

Jesus Calls the Lowly

Matthew 8:5-17


King of Kings! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

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“There is no worse screen to block out the Spirit than confidence in our own intelligence.”

- JOHN CALVIN (REFORMATION PASTOR AND THEOLOGIAN)

 pen your Bible to **Matthew 8:1-4**. We are continuing in a series through the Sermon on the Mount entitled: “King of kings.” This morning we are looking a message entitled: “Jesus Carries Our Sorrows.”

Authority

In Matthew chapters 8-10, Jesus begins to demonstrate His authority. Today we are going to see how He has authority over sickness. In future studies we will see His authority over sin, over Satan, and finally the authority to grant salvation.

Heaven Has Come to Earth

What we are going to see today in the weeks to come is that Jesus is in some way bringing heaven to earth. In the Kingdom to come, there will be no disease, no demons, no death, no rebellion. I’m looking forward to that day. In these chapters, we are going to see that where ever the Lord Jesus Christ goes, **sickness** is healed, **sin** is forgiven, and **Satan** is cast out.

Jesus Healing Everywhere and Every Disease

Many commentators believe that the first three miracles of Matthew 8 occurred on the same day. If so, Jesus entered **Capernaum** only a short while after healing the leper. Because Jesus pronounced a curse on it (Matt. 11:23), the ancient city no longer exists, except in the form of the ruins of a synagogue and of a few houses, including, according to tradition, that of Peter. It was a lovely town in Jesus’ day and He spent considerable time there, much of it perhaps in Peter’s home (see 8:14).¹

Matthew 4:23, “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and **healing every disease and every affliction among the people.**”

Matthew 9:35, “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and **healing every disease and every affliction.**”

Jesus was bringing a taste of the eternal kingdom to earth. He healed so many diseases, but in Matthew 8, he chooses three (3) specific cases to show us the nature of saving and sanctifying faith.

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Outline

Today are going to see how Jesus brings the outcasts near in three pictures of his power...

- The **Outcast**: Jesus heals the leper (8:1-4).
- The **Ostracized**: Jesus heals the Gentile's servant (8:5-13).
- The **Outsider**: Jesus heals the woman (8:14-17).

Forbidden in the Temple

Why are these three people significant? Because none of these people would have been allowed in the temple. The lepers were forbidden. The Gentiles could be on the outer plaza, but never near the sacrifices. Same with the women. There was a special court for them, closer than the Gentiles, but they were forbidden to enter to where the sacrifices were offered. Only the men of Israel had that privilege.

Jesus Brings the Temple to the Outcasts

So in this chapter we meet a leper, a Gentile's servant, and a woman. All forbidden in the inner Temple area. So Jesus brings the Temple to them. He is the Holy of holies. He is the Shekinah Glory veiled in human flesh. They can't go to worship, so He brings the worship to them!

If you are here today and you are an outcast, and you feel unworthy and unclean, then Jesus is ready to meet you. There is no depth of sin that He cannot rescue you from. You may feel defiled and guilty. You may feel unclean or deceitful. Jesus is here today to cleanse you!

Let's look today at the outcast, a leper.

I. The **Outcast**: Jesus heals the leper (8:1-4).

Lepers in Israel

Matthew 8:1-2a, "When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. 2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him..."

It's not certain how this leper was able to get near Jesus. Like HIV/ AIDS today, leprosy in ancient Israel was the most dreaded disease. Leprosy [Hanson's disease] is a contagious skin disease that not only affects the skin (its color, texture, and odor) and throat (it creates a raspy voice), but also slowly destroys nerves that sense pain in our bodies. Lepers often lost the tips of fingers and toes and broke limbs because they couldn't feel the weight of something heavy or the heat of the fire or the cut of a knife.²

The disease of leprosy was abhorred by the Jews. Those who contracted the disease were forced to live apart, isolated from human touch and the joys of intimate human contact.³ Healings of leprosy in the Old Testament were very rare (Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:9-14). Leprosy was a living death sentence. They had to warn people they were coming and shout: "Unclean!" They were going to die a slow cruel death, and live outside the camp.

² O'Donnell, Douglas Sean (2013-11-30). *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth (Preaching the Word)* (Kindle Locations 3682-3685). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

³ D.A. Carson. *The Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 158-159.

A Leper Splitting the Crowd

How this leper worked his way through the “large crowds” that followed Jesus (8:1) is not clear: perhaps he gave warning cries of “Unclean!” or rang a bell, and the crowd split around him until he could kneel before Jesus.⁴

You see God wasn’t calling the priests. He was calling the lepers. He was calling the weak, the forgotten, the outcasts. That’s the only way you can come to Jesus. Like a nobody. Like a child. **1 Peter 5:5**, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

The Greatest Requirement: Humility

God’s requirement for you to bear fruit through faith is humility. Knowledge puffs up. But if you believe you are a leper in His sight, He will use you!

Transition

Now we go from a leper to a Gentile.

II. The **Ostracized**: Jesus heals the Gentile’s servant (8:5-13).

The second picture is in verses 5– 13. Comprising this picture we find no less than seven surprises.

SEVEN SURPRISES⁵

1. From a Different Race

First, we see Jesus carrying the sorrows and infirmities of Gentiles. This is a surprise. Really there are seven surprises. **Matthew 8:5**, “When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him.” The first surprise is that “a centurion” approached Jesus (v. 5). There were likely no centurions actually living in Israel at the time Jesus walked the earth. This man was likely from Lebanon or Syria. A centurion is a military leader over 100 other soldiers.

Being a centurion meant two things, both very off-putting for Jews. First, he was a **Gentile**. He was not of the people of God. Second, he was part of the **Roman military**. He was oppressing the people of God. Thus, according to Jewish thinking, he was the wrong race and wore the wrong uniform.

3 Centurions: There are at least three accounts of centurions in the New Testament: this man, the centurion at the Cross, and Cornelius in the book of Acts. Each time, the centurion is demonstrated in God’s Word as having unusual faith.

No Jew or Greek: You see faith in Christ crosses lines. There is no Jew or Greek in the Kingdom. “Not all Israel is of Israel.” Just because a person is physically a Jew does not mean anything to God. He says in **Galatians 3:28–29**, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

⁴ Ibid., 159.

⁵ O’Donnell, Douglas Sean (2013-11-30). (Kindle Locations 3772-3778). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

2. Appeals to a Different Authority

Matthew 8:6, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” The second surprise is that this centurion, who is under the lordship of Caesar, twice calls Jesus “Lord.” “Lord” is the first word of his request (v. 6), and “Lord” is the first word of his reply (v. 8). Even if he is speaking better than he knows (which I don’t think he is based on what he asks), again this word “Lord” in Matthew is significant symbolically. Believers call Jesus “Lord,” while non-believers call him “teacher,” “rabbi,” etc.

Divinity of Christ: The man here affirmed the divine lordship of Christ, believing that Jesus was indeed God and consequently had the power to heal his paralyzed servant. Because the servant was too ill to be carried out to Jesus and because he felt unworthy to have Jesus come into his house, the centurion said to Him, **Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.** ⁶

Under Authority: In verse 9 he says, “I too am a man under authority...” And Jesus later says his faith is saving faith where he enters the Kingdom. He understood Jesus’ lordship. It’s like Jesus told Peter: Matthew 16:17, “Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.””

To be a Christian is to be under the authority of Jesus Christ. It is to surrender all that we are and all that we have to the King of kings. What is any one of us in light of our great God and Lord Jesus?

3. Helps an Unlikely Friend

Matthew 8:6, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”

The third surprise is that this centurion makes an appeal on behalf of his servant, who according to the word Matthew uses in verse 6 is a “young servant” (NLT) or “young man” (YLT), perhaps a boy who was born to one of his household slaves. You say, “What’s the big deal? What’s the surprise in that?” Because this Roman soldier, an officer, is taking up for a slave boy! Whatever the disease was, it was paralyzing, painful, and fatal. ⁷

Slaves in Rome: The big deal is that in the Greco-Roman world “the average slave owner . . . had no more regard for his slave than for an animal.” In his Ethics, Aristotle said there should be no friendship and no justice toward inanimate things, as well as a horse, ox, or slave.

So do you see the surprise? Why does this high-powered soldier’s soldier care for this slave? Let him die and buy another one. Don’t humiliate yourself by begging before this beggar, Jesus.

Deep Compassion for the Boy Slave

The **centurion** from **Capernaum** had no such inhumane ideas. He was a seasoned and capable fighting man or he would not have been a centurion-who, as the title indicates, was responsible for a hundred men. He was a man’s man, and a soldier’s soldier. Yet he had deep compassion for his dying slave boy and felt unworthy to approach: Jesus personally. ⁸

4. Takes an Unlikely Stand

Matthew 8:6-7, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” ⁷ And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

⁶ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. Chicago: Moody Press.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Rosa Parks Incident

The fourth surprise is that Jesus responds to this request, saying, “I will come and heal him” (v. 7). This is the “Rosa Parks” incident of the ancient world. Remember Rosa Parks was so brave that she sat in the White part of the bus when it was segregated.

The Ground is Level at the Cross

Here we have a Roman officer standing up for a slave boy. You see the ground is level at the Cross!

The fact that the **centurion** cared so much for his **servant** set him apart from the typical Roman soldier, who could be brutally heartless. The average slave owner of that day, whether military or civilian, had no more regard for his slave than for an animal.⁹

It is surprising that Jesus doesn’t say, “Well, let me first take a look at him and see if I can do anything for him.” “Let’s see if he’s Jewish.” “Oh just a slave?”

Rather Jesus says, “I will come and heal him.”

Officers House: Like Black and White Drinking Fountains

That Jesus is willing to go to this Roman officer’s house, likely outside of Palastine is also surprising! Jews were prohibited from doing so. It was a cultural no-no. It would be similar to a white man sitting in the back of the bus or drinking from a “black only” drinking fountain in pre-civil rights America. Jesus was willing to cross over that line.

5. Has an Unlikely Attitude

Matthew 8:8, “But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

The fifth surprise, however, is that this Gentile won’t let him. “Lord,” he says, “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof” (v. 8). Do you see the humility here? A Gentile, a military leader in the world’s greatest army, a free Roman citizen, a man who has a household of slaves (which means he has some money) thinks Jesus is so worthy that it’s unthinkable that our Lord should come over and just let himself in.

Humility: There is a humility and a brokenness in all those who come to Christ! Jeremiah 9:23–24, “Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Queen of England or Prince William

It’s like the **Queen of England** or **Prince William** coming to town, meeting you on the street, and saying, “Oh, I’ll just stay at your house tonight.” What would you say to that? At first you would be honored. But then you’d come to your senses. And I don’t care how upscale your house might be, you would suddenly recognize what a dump it is. “Oh, she can’t stay here.” That is this man’s disposition. He is unworthy to have royalty— the Lord— into his house.

Jewish Intermediaries: We learn from Luke that this **centurion** actually **came to** Jesus through some Jewish intermediaries, because he felt spiritually unworthy of approaching Jesus

⁹ Ibid.

personally and perhaps also because he thought he would be rebuffed because of his military position.

Luke 7:3-8 is a parallel passage and gives us another fact. This centurion built the synagogue in Capernaum. “When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is **the one who built us our synagogue.**’ ⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.’”

He was probably in the troops of the wicked Antipas and was possibly even a Samaritan, a half-breed Jew who was traditionally hated even more than Gentiles by “pure” Jews. Yet this man was held in great esteem by the Jews of Capernaum. He was a God fearing Gentile.

He knew He was nothing. He was not high minded! He was “clothed in humility!”

Our Past, Present, and Pride: Jesus doesn’t hold us captive to our past. He does not hold us captive to our present. If we will let go of our pride, we can come to Him!

6. Has a Surprising Level of Faith

From there we come to the sixth surprise, a Gentile’s great faith!

Matthew 8:5-13, “But the centurion replied, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

Just say a word, Jesus. I believe it will travel far enough, quickly enough, and powerfully enough to restore my servant.” “When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith’” (v. 10).

This sixth surprise— this man’s **faith**— is what surprises Jesus. Jesus marveled that someone who didn’t grow up like Paul, for example, learning the Torah, or even like Timothy with a Jewish mother and grandmother to teach him the Scriptures, knew enough to believe in Jesus and his word. This man expressed an “unlimited confidence in the authority of Jesus.” You see, what Jesus is highlighting to his disciples, who were then all Jews, is that not even they “had shown the sincerity, sensitivity, humility, love, and depth of faith of this Gentile soldier.”

7. Has a Surprising Future

Matthew 8:11-13, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹³ And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.”

It may be surprising to some that Jesus compares **Heaven** to a feast, the best banquet ever thrown (cf. Isaiah 25: 6– 9; 65: 13, 14; Revelation 19: 9).

It may be surprising to others that Jesus talks about **Hell** as a real place. Hell is a place of great pain and regret, a place where no one would want to be.

A Gentile in the Kingdom!

But *the greatest surprise* (if I can rightly call the Scripture's predicted inclusion of the Gentiles a surprise), especially to the Jews of Jesus' day, is who's in and who's out. Even the super-religious— a Jewish Pharisee, for example— is **out** if he won't bow the knee to Jesus and call him Lord.

However, the Gentile military man working for the bad guys, due to his childlike faith, is in the Kingdom! The greatest surprise is that those who are in will become "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (**Revelation 7: 9**).

Paul explains this in **Ephesians 2:11-14**, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been **brought near by the blood of Christ.**¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."

III. The Outsider: Jesus heals the woman (8:14-17).

Jesus Heals a Woman

Matthew 8:14–17, "And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. ¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Fever Can Cause Death

In response to their request, Jesus then went to her room and **saw her lying sick in bed with a fever**. Remember there were no antibiotics until 100 years ago. If you had an infection you could die. A fever normally causes death at 108 degrees.

In Israel, there were three plazas outside the temple:

- The court of the Gentiles
- The court of Women
- The court of Israel

The Lamb of God coming to the Outsider!

If anyone trespassed, they would be put to death. So this leper and these Gentiles and this woman had never seen the inside court of the Temple. They'd never seen the Burnt offering of a Lamb. But now the Lamb of God was coming to them!

Why This Miracle?

What is Matthew doing here? Why tell us of this third apparently minor miracle? It is to show that Jesus, on his own initiative (note: in this miracle he is not asked to help) can help and likes to help (he is eager to help) whomever and whenever he wants? Yes!¹⁰

Bringing in the Outsider

The main reason Matthew includes this miracle is to show that Jesus has come, in the words of Psalm 147: 2, to gather “the outcasts of Israel” (a leper and a woman) and of the world (a Roman slave) to the true Israel, Jesus.

Dead in Sin

Here is a woman who didn’t ask for healing. She is as it were unable to help herself. All those outside of Christ are “dead in sin.” “No one seeks after God” Rom. 3

Women, Second Class

You might ask, “A woman is an outsider?” In those days women were viewed as second-class citizens. In the Jewish synagogue, for example,

“women were placed behind screens, to the rear, as in modern Muslim mosques.”¹⁷ Furthermore, “in some Jewish traditions, touching a woman [or even a woman’s hand like Jesus did here] would make [you] unclean or unholy. Jewish Halakah forbade touching persons with many kinds of fever (SBK, 1: 479f).”¹¹

First Miracles Are to Outcasts

So, do you see what’s going on here? Oh, it’s so beautiful. Jesus’ first three recorded miracles in Matthew are of three groups of religious outcasts. In other words, Jesus is letting outsiders in. With his death the veil of the temple will be split in two. What will happen then—the substitutionary benefits of the Suffering Servant—is foreshadowed here.¹²

The worship of Jerusalem disallowed these people from coming to the close to worship God. The Lord breaks down the walls of hostility.

Conclusion

There is no place for racism and pride and insecurity at the Cross. The ground is level at the Cross. God resists the proud, but he gives grace – he carries the sorrow and infirmities and diseases and sins of the humble!

One day God will wipe away all tears! Christian, trust him with your sorrows, and reach out to the outcasts!

¹⁰ O’Donnell, (2013-11-30). (Kindle Locations 3772-3778).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.