

Reading: Matthew 8:1-17

Theme: Healing of a Man with Leprosy.

We are returning to the book of Matthew again to carry on looking at a few more chapters in it. Matthew has already told us a lot of detail of Jesus' glorious teaching –the Sermon on the Mount. Now for a couple of chapters Matthew moves the narrative on at what seems to be racing pace! This is especially so in the first half of chapter 8 concerning miracles of healing.

We are shown the King's power and authority in this section, so it is worth looking at these miracles. These are not ordinary events, but are beyond the ability and means of any ordinary man. Here are demonstrations of great power in events that go contrary to the normal laws of nature and occur instantaneously. These are miracles, out workings of the power of God as it touches lives, restores health and strength and - even in the first miracle recorded in this chapter - restores wasted flesh. We are going to focus our attention on the healing of this man with leprosy.

Matthew tells us that in His life ministry Jesus was fulfilling prophecy – v17. Realise that before and after Jesus' life all healing comes from God, whether directly in a miraculous way, or by Him working through means such as herbs and potions in previous days, through medicines, antibiotics, surgery however basic previously or advanced in recent times. Ultimately all healing comes from God. That does not mean all are healed automatically, nor as a right no matter how much we want that to be the case.

Jesus has finished His teaching on the mountain and the people were amazed at, impressed by all He said (7:28-29). For a time, Jesus had popularity - though He never went after such, never sought after it. He knew all too well the fickleness of people and never sought to be popular. Perhaps many were following Him

after hearing Him teach on the mountain and that others had come join them as they came down the mountain, so the numbers greatly increased. This seems a minor point, but good to note as the first miracle of healing on this man with leprosy was eye-witnessed by many, many people.

Jesus is surrounded with and followed by these crowds, when suddenly cries of alarm and terror ring out “*A leper, a leper...*” Whether this man had pushed his way forward, scattering the crowd like birds when a cat approaches, or whether he’d hidden in a place and then stepped out - we do not know. Yet here is this leprous man before Jesus. I want to look this miracle under 3 main headings:

1. The Dreadful Disease.

This man had an awful and dreadful disease - leprosy. Thankfully, we are spared the horrors of full-blown leprosy in our land and modern medicine has greatly relieved it throughout the world. At the time of Jesus there were no medicines, drugs or treatments. This is a description of leprosy I read in a book: “*The disease which we today call leprosy generally begins with a pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original colour. It gets to be thick, glossy and scaly. In fact, the affliction is called leprosy because it makes the skin scaly, the Greek word lepos or lepis meaning scale. As the sickness progresses, the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers, due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begin to bunch, with deep furrows in the swellings, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers drop off or are absorbed; toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By this time one can see that a person in this condition is a leper. By a touch of the finger one can also feel it. One can even smell it; for the leper*

*emits a very unpleasant odour. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease producing agent frequently attacks the larynx, the leper's voice acquires a grating quality... his throat becomes hoarse, and you can now not only **feel**, **see** and **smell** the leper, but you can **hear** his rasping voice. And if you stay with him for some time, you even imagine a peculiar **taste** in your mouth, probably due to the odour. All the senses of the well person are engaged in the detection of the leper.” (William Hendriksen quoting L.S. Huizenga)*

What a horrible, dreadful picture of this disease that slowly, but surely spreads though, maims, mutilates, disfigures and then kills a person. It was incurable in Jesus' day. Leprosy was a death sentence in waiting. More than that it cut the afflicted person off from the society and the religion of the day, as they had to move out of their town or village, away from direct contact with family, were kept away from places of worship and especially the Temple. If any clean persons approached near them, they had to warn them by shouting out “*Unclean, unclean*”. Any well person touching a leper was ceremonially unclean for the day and had to bath and be clean.

I wonder how we would feel if we had such a dreadful and isolating disease? We would hate it, would be shocked to have it affecting us. As dreadful as leprosy is, or many other such diseases are, there is a far worse “disease” that affects everyone of us. We can picture sin as a disease as it sets us at dis-ease with God. We can have no peace with God and no ease in His holy presence and it shuts us off from Him, His love and keeps us out of heaven. Sin is a *disease*, a disorder of the soul, but it affects every part of our lives.

People do not always recognise they have such a disease, such a disorder and certainly do not like being told they have such! Yet every one of us are infected and have this *disease* - for it is an hereditary *disease* which has been passed down through the generations from the first man and woman - Adam and Eve, who inflicted it upon themselves by going their own way and not listening to what God said.

Since then, this *disease* of sin has mutilated and deformed lives, broken out in horrible ways throughout history and it has many symptoms by which it shows its existence. It has separated people from people and still does; it bursts forth in man's inhumanity to man; shows itself so many ways, but most of all it separates every one of us from God and "unclean, unclean" is declared by our lives every moment, of every day before God and His holiness. This *disease* of sin has not only brought physical death into the world, but also physical diseases, troubles of the mind and heart, broken relationships, but it is also a death sentence in waiting physically. The *disease* of sin will destroy us eternally, forever and ever, for it will condemn us to the agony in hell for eternity - which is the only place such sin diseased people are fit to be.

Nothing we can do can bring about a spiritual cure for us - religion, morality, kindness, love, caring for the poor, sick, starving ones; giving to charities; not feeling sorry for having such a *disease*. Like this leper, our end is certain death - both physical and spiritual, but this leper heard of Jesus, of what He had taught, said and as he thought on all he heard, suddenly there was:

2. The Excited Expectation.

It would appear that this man came to a realisation of who Jesus was and what He could do - that Jesus was no ordinary man who was going about teaching and doing good. As the leper considered

the evidence, he began to realise that this one was God in human form and, if that was the case, then Jesus could make him completely well if He chose to do so. We see this attitude, this excited expectation in v2 as he says “*Lord*” for he uses the divine title, used of God in all His fullness, in His person. It does not mean a lesser being or ‘god’, but speaks of God Almighty Himself. This leper, as he had heard of what Jesus had taught, of what He had done; came to realise who Jesus was.

In his life, there was suddenly hope. From being hopeless, helpless and condemned to death, there was a bright hope. This leper knew the OT miracles and stories of lepers being healed, especially Naaman, but none had been healed for centuries and, as far as we know, no leper had been healed by Jesus before, but it does not stop this man believing Jesus could heal him. He went to Jesus and told Him “*if you are willing, you **can** make me whole*”. He had this great desire, but was willing to submit to what Jesus wanted.

Perhaps you are aware of your *disease* of sin to a greater or lesser extent, you may feel or even realise that you are not right with God. Whereas modern ideas say that we are good people and just need the right circumstances to grow and flourish in our goodness, the Bible says that is not the case and we are all infected and affected by sin in us. For many formal church attendances has disappointed, religion has been seen as useless; self-help schemes have failed, New Year resolutions have evaporated so quickly and we are stuck in the old same-as-state - feeling useless, helpless and hopeless.

Someone here may feel useless, helpless and hopeless, but as you have come to church, as you’ve considered God’s word and what it says about Jesus, then perhaps it is dawning on you the important place Jesus is to have in your estimation and life.

Suddenly or gradually, it is dawning on you that Christianity is not about religion, or religious rites, or a moral code, being a do-gooder, not about what you do or don't do, but it is about Jesus, who was more than just a good man and great teacher, perhaps you are beginning to see that He ~~was~~, is totally God and a real human man together and He is the answer to your need, your desires as well, especially to be clean from this *disease* of sin, its outworking in your life and its eternal consequences too.

You may see that, but still think it doesn't apply to you because of what you have said, what you have done, the way you feel inside and sometimes express and do. You may not feel good enough and strangely you may even feel you are somehow not bad enough! If you had a little bit of leprosy or cancer, then surely you would want to be healed and not say "*I've not got enough of it*". Adam and Eve did one little sin and that was enough to condemn them and all mankind to hell forever! We like them need the healing and cleaning that Jesus provides freely for our lives and our eternal souls.

We are to be like this leper - let nothing stop us from going to Jesus for cleansing and healing spiritually. The leper asked "*if you are willing...*" Jesus' answer then and to us, if we go to Him is still "*I am willing. Be clean*".

3. The Complete Cure.

Jesus was willing! He made the man clean and healed him. Jesus did something no one else would do, He deliberately reached out and touched this leprous man! Everyone saw it, everyone must have gasped in horror, surprise, amazement as Jesus touched the leper - especially so as the leper was made clean, cured immediately. Such was the power and authority of Jesus' healing touch, that the disfigurement, the pollution, the effects of the

leprosy were transformed and the man was made completely clean and whole.

Notice that Jesus' touch was a deliberate touch and not accidental! He chose to put out His hand and heal the man. His words to him were of kindness, of love and of intention "*I am willing. Be clean*" – also they were words of power that brought about this immediate change in the man. If we are ill, then under God, the treatments we are privileged to have at this time are often beneficial to us and usually we will get well gradually. Here in this miracle there was no gradual process, but here nature is overridden by Jesus' power and the healing is immediate. The large crowds witnessed this miracle!

Mark tells us in his gospel (1:41) that Jesus was filled with compassion i.e. He was moved with love and tenderness and so He healed this man. At this moment, if you feel your need of having your sins cleaned and forgiven, to be given new life in Christ, then see the Lord Jesus is the complete and only answer for that need and He has compassion – a great love and concern for you. You can go to Him and He will accept you, welcome you as you are, but He will not leave you as you are - as He will heal you spiritually and cleanse you from your sin. There is no need to doubt that He is willing to do this for you if you call on Him to do so. In fact, He calls on all men and women everywhere to repent and turn to Him. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord **will** be saved; if we confess our sin, we will find He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin - not just a little part of it, or just the "respectable sins" we have done, but **all** our sin and wrongs will be forgiven, never to be remembered and brought up again by God, never to be laid to our charge and in the law court of heaven and there will be no fixed penalty awaiting us (hell).

This leper would have been foolish not to have gone to Jesus for healing when he had the opportunity. So too would you be if you turn away, perhaps yet again, from seeking this Saviour, calling on Him to heal you spiritually, to rescue you from your sin and its consequences.

The man was cured, but then Jesus told the man to go and do as God's word (OT) instructed - to go and show himself to the priest. Also, Jesus said a strange thing - the man was not to tell anyone about what Jesus had done. We are told in Mark 1:45 at the healed leper didn't obey Jesus!! I can understand why - as he was so delighted and thrilled. Why did Jesus say that? At that time, I feel Jesus did not want to draw undue attention to Himself and He so gave the man this instruction. Thankfully there is no such command to us. If we have been healed from our sin, then we are to live as God instructs and part of that is to live a life that says *"See what God has done for my soul, for me, for my life"* and then backup such living with our words and further right actions, so that our words and life show the great things God has done for us.

If we have trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, even recently, then tell us here so we can rejoice with you. If you feel your need of Jesus as your Saviour, then come and talk with me, with others here and we will willingly point you the Lord Jesus, explain things further, to answer your questions if we are able to do so.

For us all here, I pray we would know the great joy and peace in believing in Jesus as our Saviour and go on to live for our Lord and Saviour, knowing the joy, the wonder of our sins forgiven, having God and His love towards us and that we have a hope of eternal life and a home in heaven – all these being just a part of the good things God has promised for all who trust the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.