

The Spectrum of Jesus' Healing

Matthew

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Bible Text: Matthew 8:1-13
Preached On: Sunday, September 10, 2023

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This evening, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew and chapter 8, and if by chance you're new to us not only here in person but maybe by way of online, we on Sunday evenings are in a very slow, steady and strategic path through what we know as the gospel of Matthew. It's a very unique portion of scripture because it connects the Old Testament into the New, connects the temple to the church, connects the old covenant to the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And tonight as we come to Matthew chapter 8, you may notice there's actually two titles that I've given the message. One is kind of a macro overarching title and the other one is very specific to the message tonight.

Let me begin with the first one: the confirmation that Jesus is the "rock." If you were with us in our study of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5 through 7, Jesus preaches probably the most famous sermon that he's known for, this famous Sermon on the Mount. He's gathered on this hill on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. There's no telling how many people would have been there, at minimum hundreds, more likely thousands. And over the course of what we know as that famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus builds a case of our insufficiency or inadequacy to save ourselves. In chapter 5, he talks about the ways and the means by which every single one of us at some level has sinned or transgressed against each other. Then in chapter 6, he talks about all the different ways that we have sinned against him personally. Then in chapter 7, he talks about the consequences, the reality of our sin condition. In fact, by the time you get to chapter 7, there's nobody that could have been there in that audience that would have said, "Oh, I think I'm still good." And then he ends this famous sermon by giving a story, a parable about two individuals who build respective homes. One is built sturdily upon a rock and the other upon what we know as shifting sand. Jesus tells the story that the rains come and the winds will blow and the storms of life, this is a metaphor for tonight, the storms of life will hit. The big question is, do we build our lives, do we build our proverbial house on the shifting sand of whatever the world is telling us we should think or believe, or do we place it upon him? In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is basically saying, you can place your life in anything and everybody's hands you want, but there's only one rock and there's only one sure foundation, and speaking of himself, he declared it was him.

When we get to chapter 8, I can only imagine the scene because I don't think they were technically Baptist back then, but I bet they had gotten hungry and they were kind of waiting for lunch or supper or whatever the time of day was, and they began to go down into Capernaum. They went down at Tiberius. They went down at the base of this famous scene and I can only imagine the conversations that they had on the way, the conversations they had in the local restaurants and such about, "We've never heard someone like this. Can it truly be that he is the only way, he's the only rock by which to build our lives?" Then chapter 8 happens and chapter 8 is this amazing chapter in the book of Matthew where every time you turn around somebody's life is being healed and radically altered and changed. It begins tonight with a leper and then a Roman centurion. They're going to make their way to Capernaum next week. We're going to meet that Peter's mother-in-law is sick of the fever and one of the things we're going to discover next week is the difference between a depression and a recession. You say, "Isn't that about economics?" Work with me for a moment. You know what the difference is? A recession is when your neighbor loses their job, a depression is when you lose yours. We're going to discover, we love to talk about Jesus healing, but it's real different when it's in our home. Is it not? Peter had been there for all of his ministry. He was there on the Sermon on the Mount. I'm sure Peter was in the amen corner, "Get him, Jesus! Get him!" But then sickness came to his home. They're going to go across the sea. There's going to be a literal storm that arises. And at the end of chapter 8, they're going to meet a man that, according to the Bible, has thousands and thousands and thousands of demonic residents within his life. He is a man that is famous for his ill behavior and his inability to be controlled. And so everything that he has taught them about who he is, for lack of better terms, is going to come somewhat under the microscope.

They're on their way down the hill. They make their way to the western coast of the Sea of Galilee and we pick up the story in chapter 8 verse 1. It says,

1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. 5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in

the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

So on the way down the mountain unto the city that we know is Capernaum, there are two very dramatically different interactions that Jesus has with two very different people. There is a leper who had been isolated by his culture, told he was unclean and could not get very near to anybody, even those he dearly loved. Then there's a centurion, a Roman, a Gentile who more likely than not was esteemed in the community and was well-received and, shall we say, revered. Here's the thing I want to show you tonight. The realization of what these two very specific encounters show us is that leprosy all throughout the scripture, and I know it is a real true physical illness, I get that, but throughout the Old Testament it is given to us as a picture, as an illustration, as a metaphor for sin. And then there's what you and I know as just sickness. And so when it comes to the struggle, the suffering of life, the difficulties of life, and we ask, can Jesus conquer this, can he cure this, can he address this, what we're really dealing with here are the two main issues, struggles that we face. Our primary issue is our sin condition, our secondary issue is our physical condition, the sicknesses of this life. And so I just want to walk through not only what we see respectively in these two cases, but what the Bible testifies to these subject matters, and then we're going to contrast this leper and the centurion and see the results that Jesus was desiring us to see.

Let's begin with the primary issue. At the core of each and every one of us, our struggle in life, though we have sicknesses, though we have infirmities, though we have issues of a physical nature, mental nature, social nature, whatever it may be, at the core of all of us is a sin condition that, as we're going to discuss tonight, there's not a one of us that can fix on our own. When you go back in the book of Leviticus, and I know that's the favorite book of all Baptists, you go back in the book of Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14, it talks about leprosy. It speaks to what it is and how it operates. It begins to draw a picture for us that, yes, it is a physical illness, yes, it is something that is tangibly physical, but it pictures for us a much more serious condition and that is the sickness of our soul, the sin that penetrates our inmost being. In fact, if you do a study of leprosy, though we see the outside effects, it's truly an inward disease. It's a disease of the nervous system. I can't see your nerves, you can't see mine. I know we tell each other we get on each other's nerves, but we can't see the nerves that we're getting on, correct? It is an inward problem that ultimately has some very outward manifestations. Is that not how sin operates in our life? When sin is embedded in our life and it is a part of our life, obviously we have outward effects therein, but it is primary within our soul. It is in our inmost being. When it comes to sin, yes, it always has an effect on those that are around us, it impacts more than ourselves, but at the heart of the issue sin is more difficult on the one struggling than those that are around. It is the one struggling with sin who can't sleep at night. It is the one struggling with sin who continues to berate themselves internally about their failures and their struggles. And it is that one who is struggling with sin who often is not able to sleep, stay asleep, or get to sleep.

Let's think about the symptoms of what we know as leprosy. Leprosy creates numbness. One cannot feel their extremities. It presents a vile odor. One's voice can be impacted by leprosy. There's even case studies where the disease of leprosy, because of how it operates, even gets into the walls and the clothes of those that are stricken with it. Now do you understand why they had leper colonies? Now do you understand why in the Old Testament they'd walk around saying, "Unclean, unclean, unclean!" Because even in the presence of this horrific disease, it could be in the walls, it could be in the clothes, it could be in the furniture. Here's the critical thing, it is not always seen with the naked eye. And so when you look at the disease of leprosy, when you look at this man who throws himself at the feet of Jesus, he comes, "Can you make me clean? Can you make me clean?" I can guarantee what happened to the crowd. Thousands listened to him on the mount, but they scattered like cockroaches in the daylight. "Don't get around that guy." Why? Because his clothes are filthy. His life is filthy. There's nothing about him that has not been tainted by this disease of the nerves. Is there any rock "unturned" by the sin in our lives? No. It impacts, it affects everything, but it is rooted at our innermost core and here's the key: you cannot cure yourself. Leprosy is one of those diseases that oftentimes we think of that is days gone by. Unfortunately it still exists in our world today and its cure is elusive.

So let's talk about the secondary issue. We've got a man who shows up. He's a centurion. He's got a servant at home who, according to him, he is tormented and he is sick, verse 6. He's sick of the palsy and he's a sick man. He's been diagnosed. It's been determined. It's who he is. The reason I call it a secondary issue is in the little book of 3 John, verse 2, it makes the statement that the wellness of our life, that the Lord desires us to be well physically to the level of our soul, and what the Bible is saying there is essentially like Mark 8 says, what good is it to be physically healthy if your soul is sick, and if your soul is sick, it doesn't matter how physically well you are. That being said, so illnesses in the physical realm are secondary compared to the sickness of sin in our lives. Typically, when we talk about a sickness, we're dealing with something that is outward. It's within the flesh. Now, understand, I know your internal organs are inside of you, but at the same time, we're dealing with the body, we're dealing with the flesh. It's not a neurological nervous system necessarily. Don't get me wrong, sickness of any kind is hard on the victim. It's difficult being the one who's sick. It's difficult the one being immobilized. But talk to the ones who are caring for them. Oftentimes caretakers of the sick are more exhausted than the sick. A physical sickness can be so hard on those who have to make the meals and clean the clothes and take care of everything because they're just, they have an incapacity to do so.

The symptoms. When it comes to physical illness, I know there's medical professionals in the room, it can be anywhere. There's not a place in your body that can't get sick. I mean, seriously, from the top of your head to the bottom of your toes, there's not a single item of you physically that cannot at some level experience sickness. That being said, in the book of Job, chapter 2, verse 4, whom we know as that character Job has been highlighted by God of his faithfulness to the things of God and to the person of God. In chapter 2, Satan comes to God again and says, "Alright, I know Job passed round 1. I know it." Now I want you to think about round 1 for just a moment. All 10 of his kids are

dead. his fortune is lost, his reputation is history, and he says, "You know what? Let me touch his body. Let me touch his skin. Let me allow sickness and soreness to come in." Now remember, God gives parameters, right? He says, "Just don't take his life." Here's what's interesting in verse 4, Job chapter 2. Here's what Satan says, "All that a man has he will give for his flesh." In other words, when it comes to illness, when it comes to sickness, when it comes to, as it says here, the palsy and being tormented, we are willing to go to such extremes. In fact, in Mark chapter 5, there's a woman who's been going to every doctor she can find for 12 years, and she finally hits the end of her proverbial rope. You know, when it comes to physical illness, unlike sin in our lives, oftentimes, we've all experienced this in "recent days," we're told we cannot be around them because their condition is contagious. Now, sin technically is not contagious. It can be infectious. But that being said, in other words, there's times where we can't be, and that's exactly what we see with physical illnesses. There's a time we have to isolate ourselves. There's times that we have to be in what we call the ICU for a reason. Why? Because whatever it is we're struggling with and dealing with is of such a nature, being outside the general populace is not wise.

When it comes to physical illness and sickness, you need a "physician." That's a loose term for anybody in the medical field, but there's a lot of incredible men and women that God has blessed with an understanding of anatomy and physiology and biology and chemistry that I and most of you can't grasp, and they have the ability to diagnose, and they have the ability to say, "Hey, if you'll just do A, B, and C, the fever will go away and you can roll in about 72 hours and you can live your life the way you should and you hope to do so." Here's the difference: you can't do that with sin. You can't give somebody a pill and say, "Hey, got news for you, the fever will go away, you'll be good." Sin is one of those things like leprosy. It eats away at us from the inside. Physical illness can impede our soul from the outside.

So here's the reality. What's happening in these two situations? I want to address just some concepts that Jesus is communicating here for you and I to hopefully grasp when it comes to his capacity to address the issues of our lives, whether it is the sickness of sin or the sickness of the body. Let's begin with sociologically, in other words, how he interacted, what he showed us about culture at large. There is a leper who is one that would have been isolated, unclean, in a colony of his own and told he's not to interact with anybody else. There's a centurion that most likely at some levels had a parade and a trophy given to him by somebody at some point. In other words, it didn't matter to Jesus if everybody loved you or nobody wanted to be around you. He didn't take that in regard when it came to healing. He did not allow, or shall we say, he did not receive the resume of your interaction and influence with others to determine whether he was going to address your problem in life.

Religiously, there's a Jew and there's a Gentile. You say, "Well, how do you know we've got a Jew?" I want you to notice what it says in verse 4 of chapter 8. Jesus said to him, "Don't tell any man, go your way, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." That's that passage in Leviticus 13 and 14. In other words, when somebody had leprosy, they put them in colonies, they're unclean,

there is more than, as we've seen, more than a six-foot barrier that they're to have around because of how deadly and how scared people are of it. That being said, it was only by going to a "priest" and offering the gift that the priest would declare he was clean. Now the reason this is important on so many levels is it shows us this leper was of a Jewish background. We know that the centurion was a good old Roman pagan Gentile like most of us would have been in those days. Now there are thoughts, some people say, "Well maybe he was a proselyte in the fact that he came to Jesus in the first place," but Capernaum as a whole was a very Roman city. So why does that matter? Because it doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't matter what your backstory is, it doesn't matter how you were brought up or how you weren't brought up, it doesn't matter what your specific religious adherence is or is not, Jesus is the way in spite of how you were brought up, raised up, or what you believe or think. And so in other words, he addressed them from the Jewish side all the way to the Gentile side.

How about just a simple observation, public versus private. I guarantee you that his interaction with the centurion was public. I guarantee his interaction with the leper was private. Why? Because nobody wanted to be around that leper, much less touch him as Jesus did, and everybody wanted to be in the realm of influence of the centurion.

But here's the one that gets me, distance. You know, it's interesting to me that when we talk about the power of God, how easily we get caught up in the here and now in the flesh and think that somehow, some way, if we're not physically in the presence of, it cannot happen and cannot be. Let me illustrate. When the leper comes to Jesus, how does Jesus heal him? He touches him. How does he heal the servant of the centurion? He speaks a word. He says it from a distance, having never laid eyes on him, having never been in his proximity, having never been in his vicinity, Jesus is able to handle, he's able to cure, he's able to fix even that which he is not physically in the presence or in the midst of.

That being said, when we look at the scope of Jesus' ability to address and to heal our lives, both on the inside and on the outside, it doesn't matter whether we're sociologically isolated or of great favor. It doesn't matter what our backstory is or is not. It doesn't matter if it's public or private. It doesn't matter whether we're in close proximity or not. So at the end of the encounters, the question we have to ask ourselves is why? Obviously, Jesus wanted that leper to be whole and to be restored, of course. Obviously, he wanted that centurion's servant to be able to operate the way that they would desire. But let me call your attention to the very last chapter of the last gospel known as John in chapter 20 verse 31. Here's what the scripture said, that if everything Jesus did, if everything that he said were written down, all the libraries of the world could not contain it. Now, have you ever really thought about that for just a moment? Have you ever considered what that would really mean? So, you know, today or this morning, I spoke about the parables of Jesus, and by the way, wherever you side on it, that's between you and the good Lord. There's either 32 or 33 parables, okay? If you subscribe to the rich man and Lazarus as a parable, then there's 33 in your book and then there's 32 in others. Do you really believe that's all the parables he told? I mean seriously. All right, there's three blind men specifically that are healed in the Bible. Do you really believe those are the only three

blind men Jesus healed? No. We only have but a sliver, but what we have is all we need, and all we need is what we have.

That being said, in John 20:31, it talks about if everything Jesus did or said were written, we couldn't handle it, we couldn't put it in one volume, and then he says this in verse 31, "I have said these things so that you might believe." The reason that every story we have, every healing, every interaction, every message is so that it will show us our need for Jesus. Do you see what Jesus is doing here when he comes off the Sermon on the Mount? He's basically, this is the way that I have to picture it... one of the things about being a "public speaker" is we read body language. We know. I've told you all before, I'm going to write a book one day called "View from the Pulpit." Oh, I see it all. All right. I see when conviction, I see when sleep, I see it all. And what I gather here is he saw every face, every body language of every person that was in that Sermon on the Mount and you almost get the idea, now this is just Jeff putting a little something into it, you almost get the idea he's like, "You know, I just don't think they really got the whole picture. Let me give them a visual demonstration here." He takes a leper who they wouldn't get within who knows how many feet of, and he touches him and heals him. He takes a centurion, a Roman Gentile, a pagan and he heals from a distance. Why? So they might believe.

And then this section concludes in verse 11 through 13, "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." We addressed the last times we've been gathered about the Sermon on the Mount, that every single person that listened to Jesus preach that famous sermon, every one of them would have had some type of Jewish impact or influence as a part of their life. They lived in their own world that thought that if I'm in the right place at the right time doing the right thing then surely somehow I am "right with God." Can you imagine how this would have hit, that a pagan Roman centurion was used as an illustration of Jesus, of faith, that was not as present as those that "are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Let me put it into our context today, and I've used this illustration numerous times, but I'm going to use it again. There are way too many people in this world that think one day they're going to go through the pearly gates of heaven just because they're a Baptist, or just because they live in the South, or just because of this. How many people think, well, just because I haven't done A, B, and C? What does he say about the centurion? "Because of your faith." And even though that exact word is not utilized, do we not see the faith of that leper willing to approach this well-known prophet, teacher, an individual who the community has been speaking of, he is willing to go and place himself in his presence. It's an exercise of faith and what we discover is just what Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with. He said there's two ways you can live and leave this life. You can do it on the shifting sand of what everybody's selling and propagating and teaching, or you can place it all on the solid foundation of himself.

You had a leper, you had a centurion. You had somebody who was dirty, you had somebody that was clean. You had somebody who was Jewish, you had somebody that was Gentile. You had somebody that was touched, you had somebody at a distance. And what was the common thread? Every one of the two individuals exhibited faith. That is why the Bible says we don't live by sight, we live by faith. Ladies and gentlemen, though it is the most powerful element in the known world, faith that is, can we at least agree that it may be the hardest to exhibit because we don't always see it, we don't always get to touch it, we don't always get to hear it, we have to simply walk in it.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight as we prepare for our time of response, maybe there's an aspect, maybe there's an area of your life tonight where you've not been willing to turn it over to the Lord because you've questioned, is it important to him? Can he handle it? Is it even within the scope of his power and authority? I think we saw tonight it most assuredly is. Or maybe tonight you're that individual that for whatever reason got to this point of this service tonight never trusting Jesus as your Savior, maybe tonight's the night where you call on the Lord to be saved. I know this, that in Matthew chapter 8 we had two men from two completely different backgrounds that both met Jesus at the same spot and it's called faith, and the question is tonight is, what is the element, what is the aspect, what is the part of faith that needs to be exercised in your life.

Lord Jesus as we come to this time of response, Lord, I know there are those here tonight that need to step out and step forward in faith with what we might call a public decision. But I also know, God, there's a whole lot of us that are exercised of faith tonight, not as stepping forward in this aisle but stepping out of this place in a moment, Lord, and living life as you've called us to, trusting you in the little things, in the big things, in the hard things, and in the easy things. God, right now at this moment, Lord, as we prepare to sing the song of response, Lord, may it be more than just the words that flow past our lips. May our hearts cry, it truly be to trust you with our soul, with our flesh, and with everything in between. It is in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.

If you would stand with me as Bruce leads us, whatever decision we'll be right here at the front.

"O soul are you weary and troubled
No light in the darkness you see
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

Thro' death into life everlasting,
He passed, and we follow Him there;

O'er us sin no more hath dominion--
For more than conqu'rors we are!"

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, as we depart from this place, Lord, I know that from the very moment we leave these grounds, Lord, there's going to be that which competes with our eyes, that which competes with our ears, and as we've been challenged on our way out to turn our eyes upon Jesus in this world will so quickly fade away, God, I pray that you would keep us focused on yourself. God, I pray that our eyes would not stray, they would not veer to anything that competes with you. And may you do that in our lives until we meet again. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.