

At the touch of Jesus

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from God's Word now, so please open your Bibles or unlock your devices.

Turn to Matthew chapter 9. We're going to read from verse 18 through to verse 34. Now while he was saying these things to them, Then behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live.

And Jesus rose and followed him with the disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

For she said to herself, If I only touch his garment, I will be made well. Jesus turned and seeing her, he said, Take heart, daughter.

Your faith has made you well. And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, Go away, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.

[1 : 24] And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand. And the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, Have mercy on us, son of David. When he entered the house, the blind men came to him.

And Jesus said to them, Do you believe that I am able to do this? And they said to him, Yes, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done to you.

And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, See that no one knows about it. But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man, who was mute, was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke.

[2 : 31] And the crowds marveled, saying, Never was anything like this seen in Israel. But the Pharisee said, He casts out demons by the prince of demons.

Well, good morning, everyone. Well, let's pray as we come to God's word. Father, I pray that whatever blindness to Jesus remains in our hearts, or whether there are people here this morning or watching on Zoom who are still completely blind to who you are, I pray that your miraculous power that you worked that day, that we just read about, that you would work it today.

So breathe life into us and open our eyes to see your son even more, that we might have life in him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Well, when, you probably know this, but when entering a mosque, there's a washing ritual you've got to do.

I think it's called hoo-doo. I don't know if I've said that right. I probably haven't. But before entering the holy place, worshippers have to wash their hands and their feet.

[3 : 47] They're stepping into sacred space. It's not just in Islam that there's this external washing as a requirement to enter the presence of the holy. Anthropologists have found that in diverse cultures all over the world, cultures where they don't seem to have any connection in history, there's this distinction between unclean and sacred in all these different cultures.

And it's the same in Jewish roots as well. Have you ever tried to read the Bible from go to woe, from Genesis through? Genesis is pretty interesting.

And then Exodus, the first half is just riveting with all those miracles. And then the second half is you struggle a bit. And then you get to Leviticus. I mean, have you tried to read Leviticus?

It's just law after law after law of how to worship God. People often stumble at that point. And I think we can kind of have a canon of Scripture within the canon.

We kind of just put Leviticus to the side. It's too difficult. But if we leave Leviticus out, we're going to miss a really big point about God and worshipping him.

[4 : 58] The point of Leviticus, if I was going to summarise it, is that God is completely holy. You cannot approach him on your own terms.

He sets the terms. He is completely clean. You better be clean before entering his presence. If you want the enjoyment of fellowship with God and the blessings that flow from living with him, that's the point of the temple, you better be clean.

So let me just pick out a few verses from Leviticus about those who are disqualified. So in Leviticus 13, the person with leprosy must wear torn clothing, crying out, unclean, unclean.

He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. He's outside the people of God.

Leviticus 20 says to Israel, you shall be holy to me for I, the Lord, am holy and have separated you from the nations that you shall be mine.

They've got to be different. They've got to be distinct. In chapter 21, God says to the priest, no one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people by touching them, in other words, except in the case of a close relative.

[6 : 19] In chapter 22, the unclean are cut off from worshipping and eating in God's temple, in God's house. If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence.

I am the Lord. Do you get the picture? It's, you must be clean. If you were to enjoy God and his blessings, you must be clean if you want to be part of God's people.

I think a non-religious Australian at this point will be thinking that's the problem with Christianity.

That's the problem with religion. It sets up these arbitrary rules and those who believe in them will exclude and mistreat anyone who doesn't fit with their view of the world.

It's exclusive. It's oppressive. So what's our current culture's alternative? What's going to make for a society where everyone belongs and can thrive?

A prosperous society. I think we say this. Our culture is trying to do this. We let every individual person be their own ultimate standard of their life.

[7 : 45] You have your standard. I have my standard. There is no great standard that we have to all meet. You have your own. As long as yours doesn't harm anyone else.

Does that sound about right? In other words, I think our culture is trying to go, everything is clean. Every opinion, every lifestyle, every action, every choice is clean.

We're all clean. We all belong. Just don't harm anyone else. It kind of sounds good. But removing the ultimate standard creates a big, big problem.

Who decides what harms someone else? Who makes that decision? How do we decide where to draw the line between an individual exercising their freedom and what's doing harm to others?

I'm going to suggest we have no idea. There is no reference point. We're groping around in the dark. It sounds good, but it's making us blind.

[8 : 55] Now, I'm not... I didn't come up with this. It's like listening to a podcast with Jonathan Haight. Jonathan Haight, a social psychologist.

He's an atheist. Just, I want to put that out there. This is not a Christian. This is an atheist social psychologist, and he's done heaps of research into morality in cultures around the world. This is his conclusion of our current time.

So he's saying that after social media came in, and not social media... Anyway, we won't get into that, but after social media came in, it creates this echo chambers where we just listen to people like us, and it's fracturing us, he's saying.

We're not actually in community across the entire community. We create our little subset of community. So after social media have done that, and journalism, instead of all this great journalism going on, we need instant news.

So he says that for the New York Times, he had a friend who worked in the New York Times, and they sent out a memo saying, every story has to have something to do with race.

[10 : 05] That's not news. That's not news. They had to spin it to do with race, because people will listen to that. So he's saying before these happen, social media, how we're using it at least, and journalism, here's what he says.

There was this period before that that grounded us to truth, or rather gave us a process by which we could make progress towards truth and weed out terrible ideas.

I see it fading away. What controls our morals in our culture is an equality debate, but intimidation. So Jonathan goes on to say this. The dynamics of social media allows a small group to weaponise their moralism and to intimidate others into silence.

We don't need a change of generation. He's not blaming the generation. We need to change the dynamics so that bad ideas don't dominate and intimidate.

[11:08] So I think Jonathan agrees. The way we're doing things, we just don't know how to work out what's good and bad. We just try and intimidate each other. So religious rules, that doesn't work.

It excludes. You're in if you disobey, you're out. But then everything is clean. It's not working either. It's fracturing us.

We have no idea what's right and what harms others. We can't work it out. We need a better way, and I think we see that better way. We see a glimpse of it in Matthew chapters 8 through 10.

This is the better way. These chapters describe what Jesus' mission to save the world is all about. So after the Sermon on the Mount, where he says that you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, he doesn't lower the bar.

Do you notice something about all these people that encounter Jesus? So in chapter 8, who's the first person who is included in the kingdom?

[12:13] It's a leper. A cut off from community and temple worship. It's the leper who's made clean. And then we have a Roman, not a Jew.

And Jesus says that many from all over the world will recline in the kingdom, and many of the Jews are going to be outside. Then we have a woman who could not enter the inner core of the temple. Then we have demon-possessed men who are living outside in the tombs. We have a paralytic who clearly was cursed by God for his sin. And then he has dinner reclining with tax collectors and sinners, disgusting, defiling in the eyes of the Pharisees.

And Jesus says, I haven't come to call the righteous but sinners. It's the unclean who are in the kingdom of God, enjoying the blessings.

And this comes to a head in our passage today. We get more uncleanness, just receiving blessing.

So what happens if a person with COVID comes into contact with someone who is healthy?

[13:31] Which direction does the transmission go? Does the healthy person transmit their health to the COVID person and make them healthy? Of course not.

That's why there's fear in the air at the moment. It's the disease that transmits and contaminates the clean. In Leviticus 15, a woman having an extended discharge of blood.

Every bed she lies on, everything she sits on is counted as unclean. Whoever touches these objects, let alone touches her herself, will also be unclean.

And this miserable woman in her story has been bleeding for 12 years. She's like the leper. Cut off from people. Cut off from community.

Cut off from worship in the temple. The other Gospels talk about how she spent all she had. The temple couldn't help her. Doctors couldn't help her. She's hopeless.

[14:37] Hopeless. Separate, you see. Like the paralyzed man, she was probably tormented, not only by her condition, but fearing that she would be under the curse of God for her sin now and in the life to come.

Totally desperate, she does something according to the old law that I would call wrong. If you're under the old law, what she does is wrong.

She comes up behind Jesus and touches his clothes. She's just made him unclean.

Hasn't she? Jesus turns and sees her. And I wonder if that phrase, sees her, is just loaded with meaning. He knows her.

He sees her pain, her anguish under the curse. He sees her. Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well. Instantly made whole.

[15:42] She's clean. Instantly made whole. Instantly in the community of God. Instantly able to worship God in his temple. She's clean.

By the mercy of this man who touched her. The curse of sin that the old covenant could just tell her, you are unclean. By the touch of Jesus, the unclean is made holy.

It goes the other way around. And then we've got a little girl who's just died. If there's any sign of the curse of God on sin, it's death.

In Jewish culture then, they would hire professional mourners, which is still the practice in some cultures today, to just give expression to the depth of grief in the family.

Now, I think we try and hide death in our culture. A lot of people try and call death natural. It's just a part of life. That doesn't comfort me much.

[16:50] Death is horrible, the Bible says, because we were made to enjoy life with the internal one. It's the ultimate enemy to fellowship. No longer any opportunity for connection.

Funerals are the greatest reminder of the curse on sin in this world. We're faced with our own mortality, that we will stand before God as judge one day. I won't forget when I was a teenager in a night church service, and the pastor makes an announcement that a 12-year-old girl in the church had just been killed in a motorbike accident.

There was just silence in the room. Some started to cry. Most were just in shock. Imagine someone standing up.

Go home. The girl is just asleep. I kind of don't understand why they laughed. Why didn't someone punch him in the face?

That is such an inappropriate thing to say at a time like that. The story, Don. You might have the reputation of a great healer.

[18:11] Only God could raise the dead. And he took the lifeless girl by the hand, and instead of death contaminating his holy hand, his holy hand breathed life into her dead body, getting her up.

As if a dad just waking his little girl up ready for school that day. It was that simple. I couldn't imagine the emotion of the parents.

It must be like, I knew I wouldn't make it through today. Cleo this week. It must be, you thought your daughter was dead. It must be amazing.

This is an understatement, but something new is here. Someone new is here. So what does this mean about who Jesus is and what his mission is all about?

So far people have called him teacher. Others have gone further and called him Lord, but they probably don't recognise him as God, but just master. Jesus uses the phrase son of man, the Daniel 7 figure, but here we have two blind men being the first to recognise him, son of David, the promised Messiah, bringing all the kingdom blessings, King and Saviour.

[19:40] Now, if you were to lose any of your five senses, which is the last one you'd choose to lose? For me, it would be blind. It would be sight. If you want to cry, then watch the Netflix show, Notes on Blindness.

It's, I do recommend it. Just take some tissues with you. But this professor, it goes blind in his adulthood. There was two moments that just struck me that it's not just the difficulty of getting through the day that is so bad about blindness, but actually it got in the road of relationships. In a sense, it cut him off from relationships. So there's two things he talked about. At Christmas time, his kids were opening the presents, but he, dang it.

He had to walk out of the room. He couldn't see the smiles on their faces. It cut him off from his family. There's another one. I can't get it out.

But, these two blind men would have felt very much under the curse of God. Cut off. Not just difficult life, but cut off from the relationship with God and in community.

[21:04] Unable to worship at the temple. Leviticus 21. No one who has a blemish shall draw near a man blind or lame. They couldn't go in. Cut off from relationship with God.

And in Jewish thinking, they would have known, this is curse on my sin. And they cry out to Jesus, have mercy on us, son of David.

And I just wonder, are they saying more than have mercy as in take away our blindness? Of course they want that. But I wonder if they realise, have mercy on me, a sinner. Again, Jesus touched, the curse is instantly taken away.

What would they have known in that moment? One of the first things their eyes would have seen was Jesus' face. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

They knew in that moment they were not under God's curse. They knew in that moment that the blessing they'd receive was because of Jesus' mercy. They knew in that moment that calling him the son of David, the promised Messiah, that they had been seeing him correctly.

[22 : 17] And I think that's why Jesus tells them, don't tell anyone. He can't be saying, don't tell anyone that you can see again, go around pretending you're groping around. They couldn't hide that.

I think he must be saying, don't tell anyone that you have seen me correctly, that I am the Messiah. But what do they do instead? Having received such mercy, they can't help themselves but spread his fame.

So as God promised in Isaiah 42, where Israel, the nation of Israel, had failed to obey God's law, the law was loudly crying out to all Israel, unclean, unclean.

But God promised a new servant, a suffering servant. Isaiah 42, I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord, that is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. The unclean are made holy, mourning is turned into joy, the blind can see God's face at the touch of Jesus.

[23 : 41] All the new wine of the kingdom is coming through Jesus. You won't find it anywhere else. So how do you belong in God's house?

How do you thrive in his presence to receive all his blessings? It's not our culture's way of every person for themselves. Trying to convince yourself that everything you do is clean and acceptable. When you feel ashamed, just accept who you are, what you've done, what you think. That doesn't work. But it's equally not the religious way.

Trying to wash yourself by obeying an external set of rules and then God owes you blessing. It's neither of those two ways.

To belong in God's house you must experience Jesus' mercy for yourself personally, his touch in your life. There's no bargaining with Jesus, there's only begging. I think some here this morning are trying to downplay the wrong things you've done, trying to accept yourself on your own terms.

[25 : 03] That's not the way to go. Remember that 12-year-old girl. There will be a funeral for you one day. The curse on sin is unavoidable.

But if you are connected to Jesus, he will take you by the hand and make you rise up. You can't avoid the curse on sin.

You can't pretend. It will catch up with us. You need the touch of Jesus to save you. I think others here are probably feeling incredibly ashamed of themselves, feeling incredibly unclean, unworthy to look God in the face.

But like the woman who's bleeding, if all the hope you can muster is just touch the edge of his garment, thinking he's going to be so angry with you.

It doesn't matter how confident you are. That's not the important point. The important point is, is Jesus trustworthy to save you? And we see clearly that he is.

[26 : 15] He sees you. Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well because your faith was in me. It doesn't matter how much faith you got. It's the direction of your hope that matters.

Then there might be others here feeling like their situation in life is just cursed. Every step you take, everything just seems to not go well. Is this passage saying, you just need more faith and then life will be better?

I think the notion in some Christian circles is that if you have enough faith, God will heal you and prosper you. It's cruel. It is cruel teaching. It says to parents who have lost their child, if only you had more faith your daughter would live.

That is cruel. It says to those with chronic illness, God would ease your pain if only you had confidence he would. He's not, some take that phrase, according to your faith be it done to you.

It's not saying according to the strength of your faith, if you have 60% faith, I'll give you 60% blessing. He's saying because your direction of your hope is in me, your faith is in me, then all I am is yours.

[27 : 40] What actually makes Jesus look as great as he really is, is those times where life is far from blessed on the outside. but you still know that you are fully loved by God and will dwell in his house forever.

That kind of hope, that kind of deep joy that can sustain you through just awfulness, that makes people around you go, Jesus must be great.

Something else is your life. That is true sight, seeing past your circumstances to see Jesus. So do you see him?

The blind men, simply by what they've heard about Jesus, were crying out, have mercy on me, have mercy son of David, promised Messiah.

And in the face of Jesus, they saw complete acceptance by God and they couldn't help but spread his fame. all of us speak about what we love.

[28 : 52] We can't help it. If you talk to me long enough, I will bring up Liverpool, soccer. You can't help but talk about the things you love.

I think Matthew compares the blind men's response to the last section of the mute man to make us think, who else should have seen the Messiah clearly?

Who should see him clearly? First, you've got the Jewish crowds. They say never was anything like this seen in Israel. They are seeing the signs clearly.

They know their history. Moses did miracles, Elijah even raised the dead, but nothing, nothing is like this man. Nothing is what we're seeing here.

Something new has arrived, but they don't take the obvious next step. surely the king had come. A bow pointed this out at elders.

[29 : 55] Why didn't they say never was anyone like this seen in Israel? They don't take that step from seeing the signs to who is this man. The fact that they are blind is confirmed in the next section, which we'll look at next week, that Jesus has compassion on the crowds because they're like harassed and helpless sheep without a shepherd.

They need the gospel still. They need mission. They're still blind. But then you've got the experts of the things of God. They do come to a solid conclusion.

He casts out demons by the prince of demons. They should have at least been scared of him. I think they come to this conclusion because Jesus has already shown himself to be an unclean man. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He's got to be unclean. And so if he's unacceptable to God and he's doing all these powerful things, he's deceiving people. He must be evil.

To admit he was the Messiah would be to admit that he was fulfilling the law and to admit that they weren't fulfilling the law, that by his mercy he was fulfilling the law and that they needed his mercy.

[31 : 10] evil. They weren't willing to admit that. They are so blind that they call good evil because they were unwilling to admit that they were unclean and needed him.

The experts should have known Isaiah 42 as the Lord calls out to his people Israel, hear you deaf and look you blind that you may see.

I think Matthew connects these verbal conclusions with healing of the mute man to leave you and I with a challenge at this point in the gospel. What will we say about Jesus?

What is our conclusion at this point? Will we say son of David have mercy on me, make me clean? If you can see him, you will praise him.

If your mouth doesn't praise him, you must still be blind. And unfortunately we can't sing.

[32 : 36] evil as as as said, you don't re can't Had they tell me might because they hear you want no to want no equity man could he But everyone for to work