the Holy Spirit wants Jesus touched because by nature we're dead in transgressions and sins and we can't hear his call the fact that you want to be touched by Jesus today is a sign that you already have been touched by Jesus today now it is your turn to respond to him in faith and trust to welcome him further to ask for a deeper healing touch the truth is that he has already borne your sin and spiritual disease by dying for you upon the cross and dying for your forgiveness nothing left for you to do other than to believe and trust in Jesus to trust it heals and then thirdly it's a touch that changes a touch that changes the passage ends with the words she began to serve him or literally it's a

Greek imperfect she was serving him now given that she was the mother-in-law of Simon Peter the disciple of Jesus we're going to make an assumption that on many occasions she had heard of Jesus perhaps even she had heard Jesus speaking perhaps she'd even met Jesus for herself she had all this experience of Jesus but she hadn't had the one experience of Jesus which is necessary for salvation she hadn't been touched by him but now she had and her whole world was new there are many of us here who have heard of Jesus our whole lives through brought up in church from Sunday to Sunday we've heard the stories about Jesus and his miracles perhaps we've also heard about Jesus from our parents and our families maybe even we've seen what Jesus has done in the lives of other people people we know whose lives have been changed when they came to know Jesus as their

Lord and Savior perhaps there's even been times in our lives when under the preaching of the word of God we've been so close to asking Jesus to touch us savingly we've been affected by what we've heard but then over time that feeling that impulse left us well Simon Peter's mother-in-law now begins to serve him and her service of him was not a one-off she became a lifelong servant of the Lord Jesus Christ she owed him her life she'd been all but dead but she's never been alive as she is right now given that that malaria had rendered her delirious and perhaps unconscious we could say to her that previously she was dead to the world you know how you say of someone they're dead to the world but now that Jesus has changed her life the world is dead to her she once was dead to the world but now the world is dead to her because

[24:51] Jesus touched her from now on she's going to devote her life to the service of Christ we don't know how much longer she lived for perhaps she was dead by the time Jesus himself died but for however long she lived every day she lived was lived for Christ throughout the gospels we meet with the same pattern Jesus meets with someone in need and heals we think of another famous lady in the new testament Mary Magdalene she had been in great need Jesus met her in her darkest suffering and healed her and she spent the rest of her life following and serving him we think of the great apostle Paul one time Saul of Tarsus Jesus met him in his deepest need because he was the persecutor of the church a vicious man Jesus brought him to him senses brought him to himself and Paul spent the rest of his life following and serving

Jesus even dying for Jesus after spending his whole life as a disciple time and again in the history of the church this has been repeated St.

Augustine had once been a promiscuous man filled with lust how many women he'd had who knows but he was touched by Jesus and for the rest of his life followed him and became a bishop in modern day Tunisia Martin Luther had desperately searched for truth until Jesus touched him Luther devoted the rest of his life to the proclamation of the gospel of Christ because those who have been saved from much will serve much those who have been saved from much will serve much look around this church today and you'll see people who follow Jesus not for cultural reasons not for traditional reasons but because they've been spiritually touched by Jesus and now they want to spend their remaining days however short however long they may be serving Jesus we've been saved by his touch now we want to serve him we want to serve him by touching others with that touch that changed our lives is your heart empty today maybe the

Lord God is beginning to do something in your life which you had never thought possible maybe he's getting ready to touch you have you become aware of how unsettled you feel and how though you know instinctively there is a God you don't know him and though you know the story of Jesus is true it means nothing to you it's a sign you know that God is already at work in you a process which will lead to him touching your heart and in so doing bringing life and salvation if only Jesus would touch you you'd know what difference he can make in your life the power of human touch is huge

the power of divine touch is infinite there aren't many things which can change the world but the touch of Jesus can and when he touches you his touch brings salvation forgiveness hope comfort love peace and joy and if you will pray for his touch today it's a sign that he's already at work in you nevertheless can I urge you as I close today now here pray for

Jesus to touch you in the quietness of your heart though you've never spoken to him before ask him to savingly touch you will you do this I can assure you it's a prayer he will honor and I promise that having been touched by Jesus your life will never be the same again and if you don't believe me ask Simon Peter's mother-in-law let us pray we worship you Lord Jesus for that saving touch for the way in which you reached out your rough strong kind tender hands and placed them on the mother-in-law of Peter your beloved apostle and heavenly father we ask that you would reach out by your spirit and word and let

[29 : 51] Jesus touch us today Lord we ask especially that there's any here who want to be touched by Jesus but feel as if they're not worthy they're too sick too far away from you or been gone away from you too long that you would reach out your hand and begin that saving work already and you would show them their great need of Jesus we ask these things in his name Amen