

Saved to Serve
Matthew 8:14-15
Halifax: 21 November 2004

Introduction

Our text is a very simply one today:

- Jesus comes into Peter's house.
- He sees Peter's mother in law lying sick with a fever.
- He touches her hand.
- The fever immediately leaves her.
- She arises and serves Him and the others who are with Him.

The lesson here is also very simple...

- It is that Jesus restores us to service in His kingdom.
- Peter's mother in law was one of God's people—a member of the covenant.
 - She appears to be the kind of woman that ordinarily served whoever came to the house.
 - She would be there patiently working to make all who were in the home comfortable...
 - washing their feet,
 - preparing food for them,
 - tending to the baby,
 - Whatever needed to be done, she was ready to do.
 - But of late, she had not been able to do this because of a serious fever that had come upon her.
 - When Matthew says she was “**lying** sick,”
 - He uses the same word for **lying** that the centurion used in verse six when said his servant was “**lying** at home.”
 - It literally means “thrown” or “cast,” with the idea that the person was so sick he or she was unable to get up—
 - He was cast upon the bed...
 - It was not a case of choosing to lie down as you do when you don't feel well,
 - but she was so sick that she was bedridden.
 - In his parallel account, Luke, the beloved physician, tells uses technical language to tell us how sick she was:

- He says that she had “a great fever,”
 - which was the way Greek physicians were in the habit of distinguishing a serious fever from the lighter kind which they called “small fevers.”
- She had been laid up by this fever and was probably facing death.
 - But Jesus comes and immediately she is able to serve Him!
 - That is the lesson—
 - When Jesus comes, He takes away your fever so you can serve Him.

This morning I want to look at three things pertaining to this:

- That fevers keep you from serving
- That the touch of Jesus removes fevers
- Then I want each of you to consider if He has removed your fever so you can serve.

First then,

I. Fevers keep you from serving.

A. That is pretty obvious, isn't it?

1. When you get a serious fever so that you are laid up sick, you are greatly hindered in your ability to serve...
 - a. You are not able to fulfil your calling...
 - You can't work in the fields or in the shop.
 - You can't go to the office or sit at your desk.
 - You can't prepare meals or wash dishes or go shopping.
 - Even your prayers for others may be greatly hindered if you are too sick to hear their prayer requests and so distracted by pain that you can hardly concentrate.
 - b. Not only that, but when you are bedridden, you have to have everyone else serve you.
 - They have to bring you things and look after you...
 - They may even have to feed you and bathe you.
2. This inability to serve is one of the most frustrating things about sickness.
 - a. It is frustrating because serving is natural to human beings...
 - 1) When God created us, He built service into us...
 - As soon as we came from His hand, He gave us a vocation—

- to fill the earth and subdue it!
- That is our calling as human beings...
 - It is in our roots.

2) Filling and subduing included all sorts of things!

- It involved science and exploration
 - by which man would study the earth and learn about all the things that God had made and the relations of one thing to another.
- It involved technology
 - by which man would develop ways of communicating and travelling,
 - of building and storing and processing as he multiplied on the earth.
- It involved all sorts of art—
 - the development of music and painting...
 - the writing of books and poetry...
 - the production of jewellery and crafts...
 - the development of architecture...
 - It involved the development of culinary arts and wine making...
 - And yes, even the development of lovemaking between a man and his wife.

3) We were created to do all this as human beings...

- a) And now, even though man is fallen, we still rightly serve in these ways...
- Rebellious sociologists have given as the false notion of the noble savage.
 - But roaming about in the woods like an animal is actually an expression of human rebellion...
 - God turns a rebellious society over to wandering and roaming as an act of judgement.
 - Our calling as human beings is still to fill the earth and subdue it...
 - and that means that we are to cultivate and develop arts and sciences to the glory of God.

- b) The great difference is that now we do these things in warped and twisted ways instead of honourable and noble ways...
 - lovemaking is done outside of marriage,
 - technology is used for destructive purposes,
 - art expresses our rebellion against God and our confusion,
 - Wine and food are used in the rebellion of drunkenness and gluttony.

- c) Besides all this,
 - God's curse hinders us in our calling to subdue the earth by the addition of thorns and weeds as well as pain and death
 - Now we have to have people whose calling involves nothing more than trying to cure the sick...or in caring for them...
 - We have people who do nothing but bury the dead...
 - We have people whose career is in putting out fires or fighting wars or subduing crime...
 - Farmers have to deal with weeds and droughts...
 - Destructive storms tear down our buildings and destroy our property...
 - Can you imagine what we would have accomplished by now if we had not fallen?
 - If all our collective human energy had been channelled to loving service without the problem of sin and the curse?
 - There is no telling what we might have accomplished by now!

TRANS> Serving is natural to human beings because this is what God made us to do.

- b. That is why it is frustrating to us when we are not able to serve because of a fever.
 - 1) Now it is right for us to enjoy rest from our labours at times—
 - God created us to love Sabbaths and to love sleep...
 - We are to live in glorious rhythm of rest and labour...
 - Yet, when we are **unable** to serve anymore because of a fever,
 - It is very frustrating to us...
 - We are not able to do what we were made to do.

- 2) And of course the greatest hindrance to our work is death...
 - Death removes us from service altogether.
 - Even the Apostle Paul who knew that death meant that he would go to be with Christ, which is far better...
 - understood that it was better for him to remain so that he could continue to serve the church.
 - He did not want to be removed from service until he had finished the work that God gave him to do.

TRANS> Fevers are frustrating because they keep us from the service that God has given us to do.

- But I want to suggest to you that it is not just physical fevers that hinder us...

B. There are also spiritual fevers that keep us from serving!

1. When we began Matthew 8, I explained that one of the purposes of Jesus' miracle ministry is to teach us spiritual lessons...
 - a. For instance, when Jesus cleanses a leper, it signifies his cleansing of our sin...
 - When He gives sight to the blind,
 - He speaks afterward about spiritual blindness that needs to be healed...
 - He opens the eyes of His people to see who God is, to see their sin, and to see God's way of salvation.
 - When He feeds the five thousand,
 - He speaks of Himself as the bread of God that came down from heaven to give eternal life to the world.
 - He nourishes us up into eternal life...
 - When He speaks about raising the dead, He not only speaks of the resurrection at the last day,
 - but also of raising us up to life with God spiritually now—
 - so that we who were dead to God are able to live for Him.

TRANS> It is clear, then, that we are called to learn spiritual lessons from Jesus' physical miracles...

- b. And I would suggest that such is the case with fever...
 - Just as there is
 - spiritual leprosy that corresponds to physical leprosy....
 - and spiritual hunger that corresponds to physical hunger...

- and spiritual blindness that corresponds to physical blindness...
 - so there is spiritual fever that correspond to physical fever.
 - Just like physical fever,
 - spiritual fever keeps us from serving—
 - especially serving God for His glory in the way we were created to do.
2. What are some examples of spiritual fever?
- a. Spiritual fever can actually be summed up with one word:
- Covetousness!
 - Covetousness is the passionate burning of the human spirit for something that God has not given you.
 - It is the burning of desire for your own will over against God’s will.
 - The fires of covetousness are mutually exclusive to service for God.
- b. Consider some of these examples—
- 1) Sexual lust is a burning fever—
- When a man’s heart is given over to lust, he can hardly think of anything else.
 - He is laid up on the bed or uncleanness and is so consumed with his fever that his service to his wife, his children, his employer, his parents...
 - even his prayer and praise of God is nixed.
 - He becomes like a beast in heat...
 - All his energies are poured in selfish use of what was given for the blessing of others.
- 2) Fretfulness is another king of burning fever—
- Perhaps you are a Martha, cumbered about with many things...
 - Worrying about whether you turned to stove off, checking to make sure you have your keys,
 - Worrying if other people at church like you and what so in so meant when she said hello...
 - or why so in so hasn’t called and didn’t seem like she wanted to talk to you.
 - “What if my family doesn’t like the supper I prepared, or what if there is not enough?”

- Do you see how thoughts like that are totally incompatible with service?
 - You are laid up on your bed with fretting fever when you think like that...
 - Though you are busy serving, your service is filled with poison of covetousness.
 - You are not really looking out for the needs of others, but are consumed with burning passion for yourself.
- 3) Then there is the burning of anger—
- You heat up because things did not go your way...
 - You growl at your wife and growl at the children—even on the way to church!
 - Everyone is a little uneasy around you because you are like Mt. Saint Helens...
 - They never know when you are going to erupt.
 - One day you are fine, the next day the fever flares up again.
 - A person with outbursts of anger has hot flashes that are common with fevers...
 - But often back of this there is a deep-seated bitterness and resentment.
 - Some have this without that hot flashes—always there to poison their service.
 - There is a constant edge on their service—
 - it has nothing of the savour of Christ,
 - but has a bitter, uncomfortable sort of taste.
 - The person continually demonstrates the attitude that God has done them wrong.
 - The old bitter thoughts consume them and make their service like acid.
- 4) Another fever is the fever of greed...
- All you can think about is all the things you don't have that you wish you did have...
 - Service and giving to others is practically non-existent...
 - Your desires are so important that the desires of others go completely unnoticed...

- even when their needs are much greater than your own!
- Sometimes this fever strikes those who do not have much, but always wish they did...
 - Other times it strikes those who have a lot and always want more.
 - A particular strain of the virus is what we might call “shopping fever.”
 - When all you can think about is that new dress you are about to buy or that new car you are purchasing.
 - And as soon as it is purchased,
 - you have your eye on the next thing.
 - Obviously, you are not focused on serving God or your neighbour.

TRANS> As you can see, I could go on and on with these—

- I could speak about the raging fevers of envy and jealousy and self-pity and revenge and ambition and safety...
- But there is one more I want to mention before I move on because it is so widespread...

5) The fever of addiction...

- Here is a person who has sunk to the level of a beast...
 - All he can think about is getting another shot of whiskey, another bag of chips, another snort of cocaine.
 - His whole life is consumed by these fevers so that his work suffers, his family suffers, his worship suffers...
 - he has no interest in others but only in what he wants.
 - As the proverbs say,
 - When he wakes up his only question is:
 - “Where can I get another drink?”
 - Addiction fever is especially debilitating because it is often driven by a desire to escape the difficulties involved in serving...
 - Things are going badly in your day, so the bottle comes out—
 - or the chips and the chocolate come out...
 - When they are used this way, they keep you from serving.

TRANS> Fever is a terrible thing.... whether spiritual or physical...

- It consumes you.
- It eats you up...
- It keeps you from the service to which God has called you.

But there is good news in our text...

II. The touch of Jesus removes your fever!

A. Let me urge you to take Him home with you when leave the synagogue!

1. We are told in the other gospels that Peter, Andrew, James and John had been at the synagogue with Jesus and that Peter brought Jesus home afterward...
 - a. And you know what Jesus did when he came home with Peter...
 - He saw that Peter's wife's mother, lying there, burning with a fever...
 - So He touched her and the fever left her and she got up and served!
 - b. This woman who wanted to serve was able to serve immediately because Jesus touched her.
 - The touch of His glorious merciful power makes the curse fly away!
 - No matter how great a fever it is, it has no power to resist Him...
 - And not only that, but the fever was rendered totally powerless, even to leave its mark on her...
 - She was able to get up immediately.
 - Usually after a severe fever like that,
 - it takes days or even weeks to recover ones full strength...
 - But this woman got up immediately and began to serve the guests who were in her home—
 - c. All this was possible because Peter brought Jesus to his home.
 - His was not just a one day a week religion,
 - but a religion that he took with him wherever he went.
 - Yes, we come to church to meet with Jesus,
 - we set aside time to praise Him to hear His word...
 - But let us not leave Him behind—let us take Him with us!
 - We need Him with us to cure our fever and the fever of the members of our household.

2. But perhaps you would say,
 - a. “What do you mean by all this?
 - Do you mean that there ought to be no fevers in my home if Jesus is there?”
 - b. Well, yes, in fact I do mean that!
 - 1) Jesus came to redeem us from bondage so that we can serve Him...
 - When God brought His people out of Egypt,
 - that is what He kept saying He was going to do it for...
 - “I will bring them out of Egypt that they might serve Me.”
 - Pharaoh was told again and again,
 - “Let my people go that they might serve me.”
 - 2) Mark it down, brothers and sisters,
 - If are joined to Jesus Christ,
 - He takes away every impediment that keeps you from serving God!
 - He not only redeems us from our sin that keeps us from serving God,
 - He also redeems us from the curse!
 - Nothing that in any way hinders us from serving God will remain because of Jesus Christ.
- c. But of course I don’t mean to say that He abolishes the curse immediately.
 - 1) He told us plainly that if we are His disciples, we must feel the curse so long as we remain in this world...
 - He told us that we would have to bear the cross...
 - Lu 9:23: Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.
 - In addition to the sufferings of sickness and death that we will meet here along with all other men...
 - We must also bear the anger and reproach of a world that opposes our discipleship and persecutes us.
 - 2) But the sure promise of God is that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of law being made a curse for us.
 - As we read in Hebrews 2:7-10 concerning man:

- You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
- And so it is certain that we will be delivered from every form of fever by Jesus Christ. The apostle says:
 - 1 Cor 15:51-57: Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?" The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - There will be no more curse for the redeemed from that day!
 - Every tear will be wiped away and we will dwell in righteousness and peace forever and ever.
 - Yes, we will be able to serve God without the limitations of the sickness and suffering—
 - Nothing will stand in the way of that service...
 - You will be totally free if you have Jesus.
 - That is our hope.
 - Jesus' removal of the fever from Peter's mother in law reminds us that He will remove all our fevers on the day of the resurrection if we know Him.

TRANS> But this deliverance from the curse of physical fevers is just one aspect of our redemption.

- B. Jesus also delivers you from the fever of covetousness that burns in your spirit now.
1. There is a great difference between a believer and an unbeliever.
 - a. A believer is born again.
 - He is born of the Spirit.

- He has a new nature and is called a new creature.
 - His heart of stone is taken away and He is given a heart of flesh that loves God...
 - He is given a new nature that delights in the law of God.
- b. Covetousness is the opposite of delight in the law of God...
- The covetous person delights in doing his own will...
 - He has that craving and that burning to do his own thing...
 - The born again person delights in doing the will of God...
 - He has that craving and that burning to do the will of God.
- c. There is an immediate change that occurs...
- The person who has never praised God begins to do so...
 - The person who has never trusted Him begins to trust...
 - The person who had never done His will begins to serve.

TRANS> That is the fundamental difference between a person who is born again and a person who is still dead in sin...

2. But again, lest you despair, this needs to be qualified.
- a. Believers still catch fevers of covetousness.
- 1) A believer can be overtaken in a fault...
 - You can be like David who caught the fever of lust, committed adultery, and even murder.
 - 2) A believer can fall into sin...
 - You can fall into the fever of fear the way Peter did,
 - when the servant girl asked him if He knew Jesus,
 - and he denied it.
- b. But the great difference in you if you are a believer is this:
- Sin shall not have dominion over you—
- 1) You may catch a fever of lust even as David did and commit adultery and murder...
 - But you will not continue in it without repentance.
 - God will send Nathan to call you back to repentance and you will repent!

- Sin may take hold of you, but it will not be able to keep you in its clutches because Jesus Christ will set you free.
- 2) If you are in Christ, it does not mean that you will never sin...
- There are sins of ignorance that you don't even know about but will discover later...
 - And there is the ongoing sin of coming short in your service and your praise and your gratitude...
 - These will not be fully eradicated until the last day...
 - But if you are in Christ,
 - the fever of covetousness will not dominate you and control you...
 - God's Spirit will control you.
 - Jesus will lead you out of covetousness and bring you into discipleship.
- 3) The Apostle Paul speaks about this glorious change in Romans 8:
- Hear what he says:
 - Rom 8:5-9: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.
 - You have changed sides as soon as you are born again...
 - You are now able to live according to the Spirit...
 - To serve God instead of serving the flesh... instead of serving your sinful desires...
 - Paul goes on to say that if you are living according to the flesh, you will die, but if you killing your fleshly desires by the power of God's Spirit, you will live...
 - Romans 8:12-14: Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
 - It is all a matter of where your allegiance is.

- If you turn to Christ, you have God's Spirit and your allegiance is to Him...
- He has delivered you from the fever of covetousness and set you free to serve God...
- But if you have not turned to Christ for salvation,
 - you are still in the flesh...
 - You are full of the fever of covetousness and cannot serve God.

TRANS> Jesus is the one who has the power to deliver you from your fever so that you might serve God.

- And so now I have a question you must all answer...

III. Has Jesus come and touched you so that you have arisen to serve?

A. Are you cast out on your bed, burning with the fever of covetousness?

- or are you up and about serving Jesus Christ?

1. I am not talking about some great whiz-bang service!

- Peter's mother in law simply got up and did her humble service to the glory of God.
- She did not go out in the streets preaching,
 - She got up and made supper to the glory of God...
 - She got up and served the people who had come into her home because the fever was gone.

2. How I could wish that there were more Christians who were serving God in their callings!

- There are so many who think their service to God has to be in leading a Bible Study or teaching Sunday school or doing evangelism in the streets.
- I am not saying those things are wrong in themselves...
 - But the great need in the church today is for men and women who humbly serve God in their daily callings...
 - For those who are Christ's disciples in their homes, at the dinner table, on the drive to church...
 - For those who are Christ's disciples in their work places, when they work at the desk or in the shop or on the project...
 - Geneva and Kidderminster are two cities where the gospel truly took root...

- Families changed, language changed, work habits changed, marriages changed,
 - and the changes lasted in both cities for well over a hundred years.
 - It was evident to everyone!
- Everyone was serving Christ in his or her calling and God was glorified from one generation to the next...
 - And these cities became a source of light to the whole world that remains with us to this day!
 - Not because they all became missionaries, but because they all served Christ where they were.
 - Christ touched them,
 - the burning fever left them...
 - They arose and followed Him.

B. Have you a fever burning in you this day?

1. Then I urge you to take Christ home with you today.
 - Do not live without Him another day!
 - Take Him with you to cure your fevers when they arise so that you can serve the living God.
2. But how do you take Christ home with you?
 - a. Jesus tells us that we are to abide in Him by abiding in His word...
 - He touches you through the promise of the gospel when you believe...
 - You look to Him to heal you and raise you up from your sick bed to serve.
 - And whenever you feel the fever coming back,
 - Turn to Him again and ask Him to heal you according to His promise.
 - b. But let me tell you...
 - If you feed on the filth of the world—
 - If your diet is television and worldly music and magazines of filth, you are likely to catch the fever...
 - An unhealthy environment, a filthy environment, is a place where sickness breeds...
 - If you make your friends with those who love the world and the lust of it, you will be likely to catch the fever from them.
 - If you have intimate fellowship with sick people, you will get sick.

- If you come to church, but do not eat what is good, that is, if you do not *feed* upon the word...
 - If you do not carry it with you to digest it meditate on it, but walk away and forget, the fever will overtake you again and again...
 - Proper nourishment is essential to good health...
 - If you do not meditate on the word in your house and pray in your closet, you can be sure that your fever will return.
- c. So you see what I mean when I say to take Jesus home with you.
 - Abide in Him, remain with Him, do not forsake Him.
 - He is the one who saves you so that you can serve God.
 - He is the one who heals you.

C. I hope you want to serve God.

1. It is such a beautiful thing—
 - It is the very thing that God created us to do...
 - The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have lived in an eternal relationship of loving service...
 - The Father giving all things to the Son and the Son always doing what pleases the Father,
 - and the Father and the Son giving to the Spirit, and the Spirit always doing what pleases them.
 - It is a beautiful, eternal relationship of loving service...
2. And it was this beauty that God created us to live in...
 - a. He made us in image to serve Him and to serve one another in this world.
 - We were to be a beautiful picture of the eternal love in which He dwells.
 - This is what we had until we contracted the fever or covetousness and broke away from serving to Him to serve ourselves!
 - What ruin we brought to His glorious creation...
 - b. But the story of the healing of Peter's mother teaches us that God sent His Son to restore that blessed, beautiful service in all the redeemed!
 - Do not let the fever destroy you!
 - There is a Saviour to raise you up!
 - Come to Him with all your fevers and He will lift you up!
 - To God be the glory forever.