

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 18TH-19TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

JESUS CLEANSSES A LEPER (MATTHEW 8:1-4)

Jesus ministry is now established- He's called His disciples and provided them with a new constitution for the Kingdom (Matt. 5-7).

- Matthew now begins the second major section of his gospel account.
- Jesus amazed the crowds because He taught with authority (7:29), and now He displays that authority by healing a leper (vs. 2).

Leprosy was not just an embarrassing skin condition in 1st century Judaism.

- It was an incurable physical disease that attacked the nerve system, to the point where the victim would eventually lose their ability to feel pain.
- Infection would happen easily, which would lead to the degeneration of tissues, organs, and limbs, to the point where sometimes limbs would become deformed and eventually fall off.

Leprosy was considered by many Jews to be a spiritual contagion (Lev. 13, 14, Isa. 1:5-6).

- It was seen as a picture of sin in that sin also is deeper than the skin, it spreads, it defiles, it isolates, it numbs, and it destroys.
- Because of this, lepers were outcasts- they were required to stay a certain distance from everyone around them and had to yell out "unclean, unclean!" if anyone came near them.

When the leper came to him (vs. 2), both Jesus and the leper were violating the law.

- The leper shouldn't be approaching Jesus, and Jesus shouldn't be touching the leper, for to touch a leper would make a person unclean.
- The leper had confidence in Jesus' ability to heal, he only asked if He had to desire to do so- it seems that he viewed himself as unworthy.

But Jesus wasn't just able- He was willing!

- Jesus stretched out His hand and "touched Him", and immediately the leper was cleansed.
- When Jesus touched the leper, He contracted defilement, but He also transferred His health.
- This is a picture of what He would do through the "great exchange" (2 Cor. 5:21).

After this man was healed, Jesus told him not to say anything about it, but to "go the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded" (vs. 4).

- This was a ritual to restore the healed person's before God and to the community.
- The first witness to the power of Jesus would've been the priest.

THE CENTURION (MATTHEW 8:5-13)

A centurion was an officer over 100 men in the Roman army, and they seemed to be highly respected men of power, duty, and honor.

- However, this man was a Gentile, and Jesus was a Jew- for a Jew to even enter into the home of a Gentile was unthinkable.
- Israel had taken God's prohibitions against worshipping the gods of the Gentiles as a prohibition against associating with them at all.

Luke's gospel account tells us that this particular centurion in Capernaum loved the people of Israel and even built them a synagogue (Lk. 7:4-5).

- He was most likely a "God-fearer", a Gentile who observed the basic tenets of Judaism.
- He came to Jesus on behalf of his servant who was suffering and "lying paralyzed" (vs. 6).

We're not sure how his servant was paralyzed, only that this Roman centurion had faith.

- When Jesus heard of the centurion's predicament, He amazingly was willing to break all social taboos and go into the house of a Gentile to heal this servant (vs. 7).
- But the centurion, well acquainted with the Jewish law, counters that he is undeserving to even have Jesus come under his roof.

In response to Jesus' offer, he explained that he understood the concept of true authority.

- As a centurion, when he gave an order to under they obeyed immediately (vs. 9), and in the same way he believed that Jesus possessed that same authority.
- All Jesus had to do was "say the word, and my servant will be healed" (vs. 8).

This is the only time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus is said to "marvel" (vs. 10), and it's because this Gentile understands His identity and believes more so than anyone in Israel.

- He pointed to the coming day of the Kingdom's consummation when many Gentiles would be gathered from east and west to take their places at the feast with the patriarchs (vs. 11), while many Jews would be cast out to outer darkness (vs. 12).

Jesus is speaking to the prejudice and exclusiveness of Israel, as well their mistaken notion about what it took to enter the Kingdom.

- The Kingdom was about faith in the Messiah- not race, ethnicity or family pedigree.

- Jesus turns back to the centurion and assures him that his request will be honored in accordance with his faith (vs. 13). And at that very moment, the servant was healed.

THE HEALER'S TOUCH (MATTHEW 8:14-17)

Matthew gives us a brief account regarding a family member of one of Jesus' own inner circle.

- Women didn't hold a high position in Israel, and it's doubtful that a Pharisee would've paid attention to this need in Peter's home to his mother-in-law who was sick with fever (vs. 14).
- Some scholars believe she might have been suffering from "lake fever" (malaria).

Religious leaders seldom touched a woman at all, because they wanted to avoid any possibility of becoming "unclean" because of her monthly cycle (Lev. 15:19).

- But Jesus reached out and "touched her hand", and the fever left her and she began to serve Him by probably making a meal.
- When people in the town heard of this healing, they brought many to him who were in need.

Blessings given to us should lead to blessings extended to those in our community.

- In other words, the change in our life from God's touch should lead to others around us seeking that same power that can change their lives.
- That evening Jesus healed all who were sick & cast out demons with His word (vs. 16).
- Not only did He have authority over sickness, He had complete authority over demons.

Matthew connects this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4- "He took our illnesses..."

- Notice that Matthew is stating that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His life and not on the cross- He's stating that Jesus bore humanity's sickness during His ministry on earth.
- Some have taken this verse to say there is a right to divine healing through the atonement.

It's true that we will be given perfect bodies in the resurrection as a result of Jesus' atonement- but to say that we're always promised healing in this life is to misinterpret Scripture.

- We're promised ultimate redemption from the sin that causes death, sickness, and disease, and this is a superior healing than just the physical. Does God still heal today?

THE COST (MATTHEW 8:18-22)

After these displays of Jesus' power and authority, there was a crowd around Him (vs. 18).

- As long as He was being mobbed, Jesus couldn't give His disciples the attention they needed, and He ordered them to "go to the other side" of the Sea of Galilee in order to narrow the number of those who accompanied Him. Some wanted to go with Him.

The first individual who wants to come with Jesus is a "scribe" (vs. 19).

- By Jesus' time, scribes were copyists, teachers, scholars, and lecturers versed in Jewish law.
- This scribe addresses Jesus as "teacher", which is probably what He's looking for.
- For the scribe to volunteer to go with Jesus "wherever you go" reflects an impulsivity.

Jesus' response to the scribe suggests that he's not quite thought out the commitment.

- Jesus warns the man that being a disciple won't be easy and it might involve a life of deprivation, poverty, and transience (vs. 20).
- Jesus is not looking for impulsive volunteers- He's looking for fully committed disciples who have made the calculated decision to follow Him no matter what it may cost.

The second person that seems willing to follow Jesus is described as a "disciple", but one with tremendous reluctance to follow immediately.

- He says to Jesus, "first let me bury my father" (vs. 21).
- In the 1st century, a responsibility of the eldest son was taking care of his father's final arrangements as he aged and eventually passed.

To "bury my father" was a standard idiom for fulfilling one's family obligations for the remainder of the father's lifetime, even with no prospect of imminent death.

- It was essentially a stall tactic by appealing to family responsibilities.
- Jesus' response was clear- it's better to follow Him and give life to the spiritually dead than to wait for your father to die and bury him (vs. 22).

In Jesus' claim of absolute authority and Lordship, absolutely NOTHING comes before Him.

- All of our old obligations and priorities must vanish when we take up our cross.
- Jesus not only calls disciples who have "counted the cost", He calls disciples who are willing to put Him above everything else in this life.

What's the Point?

Jesus possesses absolute authority in the world and over every sickness, disease, evil spirit, and uncleanness. When Jesus speaks, leprosy, paralysis, fever, and demons immediately obey.

Bringing it Home.

Who are the "untouchables" in your life that you're called to bring the touch of Jesus to? What excuses are you giving for not fully following and surrendering to Jesus? Is it fear of losing material or social comforts? Fear of losing control? Fear of losing an idol?