

MATTHEW 8: 1- 17

COMPASSIONATE AUTHORITY

I have heard the term, “expert” defined as, “someone from out of town ferrying a briefcase.” But in general, people have authority in an area when they are able to back up their claims about some specific area of knowledge. This is what we see in court cases, which nowadays are laden with so-called experts.

What we see in the healings that were performed in Jesus’ Galilean ministry is compassion, but there is much more than that. The predominant theme is that of the authority of Jesus regarding the message of the kingdom He brings. His disciples can trust Him and should adopt His vision for life. The Sermon on the Mount was not given as being optional or to be trimmed and dumbed down according to whatever cultural conditions existed at the time of its reading. It was/ is a necessary foundation for life. Coming off of the end of that message, Jesus backs up His authority to make this kind of claim with powerful actions. And not only does He perform miracles, the people on whom they are performed and those with whom He interacts leaves long-standing cultural taboos crushed and thrown aside. Jesus is not only a Messiah in word, but is also Messiah at work.

As we go through this section, please pay attention, because there is much more being said than we may see on the surface. This is in part due to the way Matthew writes. When we compare his Gospel to the other synoptics it is quite clear that he condenses stories, (leaves out details we see in Mark or Luke) in order to remain focused on the theme he espouses. There are times he leaves the chronology of events in order that a greater truth or theme may be set forth. With this in mind, we can focus on what Matthew says and not worry so much about what he doesn’t say.

Jesus’ Matthew focuses on three types of miracles as a demonstration that the kingdom of God truly has arrived. Generally speaking, Jesus’ miracles can be divided into three categories: healings, exorcisms and nature miracles, with raisings of the dead tacked on also.

In three somewhat brief scenes, Jesus brings restoration, (healing) to people that were for the most part marginalized in that society. But He can only do this if He has the authority to do so. In one fell swoop Jesus shows His authority while at the same time, He reaches out to those on the fringes of Judaism: lepers, Gentiles and women, all the while fulfilling OT prophecy.

1 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 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."

We find ourselves at the end of the sermon. Jesus has come down from the hill where He was teaching and as you would expect after such a message, He was thronged by many. In this case He was approached by a leper. There is a great deal more going on here than you might expect.

- Leprosy, most commonly known as Hansen's disease today, was only one condition referred to as leprosy, in Jesus' day. Most skin conditions fell into this category.
- Lev. 13 -14 specifically deals with the guidelines for leprosy. Jesus keeps with these. Germ theory and "unclean!" quarantine.
- "Lord, if you are willing." The leper appeals to Jesus as the one bearing God's healing purity.
- The source of the healing is in Jesus, who only has to will to effect an immediate cure. As Jesus fulfills the Mosaic Law, it becomes a "testimony" to the priesthood and the people of His true Messianic identity.
- Jesus isn't rendered unclean by touching the leper, rather He makes the unclean, clean.
- Jesus broke the barrier of being unclean, bringing the leper into the fold and not ostracizing him.
- "Don't tell anyone." Go tell the priest. While His miracles authenticate His Messianic identity, He doesn't want the people to become so enthralled with the miracles that they miss His primary mission; the forgiveness of

sin. This is the true cleansing. **This is a lesson that we would do well to heed also.**

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

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."

- Jesus returns to His base of operations in Capernaum, the site of Peter's home since he moved from Bethsaida: John 1.
- Centurion: military leader over 100 men. The smallest division of Roman troops. There was a Roman garrison just East of Capernaum.
- A Gentile. Jesus now breaks the barrier to the Gentiles.
- **This speaks to the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom. (Isa. 25:6-9; 56:3-8)**
- **This opens the door to the Great Commission, which is given later.**
- Addresses Jesus as "Lord" as did the leper. He (centurion) shows that he is sensitive to the culture in that a Jew wasn't to enter the house of a Gentile. He also applies his knowledge of the chain of command.
- The centurion, when giving orders carried the weight of the emperor. In this he also sees Jesus' authority. **If Jesus can "speak" a thing, then His word carries the authority of God.**

Look at Jesus' response to this man's words.

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.

- Another reference to the inclusion of Gentiles at the banquet table.
- “Assuredly, I say to you...” This was a way of issuing a warning and would not be missed by the Jews in the audience.
- It was a warning to the Jews, who found their inclusion in their heritage rather than their faith.
- Faith in Jesus is the only ticket that gets us into the banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- While it shocked His listeners, it is consistent with OT prophets who consistently called Israel back to God. Jesus will continue this appeal to faith and not heritage. Attendance at that banquet has one primary requirement for all God’s children, regardless of ethnic identity: faith in Jesus as Messiah.
- Jesus simply spoke and the servant was healed instantly.

Peter’s Mother-in-Law Healed

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.

Jesus has already crossed the boundaries of purity and ethnicity. In this third miracle He will cross the boundary of gender. He heals a woman, one of another group so often kept on the fringes of Jewish society.

- Fever: considered a disease, not a symptom.
- He heals her with a simple touch.
- The fact that she gets up instantly speaks to her gratitude of being healed.
- This is to be the motivation for all of Jesus’ disciples, including us.
- In Mark and Luke, we are told that this healing took place on the Sabbath, which tells us why the next verses took place in the evening.

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,

The Sabbath was over at sundown. Healing and traveling were considered to be work. Therefore the sick were brought to Jesus after sundown.

17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.”

Now Matthew emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy by quoting Isaiah 53:4.

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is known as the "Servant's Song" which has substitutionary atonement as one of its central themes. This is the heart of Jesus' ministry.
- Unfortunately it was misunderstood then as it is now. Then, the substitution of the servant could not be reconciled with a conquering king in the minds of Jewish interpreters. Now, that is clear to us.
- Now, the misunderstanding comes from those who attempt to "claim" divine healing on demand by the use of this scripture.
- This text speaks of the servant that takes our sin and our sicknesses on Himself. It also teaches that there is healing in the atonement; but similarly there is the promise of a resurrection body in the atonement, even if believers don't inherit it until the resurrection.
- While we do attain our salvation instantly, there are other blessings we don't get until all of these benefits right now, on demand any more than we can demand our resurrection bodies right now.
- This was one of the issues Paul dealt with at Corinth; an over-realized eschatology, which demanded blessing which may not be ours until the end of the age.

A word on the faith we have seen in these verses.

The actual healings were not in proportion to the amount of faith of those healed, nor is the healing *caused* by the centurion's faith, but is in response to his faith in Jesus as the One who can heal.

"Faith is not a particular substance, the more of which the disciples have, the more they can accomplish. It is not a gift of magic that can be manipulated at will. Rather, faith is confidence that we can do what God calls us to do --- it is taking God at His word. Therefore the disciples should not place confidence in what they have but have confidence that if God calls them to do something, thy can do it in His strength."

Wilkins

Jesus has crossed the artificial boundaries that had been established through custom and culture. He has reached out to all and extended an invitation to the final grand banquet: the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is now nothing hindering any of us from going to Him. Not our impurity, our ethnicity, nor our gender, nor anything

else, can prevent us from being able to accept His invitation, and His empowerment for living out the Sermon on the Mount as well as being his disciple.

And how can we know this? We can know it because He demonstrated through His miracles and His teachings that He has the authority declare it so!