



The Authority of Jesus Christ - Over Disease (Part 1)

Matthew 8:1-4

1. A Terrible Disease (verse 2a)
2. A Wonderful Approach (verse 2b)
3. A Favorable Response (verses 3-4)

Matthew begins his gospel, in the first four chapters, with a description of the background and history of Jesus Christ. Essentially, Matthew explains where the Messiah came from. He was born of royal descent. His conception was miraculous. As a child, He was protected from harm. He was the One to Whom John the Baptist, the forerunner pointed. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit for ministry. He was victorious in temptation. He began His ministry in chapter 4.

A great summary verse of His ministry is found in verse 23, "And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, **healing** every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." Notice the two activities of His early ministry: teaching and healing. For the past several months, we studied the beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry in chapters 5-7. This morning, we begin a study of Jesus' healing ministry, which Matthew records for us in chapters 8-9.

Within the span of these next two chapters, Matthew will give us the account of 11 different people who were healed of their diseases by Jesus Christ.

- A leper will be cured of his leprosy (8:2-4).
- A servant will be cured of his paralysis and pain (8:5-13).
- A mother-in-law will be cured of her fever (8:14).
- Two violent, demon possessed men will have the demons cast from them.
- A paralytic will be cured (9:1-8).
- A daughter will be raised from the dead (9:18-19, 23-26).
- A hemorrhaging woman will be healed from her bleeding (9:20-22).
- Two blind men will see (9:27-32).
- A dumb man will speak (9:32-33).

In the rest of the gospel of Matthew, we will only see only five more people healed of disease:

- A man's withered hand will be restored (Matt. 12:9-14).
- Two men will be have demons cast from them (Matt. 12:22; 17:14-18).
- The two blind-man on the outskirts of Jericho, will be given sight (20:29-34).

That's a total of 16 different people healed of their diseases. But it isn't as if Matthew records these cases for us, because these are the only ones he knew of. No, Matthew describes how Jesus healed many, many, many, many people during His ministry. For instance, ...

- "And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them" (Matt. 4:23-24).
- "And 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 ill" (Matt. 8:16).
- "And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt. 9:35).
- "... many followed Him, and He healed them all" (Matt. 12:15).
- "And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; and they began to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured" (Matt. 14:34-36).
- "And great multitudes came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them, so that the multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. 15:30-31).

With the testimony of so many miracles described by Matthew, I have even heard some say that Jesus' miracles were so many that when

Jesus was finished with His ministry, there was no sickness in Israel at the time of Jesus! Perhaps this is hyperbole, but I am sure that in some measure, Matthew felt like the apostle John, who wrote, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written" (John 21:25).

Yet, Matthew will record for us only 16 specific healings in his entire gospel. All of these miracles will be only a sampling of all of the healing miracles of Jesus. I believe that these miracles are typical of the miracles that Jesus did. Furthermore, I believe that these have been included in the Bible because they include some elements that are particularly instructive for us. Out of the 16 healings recorded, 11 of them are contained in the next two chapters (chapters 8-9). The implication of this is that Matthew is trying to focus our attention on something. He has mentioned these few miracles for a purpose.

It is also significant for us to note here that Matthew doesn't give us these events in the order in which they happened in the ministry of Jesus. Mark and Luke (who are both more interested in the chronology and sequence of things than Matthew) have these events occurring in a different chronological order than Matthew does. This is a huge indication to us that Matthew's aim is to present Jesus in a specific way. Matthew isn't simply regurgitating the facts of Jesus' life. Rather, Matthew has specifically selected and recorded a few miracles of healing for us to behold. They haven't been chosen at random. They have been chosen to suit Matthew's purpose in his presentation of Jesus Christ.

Commentators are agreed that Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus Christ at the King. We have already seen Jesus born of a royal lineage. We have already heard Jesus preach of His kingdom. Today, we begin to behold the authority of the King. Matthew will begin to describe Jesus as the Miracle-man. This morning, we will behold the authority of Jesus Christ over disease.

Before we dig into these verses, I would like to remind you that these words are describing actual events that actually happened. This is no "once upon a time" fairy-tale of a miracle worker that never existed. These things actually happened some 2000 years ago. In my exposition of these verses, I will attempt to describe these events in such a way that you might feel the impact these miracles would have made to those who witnessed them.

Let's begin by looking at verse 1 of Matthew 8, "And when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him." Crowds were nothing new to Jesus. His ministry was a very popular ministry. "And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan" (Matthew 4:25). When Matthew writes that many had come down from the mountain, it ties us back to the last two verses of chapter 7, where Matthew writes, "The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching **them as one having authority**, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). As we have seen, for the past seven months, there has been great reason for the multitudes to be amazed at Jesus' teaching. It was challenging. It was instructive. It was encouraging. It was authoritative.

What made His teaching authoritative? In chapter 5, Jesus often said, "You have heard it say, **but I say to you**." Jesus opposed the teaching of the Pharisees by referring to His own authority. On top of that, He dares to speak against the religious establishment of the day and expose their hypocrisy and corruption. In chapter 6, they are clearly identified as "hypocrites." In chapter 7, Jesus identified Himself as the judge. He said that there would be a day when you stand before Him, who will determine whether or not you will enter the kingdom of heaven or not.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5-7 was filled with authority and the people marveled at it. In the next two chapters, Jesus will give the people even more reasons to marvel as He will heal many. The crowds that heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount were ready to follow Him, because of His authority in teaching. Soon, His authority to heal disease would give the crowds even more reasons to marvel and follow Him.

This morning we will begin by examining the first of Jesus' three miracles which will teach us of Jesus' authority over disease. We will examine the case of the leper made clean in verses 2-4, where Matthew records, "And behold, a leper came to Him, and bowed down to Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' And he stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.'"

1. A Terrible Disease (verse 2a)

Physically

We have here the story of a man with leprosy coming to Jesus. In the time of Jesus, as many of you know, leprosy was a terrible disease. It is difficult to know exactly what this disease was. Most believe that this is what is commonly called Hansen's disease, which starts out with a pink or white discoloration of a patch of skin. From there, it often begins to spread. Sometimes spongy, tumor-like swellings would begin to grow on the skin. Pretty soon, the disease would become systemic and attack the internal organs as well. When on the skin, the nerve endings no longer detect heat or injury, and the skin wastes away. Tissues between the bones deteriorate and cause the deformity of hands and feet. Death often occurs after 10-20 years with the disease. This terrible disease leads to a terrible death.

Socially

Since there was no known cure, those with leprosy were simply isolated into their colonies. This made the disease twice as bad, because those who were sick were banished from contact with other loved ones. The law said, "He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Lev. 13:46). In fact, when they came close to people, they had to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" because they were not to be touched (Lev. 13:45). According to Jewish tradition, they were to keep a distance of 6 cubits (9 feet) from others, in case the disease spread.

Spiritually

To make matters worse, those with leprosy were ceremonially unclean. They couldn't enter into the temple area. They were banished from worshipping God with the congregation, unless they had been declared "clean" by a priest (according to the regulations of Leviticus 13,14). The perception became that they were unacceptable to God because of their illness.

The disease was so terrible that the Jews even considered those with leprosy as "dead." Perhaps you remember when Miriam and Aaron grumbled against Moses, God's anger burned against them and Miriam became leprous. Aaron pleaded with Moses, "Do not let here be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!" (Num. 12:12).

So, imagine this man coming to Jesus. You might be thinking of how such a person could get so close to Jesus. Actually, it would be quite easy for him. He would simply have to approach the crowd and cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" He would simply need to walk right toward Jesus and the crowd would make room for him, so that he wouldn't touch them.

2. A Wonderful Approach (verse 2b)

Look at how verse 2 describes this meeting, He "came to Him, and bowed down to Him." His approach was one of humility. By bowing down to Jesus, the leper placed himself in complete submission to Jesus. He said, "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean" (verse 2). There is much that we can learn from the way this leper approached Jesus.

1. He acknowledged Jesus' ability.

He said, "You can make me clean." This is a simple statement of sovereignty. Though leprosy was considered to be incurable, this leper had come to the One, Whom he knew could cure him. And the leper affirmed that He could. It's not like this took rocket science intelligence. He had certainly heard the rumors concerning this Miracle-Man (that those with various diseases and pains were being cured, from demoniacs to epileptics to paralytics). Perhaps he had seen other people who had already been cured of their disease. He reasoned correctly that this Man had great powers. He was convinced that Jesus had the authority to heal him as well.

It is interesting to note that the word translated, "bowed down," is a word often translated, "worship" in the New Testament. The basic idea is that of kneeling or bowing down or prostrating one self before another. It is the context, then, that determines how exactly it is best to translate the word (i.e. "bow down" or "worship"). Several of the basic English translations use the word, "worship" (KJV, NKJV, ASV).

Furthermore, when you tie this thought to the way in which the leper addresses Jesus, you further see this man's humility. He addresses Jesus as "Lord." This may imply that he was being polite, as we do when we use the word, "sir." Or, this leper may have addressed Jesus as a superior, like a soldier would address his commanding officer. Or, this leper may have realized that someone far greater than he was standing before him. Again, it is the context that determines how exactly to understand exactly how this ought to be understood. Some think that the leper bowed down in common courtesy to a superior. But, you don't bow down in simple courtesy to someone who (as you are convinced) can heal you! I believe that the leper fell on His face in worship of Jesus, the almighty God incarnate, acknowledging Jesus' sovereignty in all things.

2. He submitted to Jesus' authority.

The leper said, "If you are willing." In other words, this leper came before Jesus with great humility of heart. He didn't come demanding anything from Jesus. He didn't come expecting anything from Jesus. He came with a heart-felt desire to be healed. Yet, He submitted everything to the tender heart of Jesus.

I believe that our prayers to God ought to come with this same attitude. When we pray to God, we ought to believe and acknowledge God's sovereignty in all things. This will often turn into our praise and adoration of God. And then, when we come with requests to God, we need to trust that God will act according to His will in all things for the good of Himself and for those who love Him. We have the clear promise in Romans 8:28 that God will indeed "cause all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." Certainly, we can entrust our prayers to His desire and will.

This type of praying is "according to His will" praying. "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14-15). We should begin our prayers with Job's heart, when he said, "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2) (i.e. "You can make me clean."). Then, we should come to God with our requests, our longings and our desires and ask God if He is willing to grant them (i.e. "if You are willing."). We certainly have a God who can accomplish all that He desires. We also have a God who can be trusted to do what is best for accomplishing His glory. He can be trusted. Thus, we pray, "if you are willing."

This is how Jesus taught us to pray. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This is nothing more than a prayer that God would accomplish His desire upon the earth, just as He already does in heaven. We might have our requests and our desires, but they are all over-ruled by our desire to see God's desire accomplished first.

This is how Jesus prayed. Remember when Jesus was in the garden, just before His betrayal, arrest, and death. He had told His disciples to "sit here while I go over there and pray" (Matt. 26:36), saying "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38). He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus was deeply grieved at the suffering that he was about to experience. He knew of the tremendous sufferings that He was about to experience -- greater sufferings than anyone had ever experienced before. He pleaded with God for another way. He pleaded with God for the cup to pass from Him. Yet, Jesus resolved Himself, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

This is how Paul prayed. At the beginning of his epistle to the Romans, he wrote, "God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ... I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far)" (Rom. 1:9-10, 13). Paul was unceasingly requesting that he might come to see those who lived in Rome. He often planned to come to Rome. Yet, in every way, Paul submitted Himself to the will of the Father, as he was prevented from coming to

the Romans on several occasions. (See also Acts 18:21, where Paul speaks to those at Ephesus, "I will return to you again if God wills").

James, likewise, warns us, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that'" (James 4:13-15). If God wants us to go someplace or make a profit in some town, God will see to it that it will happen. I think of Jonah, who tried to flee to Tarshish, rather than going to Nineveh. God brought him to Nineveh, by way of the big fish. If God doesn't want us to go someplace, God will see to it that we won't get there. I think of Paul, who tried to bring the gospel to Asia (which is a good thing), the Holy Spirit forbid him to go there (Acts 16:6). He also tried to go into Bithynia, but "the Spirit of Jesus did not permit [him]" (Acts 16:7).

We ought to see the road-blocks that God puts in our path as good things that the Lord has chosen to do. God uses such roadblock in our lived to accomplish His purposes. I think especially, regarding the physical problems that we experience in this life with our frail flesh. This is how we need to come to God. I think of several of you here at Rock Valley Bible Church who are experiencing chronic health problems. Your prayers and our prayers for you ought to be like the prayer of this leper. We ought to pray prayers like this, "Lord, I know that you can do all things. I know that you can make sick and that you can make well. I desire to be made well. Yet, in all things, I submit to your desires for my life." Even if you aren't healed, you need to praise Him for it. Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego are great examples of this. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have setup" (Dan. 3:17-18). Paul is a good example. He pleaded with the Lord three times that the thorn in the flesh would be removed. Yet, when God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9), Paul was pleased to boast about his weaknesses. His weakness enabled the power of Christ to dwell in him and make him strong, "for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9, 11). You need to throw yourself, like this leper did, on the goodness and compassion of God to deal appropriately with your health problems, and pray, "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean" (verse 2).

3. A Favorable Response (verses 3-4)

In this instance, praise the Lord, we find Jesus willing. Verse 3 tells us how Jesus responded to this man, "And he stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." With His actions, Jesus demonstrates why it is that He is so lovely, so caring and so attractive to us. He reached out and touched this unclean man. When you think of those with leprosy in Biblical times, you can think of those with AIDS in our society. There is a certain fear that even touching those with AIDS will allow the disease to be transferred to you. Jesus is like the man, who has compassion upon the AIDS victim and reaches out and touches him.

Several years ago, I went to visit someone in the hospital. In hospitals there are often isolation rooms for those with highly contagious diseases. These rooms are plastered with signs that basically say, "STOP." Before you enter this room, you need to put on gloves, or a gown or a mask, so as to protect yourself from the sick person inside the room. I noticed that many of the family members ignored these warnings. They had lived in the same house with the patient for months when she was sick. What was I to do? I was more like family to them, than "visiting clergy." At that point, I remember thinking of Jesus, who touched this leper and demonstrated His compassion upon the individual. And it really struck me how far Jesus went to demonstrate His compassion on others.

Though the law had dictated a separation of the lepers from the rest of the people, Jesus wasn't above touching this man. Though touching such a man might make Jesus ceremonially unclean, Jesus wasn't defiled by touching this man. Rather than being defiled, Jesus cleansed. In this instance, **it wasn't the unclean one that made the clean one unclean. Rather, it was the clean one that made the unclean one clean.** How like our sins! We come polluted and defiled to Jesus. Rather than polluting Him, He cleanses us!

"Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (verse 3). I believe that this cleansing was obvious. I placed on the children's notes a picture of a lady with leprosy. You can see her deformed hands. Imagine her withered hands now looking like yours or mine. We don't know how far leprosy had devastated this man, yet, his hands and his feet and his face were restored to look "normal." He was cured "immediately." It would have been obvious to all.

How the heart of this leper would leap for joy at what Jesus did for him! **Physically**, this leprous man had been wonderfully healed. Certainly, he understood the implications upon his **social** life as well. No longer would he be excluded from the commonwealth of the society. He could return to living a normal life. Furthermore, **spiritually**, he was able to return into the fold of God's people to worship with them. What a wonderful thing happened to him. What great news he could have shared with all! This was

When something good happens to you, your natural desire is to let everybody know about it. Perhaps you have won some prize in a drawing. Perhaps you have earned some scholarship. Perhaps you have received a big bonus at work. Perhaps you have been healed of cancer. Perhaps you have been saved from a big auto accident. Perhaps you have just landed a job after months of unemployment. Your natural tendency is to tell others about it. It is how God has wired us. For this leper, this was arguably the best thing that ever happened to him in his entire life. Think with me of the greatest thing that has ever happened to you. Certainly you ought to think first of your salvation in Christ. Perhaps another great thing come into your mind: Your spouse or some great award you have received or a great prize you have won. Hasn't your natural response been to tell everyone about it? This is how God has made us. We naturally love to tell others of the good fortunes that have come our way. This is our primary motive for evangelism. When we are impacted by our redemption in Christ, we easily tell others of what God has done for us. We are "witnesses" in that we give first hand testimony to what God has done for us. It is somewhat natural for us to do. My children often say, "Look at me daddy," as they show off their latest achievements. My daughter has been entering herself into a contest with a local radio station each morning, with the hopes that she would win the prize. Well, recently, she won the prize! She was very excited to tell others of the prize that she had won! God has made us to marvel at the good things that come upon us and tell them to others.

Now, imagine that you are told, as this leper was, "See that you tell no one." (verse 4). It would certainly be difficult to keep the good news in, right? So, imagine telling this leper, who was wonderfully healed, not to tell anybody about what happened. It certainly would have been a

difficult thing to do. You know what he did? He was a blabber mouth. In Mark's account, we are told that he "went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about" (Mark 1:45). In Luke's account, after this healing, "the news about [Jesus] was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses" (Luke 5:15). Who can blame him? He was naturally excited at what Jesus had done for him, and couldn't help, but to tell others.

So, why did Jesus tell this leper not to tell anyone what had happened? By the way, this wasn't the only time Jesus said this. He told the two blind men not to tell anyone (Matt. 9:30). He also was instructing the multitudes who were being healed to be quiet about their healing as well (Matt. 12:16).

First of all, I believe that Jesus didn't want his healing ministry to overshadow His teaching ministry. There are all types of problems that would befall Jesus if His ministry were solely a healing ministry. In the gospel of Mark, we are told of how Jesus' healing ministry had exploded with many being healed. Yet, Jesus departed to a lonely place to pray. Peter finally found Him and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." But Jesus said, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out for" (Mark 1:32-38). Jesus was intent to keep His preaching ministry as primary. In Mark's account of this miracle, the disobedient testimony of this leper spread the popularity of Jesus so much that "Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city" (Mark 1:45).

Second, I believe that the character of Jesus' ministry was intended to be a humble ministry. Jesus wasn't trying to bring notoriety to Himself by these miracles (unlike the faith healers of today). Perhaps you remember what happened after the feeding of the 5,000. The crowds were "intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king" (John 6:15). Jesus withdrew from these people. His intent wasn't to overcome people with the marvels of His healing. In Matthew 12:19, we read that Jesus fulfilled prophesy of Isaiah, who wrote, "He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets." As predicted, when the Messiah would come, He wouldn't seek to bring all types of attention to Himself.

Jesus then gave further instruction to him (in verse 4), "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them." With these words, Jesus was simply instructing this man to follow the law, regarding his cleaning.

According to Leviticus 13 and 14, it was the priest, who was to determine whether or not a person had leprosy. If they did, they were to be pronounced, "unclean." If they didn't, they were to be pronounced, "clean." This process sometimes lasted several weeks. When a man came to the priest to be examined. The priest would look at the skin. If it was clearly leprosy, the priest pronounced him "unclean" (Lev. 13:3). If there was uncertainty, the man would be isolated for seven days (Lev. 13:4) and return to the priest. If the infection didn't spread, the man would again be isolated for seven more days (Lev. 13:5) and return to the priest. If the infection still hadn't spread, it was considered a scab, and the priest would pronounce the man "clean" (Lev. 13:6). If the infection did spread at any point, then the priest would pronounce the man "unclean" (Lev. 13:8).

In a similar way, when a man has been declared to be "unclean," it was only the priest who could declare him to be "clean" again. In Leviticus 14, the instructions were given for the cleansing process. There would be sacrifices and offerings to be performed (you can read about it in verses 4-20). After a week, the leper would be pronounced "clean" (Lev. 14:20), and able to join with the people once again.

The reason why Jesus sent this cured leper back to the priests, is so that he might be "a testimony to them." Literally, this means that the leper was to give a "witness" to the priests. He was to tell them, first hand what Jesus had done for him. Think about what may have happened when he came to the priests for cleansing. Perhaps the priests would have asked the leper, how did this happen that you were healed. Any testimony that he would have given would have been focussed back upon the wonder-working of the Miracle-man, who healed him with a touch.

I believe that this is also a reason why Jesus wanted the leper to refrain from speaking to anybody, because he was to go first to the priests, as a testimony of Jesus' authority. He had the authority to heal diseases with a touch. By going first to the priests, the priests would be forced to grapple with who Jesus was. This would be one of many opportunities for the religious establishment of the day to see that Jesus really was the Messiah, of whom the Old Testament pointed. They would have had a first-hand opportunity to behold the miracles of Jesus, by the testimony of this individual. Yet, the sad thing is that they didn't believe. The healings of Jesus were a demonstration of His authority, but they rejected His claims.

Do you remember what Jesus told John's disciples who came inquiring whether Jesus was the "Expected One?" He said, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:4,5). Jesus was quoting from Isaiah to describe the manner of ministry that the Messiah would have. And the priests would receive first hand testimony of whom Jesus was. He was the expected one. His miracles were a demonstration of this. Jesus pushed this leper to see that they received this first-hand testimony.

Well, obviously, we don't have time this morning to continue on with the next two miracles of healing that Jesus performs. We will deal with them next time. But I don't want you to lose sight of the reason why Jesus performed these miracles. After recording the account of the healing of the centurion's servant and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Matthew writes, ""And 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 ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.'" (Matthew 8:16-17).

When Jesus walked upon this earth, He was the Miracle-Man, who was able to take away the infirmities and diseases, as He healed scores of people. Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate that He was the one to whom Isaiah 53 pointed. Isaiah 53:4 says, "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES." (Is. 53:4). The very next verse (Isaiah 53:5) says, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed." This comes back right to where we were last week: "God made Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the

righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was sinless. Jesus was a sacrifice. Jesus was a substitute.

Let's take this verse in Isaiah 53:5 phrase by phrase. Jesus was "pierced through for our transgressions." This sounds like substitution to me. When Jesus was pierced upon the cross, He was pierced in place of us, on account of our transgressions. Jesus was "crushed for our iniquities." This sounds like substitution to me. Our iniquities were the reason why Jesus was crushed upon the cross. "The chastening [of Jesus] for our well-being fell upon Him." When Jesus was whipped and flogged and brutally beaten, it was for our well-being -- it fell upon Him, rather than us. Again, we have substitution. The result is this, "By His scourging we are healed." It was the death of Jesus Christ that ultimately heals those who believe in Him.

How could Paul say that Jesus was indeed the One who "became sin for us"? His authority to heal demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah, who would come to "take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Why has Matthew recorded these miracles of Jesus? To point us to Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the King, who alone has the authority to save.

Let me close with one last observation. When Jesus performed these miracles, He wasn't merely using these people as pawns to accomplish His purpose of showing that He was indeed the Messiah." (If so, why would Jesus have instructed so many to keep quiet about His healing power?) Throughout all of these miracles, Jesus demonstrates what sort of God we have. Our God is compassionate and caring. I am sure that it gave Jesus much pleasure and delight to see this leper made well. When the leper came humbly submissive to Jesus, bowing down to Him, calling Him "Lord," acknowledging His ability "you can make me clean," and submitting to His authority "if you are willing," it didn't need a great tug at Jesus' heart for Him to respond, "I am willing." I believe He did so with a smile on His face, expressing His delight to do such a work.

The leper's coming to Jesus is a great picture of how we ought always to come to Jesus. Like the leper, we too have **a terrible disease**. Let's continually come to Jesus with **a wonderful approach**, by humbling ourselves, bowing down prostrate to Him, calling Him, "Lord," acknowledging His ability, and submitting to His authority in all things. When this is our approach, the Scriptures confidently affirm that we will receive **a favorable response**. When a sinner comes to Jesus with such an attitude of humbly confessing his sins against a holy God and seeking forgiveness from Him, I will confidently tell you that Jesus' response will always be, "I am willing to forgive."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 27, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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