

Sermons on Matthew

Jesus, Healer of Souls

Matthew 8:1-17

With Study Questions

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When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. ⁻²⁻ ^a And behold, a leper came and __worshiped Him, saying, “_Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” ⁻³⁻ Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, “_I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy __was cleansed. ⁻⁴⁻ And Jesus said to him, __“_See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that __Moses __commanded, as a testimony to them.”

⁻⁵⁻ __Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a __centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁻⁶⁻ saying, “_Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.” ⁻⁷⁻ And Jesus said to him, “_I will come and heal him.” ⁻⁸⁻ The centurion answered and said, “_Lord, __I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only __speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁻⁹⁻ For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘_Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘_Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘_Do this,’ and he does *it*.” ⁻¹⁰⁻ When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “_Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ⁻¹¹⁻ And I say to you that __many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ⁻¹²⁻ But __the sons of the kingdom __will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ⁻¹³⁻ Then Jesus said to the centurion, “_Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

⁻¹⁴⁻ __Now when Jesus had come into Peter’s house, He saw __his wife’s mother lying sick with a fever. ⁻¹⁵⁻ So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served __them. ⁻¹⁶⁻ __When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, ⁻¹⁷⁻ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: □ “_He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.” (Matthew 8:1-17)

Introduction

After the Sermon on the Mount we read, in Matthew, of numerous miracles Jesus performed. In the three specific and one general recount of the miracles we'll discuss this morning, there are numerous sub-points. I will attempt to give some brief statements regarding these sub-points and then conclude with what appears to be Matthew's single main point seen in verse seventeen.

Preface

One significant question must be asked prior to our discussion of these miracles Jesus performed: Why don't we see miracles like this today? It would appear that the closest thing to these sensational miracles in today's Christian market is always accompanied by television cameras and heresy. Not to mention the fact that the miracles themselves are never self-authenticating; that is, one never sees leprous skin immediately become smooth and clean. It's always someone with has a back problem who, in front of 15,000 people, is supplied with a sufficient adrenaline rush to make it out of the stadium before relapsing.

Should Christians, as the bumper sticker reads, "*Expect a Miracle...*" — at least the kind of miracles we see Jesus and His apostles performing? We should not doubt for a minute that God has the power to perform miracles and, in response to prayer (and sometimes without prayer), may perform miracles. But it is a mistake to think that the type of wide-scale, authoritative¹ miracles performed by Jesus and His apostles should be the norm for history. We must understand the reason for miracles—again, at least the kind of miracles performed by the hand of Jesus.

The Bible teaches a specific purpose for signs and wonders. They were designed to confirm the message of the one performing them. This goes all the way back to Moses when he asked God why the people of Israel would listen to him. God told Moses to put his hand in his bosom and pull it out... it was leprous. God told Moses to do it again and it was restored (Exodus 4:6). The people would listen to Moses because of the great signs he would perform.

This idea of miracles confirming the message is explicit or implicit in almost every miracle we see performed in the New Testament. When Jesus' authority to forgive sins is questioned by the scribes, He responded,

¹ It wasn't as if the miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles were questionable. When Jesus or Peter said "Walk" the receiver of the miracle was going to walk—even if he had no faith at all (Acts 3:6).

- Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁻⁵⁻ For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ ⁻⁶⁻ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” (Matthew 9:4b-6)

Similarly, the author of Hebrews writes,

- . . . how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁻⁴⁻ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Hebrews 2:3, 4)

This was true of the miracles of Jesus and His apostles. Of Paul and Barnabas we read,

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3)

Miracles were also designed to show the faithful that Jesus was the promised Messiah. When John the Baptist, while in prison, sought the comfort of knowing that Jesus was truly the Christ, Jesus told John’s followers to relay this confirming information.

Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁻⁵⁻ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:4b, 5).

I labor this point for three reasons: first, as an apologetic. As Christians we should be able to give a reasonable, biblical explanation as to why we don’t see miracles today. They were called signs. A sign points to something. They pointed to the fact that the Messiah had come.

Second, the abuse of the doctrines of the miraculous has become quite abusive. Ministries built around healing give promises they cannot

even begin to keep. Often these promises of healing revolve around sufficient hoop jumping of the needy person. When they are left in their illness they naturally think that there is something deficient in them or in God. Keep in mind, that even during the time of Christ, not everyone was delivered from their afflictions—not even those with great faith (2 Corinthian 12: 7-9)

And finally, we must not miss the point made in Jesus' healing ministry. This is the point Matthew makes in verse seventeen of this chapter. Jesus' healing of illness served as an illustration of His power over, and atonement for, sin in general. Let us make some observations of the miracles before us.

Three Types of People

The three specific people healed in these verses would be considered at best second class and, at worst, unclean outcasts. Jews were forbidden to even touch a leper who was considered unclean (Leviticus 5). The centurion (leader of a hundred soldiers) was a Gentile. A Gentile, to the Jewish mind, would be synonymous with an unbeliever (Matthew 6:32). And, finally, a woman: though Peter's mother-in-law was Jewish, women in that culture were often considered the property of the man.

Matthew, in recording these miracles, seems to be zeroing in on a dramatic point, a point quite startling and distressing to his largely Jewish audience: the coming of the Messiah was to be an international blessing. God's grace would, in a certain sense, be indiscriminate. Any and all who throw themselves upon the mercy of Christ would find a loving, powerful and gracious response.

Three Types of Petitions

People looking for formulas to extract God's grace will be hard-pressed to find one. The three people healed found God's grace in three different ways. The leper asked for himself; the centurion interceded on behalf of someone else, and that at a distance; and Peter's mother-in-law was healed when Jesus visited the house. As mentioned earlier, God's power is often poured upon those who don't seem to be seeking for it at all. This, of course, is not to say that we should neglect to beseech God for His

blessings. All three healings before us came in response to some type of petition. But these petitions were reverent. It wasn't as if they viewed Jesus as a waiter or even a hired physician—which brings us to our next observation.

Extolling Christ

Other than Peter's household (where we can probably make some safe assumptions regarding their knowledge of who Christ was) the petitions are accompanied by some astonishing remarks pertaining to the person of Christ—namely His deity (God-hood) and authority.

The leper came and worshiped Him. In Mark we read that he knelt before him (Mark 1:40) and in Luke we read that he fell on his face before him (Luke 5:12). Some might argue that this was a simple middle-eastern custom. If so, why, when the same word is used to describe a man worshiping Peter in Acts 10:25, did Peter respond with the words, **“Stand up; I myself am also a man_”**?

The Scriptures are unambiguous regarding the worship of God and of God alone (Exodus 20). If Jesus were not God, it would have been inappropriate for Him to receive the worship of this leper.

The centurion, perhaps sensitive to the customs of Israel (for he was apparently a faithful man—Luke 7:5), did not wish to inappropriately ask Jesus to enter his household. He realized, nonetheless, that Jesus had authority even over disease. In the same way he, as a soldier, gives and takes orders, Jesus had the authority to give orders which must be obeyed. There seems to be no end to the authority of Christ (Matthew 28:18).

How easily we assign to Satan that which belong to Jesus. I recently received an e-mail from another state regarding the recent tsunami in India. A woman found herself in a Bible study where all were saying that this was not God but Satan. There seems to be a sentimental, albeit unbiblical, need to rush God out of the building when tragic things happen. Will not the answer to that question be found later in this very chapter: **“_Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matthew 8:27_b)**

In these passages we learn that Jesus receives the acknowledgment for being the Almighty God.

Trust

Yet the august nature of Christ's person did not prevent the petitions from taking place. The leper and the centurion both trusted that the Almighty God would hear their pleas. It might be safe to say that at the point of their appeal, their doctrine, though perhaps small, was accompanied by great faith.

As a youth pastor I remember a new convert asking me about abortion. She had been taught that it was an acceptable practice. When presented with a biblical argument, she immediately changed her mind. If the Bible says it's wrong, it must be. She didn't know everything about the Bible, but the things that were clear she believed. Oh, that we would all follow that pattern.

Methods of Healing

We also read of various methods of healing. Jesus touched the leper. For any normal Jew or Rabbi to do this would have resulted, not in the healing of the leper, but the defilement of the priest (Leviticus 5). He could touch lepers and remain clean and touch the dead and remain undefiled (Mark 5:41), for He had power of these contaminations. One can reasonably conclude that this was a point Jesus was seeking to make since He didn't even need to be present in order to heal.

Three Responses

We then see the three responses to healing. The leper is told not to tell anyone but to show himself to the priest. This would be the proper response given in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 14). It is very likely that the reason for this is to give further demonstration to the Jewish leadership that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The leper should have obeyed. Not everything is to be viewed as a utilitarian opportunity for evangelism. We ought to be careful when athletes or rock stars become Christians to immediately usher them before the masses as the poster child for the Christian faith.

The response recorded in association with the centurion is actually the response of Jesus. Jesus marveled and said **"Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel."** Again, it is not that this centurion was a master theologian. It is, however, that he strongly believed in the things he did know of Jesus.

Jesus then gives clear reference to the international nature of the new covenant: **"...many will come from east and west, and sit down with**

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” He also gives a strong warning to those who believed they were in God’s good graces merely by being part of the Old Testament church: “...**But __the sons of the kingdom __will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” Covenant children take heed. Someone once said, “God has no grandchildren.” Your inclusion in God’s church is meaningless, in fact an indictment against you, if you do not have faith... your own faith... in Jesus.

Hell is a reality. And I would be remiss in my duty as a pastor to neglect the warning that those who take lightly or ignore the message of the gospel will be in everlasting torment.

Peter’s mother-in-law serves as a simple illustration of how one who has been blessed by Jesus ought to respond. “**She arose and served them.**” is all we read.

Taking Our Infirmities

Matthew finally records that many demon-possessed and sick were brought to Jesus and He healed them. He then informs us that this (all the healings) are the fulfillment of the prophecy we read of in Isaiah 53, “**__He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.**”

Although sickness is mentioned, a reading of Isaiah 53 reveals the sickness is mentioned more to illustrate the genesis of all sickness, sin. Isaiah 53 brings this to a head in its last verse which reads, “**And He bore the sin of many, and __made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).**

Let us not miss the point that Matthew—that Jesus is making. Healings were a sign of who He is and an object lesson of His power over sin and death. If He can heal, He can save. Jesus conquers all that sickness represents—all the pain, sorrow suffering and death.

In our prayers, we pray for healing of the body but more so for the healing of the soul. It is not the plan of God that man should escape his sicknesses which lead to death. Every person Jesus healed eventually died. And if they didn’t come to learn what His healing power represented, the second death would own them forever. When I walk through the lonely hospitals at night and see poor souls knocking at death’s door I am reminded that it is only a matter of time before I am attached to those tubes and sensors. Who will be with me in my death? Who can bear that which I cannot bear... the death of my body and the judgment of God?

Let us not lose sight of the message of the miraculous lest the miracles become our curse and we start moaning for the comforts of slavery in Egypt. The power of Christ to heal testifies of His power to forgive and deliver. Herein lies the gospel. And may our hearts ever belong to the blessed healer of souls.

Questions for Study

1. Should Christians expect the same kind of miracles that Jesus performed to be the norm for history (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the purpose for miracles (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why is it important to understand the purpose for miracles (pages 4, 5)?
4. What were unique about the three people Jesus heals in this passage (page 5)?
5. How did they ask Jesus to heal (pages 5, 6)?

6. Discuss the leper's/centurion's view of who Christ was (pages 6, 7)?
7. How did the leper respond to being healed? Was it appropriate? Why (pages 7, 8)?
8. How did Jesus respond to the centurion's faith? Who were the sons of the kingdom (pages 7, 8)?
9. What do the healings of Christ point to as it relates to Isaiah 53 (pages 8, 9)?