

Matthew 8:14-17

When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."

Introduction

After the healings of the leper and the centurion's servant, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law seems very insignificant. Compared to four verses for the Jewish leper and nine verses for the Gentile centurion, this healing gets only two (very short) verses. So we could feel like it's being told only in passing – almost as an afterthought. Compared to the obvious and profound theological lessons in the stories about the Jewish leper and the Gentile Centurion, this story seems much simpler and much less profound. So we can be tempted to pass it by. But this is precisely why we need to stop and give this story more time, and study, and reflection. Matthew, Mark, and Luke *all* include this account in their Gospels. *Why?* I actually believe that Matthew included this story *because* it is so simple... and because the simplicity of the story will help him to teach a lesson that could possibly be missed in all the profound (and even shocking) theology of the first two miracles.

I. "And when Jesus entered Peter's house"

In both Mark and Luke, we are told that Jesus did not come to Peter's house alone. Mark tells us that Jesus "entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John". Peter lived in the same house with his brother (Andrew) *and* with his wife's mother. Now even if we had only Matthew, we could still assume that Jesus was accompanied by some of His disciples and that there may be other family members in the house (such as Peter and his wife). But as usual, we'll see at the end of the story that Matthew has his own agenda. There is a *reason* that he leaves everyone else out of the story – everyone except for Jesus and Peter's mother-in-law.

II. "he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever."

Mark and Luke both tell us that there were others present who actually appealed to Jesus on behalf of Peter's mother-in-law. But Matthew simply says that Jesus "*saw* [Peter's] mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. In Matthew, there is no *request* for healing, and this means something. It assumes that Jesus didn't heal people only because He was asked (or badgered, or pestered). Yes, He *was* asked in this case, and asking is an important expression of faith. But for Matthew, the asking is obviously beside the point, or he wouldn't have left it out. The point for Matthew is brought out when he alone says that Jesus *saw* her lying sick with a fever. For Matthew, it was just the *sight* of Peter's mother-in-law that moved Jesus to heal her. I believe that here especially Matthew wants us to see the simple compassion of Jesus. Jesus healed not just to teach theological lessons to the multitudes, but as the outflow and the expression of his love and compassion for suffering people.

We also see that contrary to the vast majority of Jesus' miracles this is a "private" healing. So not only is there no obvious theological lesson that Jesus is trying to teach, but there are no crowds around to witness this display of kingdom power. There is no one to watch. There is no obvious lesson being taught. So then *why* does Jesus heal the mother of Peter's wife? And again, the only explanation Matthew gives is that He saw her lying sick with a fever. And what He *saw* moved him. To put it simply, He healed *just because He wanted to*. That's it. John Calvin writes: "The Evangelists appear to have taken particular notice of this miracle; not that, in itself, it was more remarkable, or more worthy of being recorded, than other miracles,—but because, by means of it, Christ gave to his disciples a private and familiar [or, intimate] illustration of his grace."

III. "He touched her hand, and the fever left her"

We've already seen in the healing of the leper (8:1-4) how Jesus "stretched out his hand and touched him" Would someone dare to say that the only reason Jesus touched the leper was to make His theological point about cleanness and uncleanness in the kingdom? If so, then we have only to see that when Jesus touched the hand of Peter's mother-in-law, there was no such point to be made! We know that Jesus can heal from a distance by simply speaking the word (8:5-13), so obviously the physical touch is not necessary to the healing. We also know from Luke that Jesus did actually speak and "rebuke" the fever. So then we not only have to ask why Jesus healed her, but also: Why did Jesus touch her hand? Mark tells us that Jesus "took her by the hand and lifted her up." Matthew alone says ever so simply that Jesus *touched* her hand. And so it seems clear that he wants us to interpret this as a deeply human gesture of affection, and love, and compassion. Hendriksen says: "What a sympathy there was in that touch!" Jesus didn't just speak the word, He touched her hand. And as He lifted her up, the fever left her.

IV. "And she rose and began to serve him"

See how the fever not only left Peter's mother-in-law, but all of her strength and energy was immediately and completely restored! Luke, the physician, tells us that she was "ill with a high [lit. great] fever". She was burning up! We know that when a high fever breaks, we are not immediately up on our feet and going about our normal, everyday business. But Peter's mother-in-law went from lying in bed with a terrible fever one minute to serving and waiting on Jesus the next minute! She probably prepared food for Him and brought Him a drink (cf. NLT). The transformation was total and complete.

But what Matthew especially wants us to see is that Peter's mother-in-law responded to the compassionate and healing touch of Jesus by ministering to Jesus, by serving Him, and by waiting upon Him. Mark and Luke tell us that "she rose and began to serve *them*" (Jesus and the disciples). But Matthew (who has purposefully not introduced any disciples into this story) simply says that "she rose and began to serve *him*". Matthew wants us to see that this was her *natural* and *joyful* response to the compassionate and healing *touch* of Jesus. She took the strength and energy that Jesus had freely and lovingly restored to her, and immediately began to use it in His service. Someone could say: "Why would Jesus let her wait upon Him after she has just been sick." And I know that Peter's mother-in-law would say to us: "Why would you keep me from waiting upon Him – my healer and the restorer of my life?" I think of when Jesus *called* the disciples and they left everything and *followed* Him. *There* we see the compelling authority

of His call and the magnetism of His “personality.” In this story, Jesus *healed* Peter’s mother-in-law, and she rose and began to *serve* Him. *Here* we see the winsome and compelling power of His gentleness and love. We see a compassion that *draws* people to wait upon Him and spend their lives in His service. I see a beautiful pattern in these verses, and I think it’s a pattern that Matthew very much *meant* to convey to us: [Greek] “He saw... He touched... she rose... she served.” Or.... (cf. Hagner)

- a. *He saw* his mother-in-law
- b. lying sick
- c. having a fever
- d. He touched her hand**
- c¹. the fever left her
- b¹. and she rose
- a¹. and *she served* Him

It’s simple, it’s memorable, it’s powerful... and Matthew has carefully crafted this story so that it might serve as a model for our own lives.

But Matthew is not finished. We know that Matthew has collected various “miracle stories” (various accounts of Jesus’ *deeds*) and put them all together here in chapters eight and nine. We know that in many cases, Matthew doesn’t follow any chronological order. Mark and Luke both have Jesus healing a demon-possessed man immediately before He heals Peter’s mother-in-law, while Matthew tells about the healing of the centurion’s servant. Very soon, Matthew, Mark, and Luke will all go their separate ways once again (beginning with Matthew 8:18). But it’s significant that here Matthew agrees with Mark and Luke as he goes on after the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law to tell what happened that evening. At least for Matthew, the next two verses are the *conclusion* or the grand finale to the story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (the conclusion to the entire collection of miracle stories is in 9:35).

V. “That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons”

We know from Mark and Luke that Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law on the Sabbath. This is why the people began coming to Jesus only in the evening, *after* the Sabbath was over. In fact, the Sabbath was over after sundown, so by the time people began arriving at Peter’s house, it was already getting late. Mark says that “the whole city was gathered together at the door”! And yet in spite of the late hour and the great number of people who had come, we read simply:

VI. “And he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick”

Once again, it doesn’t appear that Jesus is trying to teach any specific theological lessons. Once again, the focus seems to be on Jesus’ boundless compassion and tireless love. Can you see the picture on that Saturday night in Palestine? Look at Him! It’s late, the sun has set, the whole city is gathered together at Jesus’ door, and where is Jesus? He is casting out the spirits with a word and healing all who were sick. It’s the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law repeated over and over and over and over again.

Mark and Luke both close their account by telling how Jesus would not allow the demons to speak because they knew who he was. But Matthew leaves this out, for it would distract from the

lesson He is trying to teach. Matthew replaces the material in Mark and Luke with his own inspired commentary – commentary that you won't find anywhere else in the Gospels.

VII. “This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’”

What does this mean? Did Jesus actually bear our fevers, and our leprosy, and our blindness? Did Jesus take away people's sicknesses by becoming sick Himself? In order to understand Matthew, we have to understand the passage that he quotes from.

Isaiah 53:3-6

- 3** He [the suffering Servant] was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows [lit. **pains**], and acquainted with grief [lit. **sickness**]; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 4** Surely he has borne our griefs [lit. **sicknesses**] and carried our sorrows [lit. **pains**]; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
- 5** But he was wounded for our *transgressions*; he was crushed for our *iniquities*; upon him was the chastisement that brought us *peace*, and with his stripes we are **healed**.
- 6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Notice how the English translations translate “sorrows” and “griefs” instead of “pains” and “sicknesses”. They do this because it seems to fit better with the fact that He was wounded for our “transgressions” and crushed for our “iniquities”. “Sorrows” and “griefs” seem to match up better with the spiritual nature of the atonement as Jesus took our sins upon Himself. And so when Isaiah says that “with his stripes we are *healed*” we automatically think of a spiritual healing of the soul and a cleansing from sin. Jesus and the apostles usually quoted from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) because this was their Bible. And the Greek Old Testament translates Isaiah 53:4 like this – “This one bears our sins [instead of sicknesses] and suffers for us.” If only Matthew would have quoted from his Greek Old Testament – or even our English translations! Then everything would make perfect sense to us! But Matthew quotes the Hebrew and so we are easily left scratching our heads in confusion. How can Isaiah say that Jesus was a man of pains and acquainted with sickness? How can Isaiah say that Jesus has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains? Matthew translates “illnesses” and “diseases” and he clearly means things like fever and leprosy! Are we to understand that when Isaiah says we are healed by his stripes, the meaning is that by Jesus' death on the cross, we are healed of the fever? The solution is simple. And if we weren't so far removed from the Old Testament, it would also be quite obvious.

“Pain” and “sickness” are two words used in the Old Testament to describe the kind of judgments God brings upon His people for their sin.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 28:58-60 – If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book... then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and *sicknesses* grievous and lasting. And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 7:12, 15 – And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them... the LORD will take away from you all *sickness*, and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew, will he inflict on you.

In the Old Testament, “pain” is almost exclusively used for the punishment that God visits upon sinners.

- ✓ Psalm 32:10 – Many are the *sorrows [pains]* of the wicked...
- ✓ Psalm 38:17-18 – I am ready to fall, and my *pain* is ever before me. I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.
- ✓ Jeremiah 30:15 – Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your *pain* is incurable. Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you.
- ✓ Lamentations 1:12 (cf. 1:18) – Look and see if there is any [*pain*] like my [*pain*], which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.
- ✓ Cf. 2 Chron. 6:29-30; Job 33:19; Ps. 69:26; Jer. 51:8

When Isaiah talks about pains and sicknesses, his main point isn't the actual leprosy or fever. His main point is God's righteous wrath against sin. In Old Testament Israel, sickness was one of the major tools God used to punish the sin of His people (cf. Num. 12; 2 Kings 5, 15). So in the New Testament, to say that Jesus took our illnesses and bore our diseases is not to say that He literally became a leper or suffered with a fever in our place. It simply means that He took upon Himself the full punishment for sin that the Law required. So when Isaiah says that by his stripes (or scourging) we are healed, can you guess now what kind of healing he is talking about? Is it a spiritual healing and cleansing of the soul? No! It's a healing from the wounds and sicknesses and judgments that God has inflicted because of sin.

- ✓ Exodus 15:25-26 – If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.
- ✓ Deuteronomy 32:39 (cf. Job 5:18) – See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal.
- ✓ Psalm 41:4 – O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!
- ✓ Cf. Deut. 28:27; 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 6:1-2; 30:2-5; 107:17-20; Is. 6:10; 19:22; 30:26; 57:17-18; Jer. 8:21-22; 30:15-17; 33:5-8; Lam. 2:13

So now let's see if we can summarize the meaning of Isaiah 53:3-5.

- 3** He was despised and rejected by men; a man of **pains**, and acquainted with **sickness** [*he was a man who suffered under the judgment of God*]...
- 4** Surely he has borne *our sicknesses* and carried *our pains* [*he has suffered the punishment for our sins*]...
- 5** and with his stripes we are **healed** [*because he suffered the judgment of God, the effects of God's punishment and wrath in our own lives are completely undone and totally reversed*].

Conclusion

Now that we understand the meaning and the context of Isaiah 53, we can truly and fully understand the *profound* lesson that Matthew was trying to teach his church. And this is the *same* lesson that God wants to imprint upon our hearts 2000 years later. As Matthew reflects back on the day that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and then that late Saturday evening when Jesus healed the crowds of sick people who showed up at His door, he sees the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Matthew knows from his Old Testament that even though all sickness is not the *direct* result of *personal* sin, it's still true that all sickness came into the world *because* of sin. Fevers and leprosy and blindness and colds and flus and cancers are all *ultimately* the result of the curse and God's righteous judgment upon sin. And so Matthew sees that when Jesus *heals* all the people at His door, He is reversing the effects of the curse in their lives. Based on Isaiah 53, Matthew sees that when Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, He is undoing and turning back the effects of God's wrath and judgment upon sin.

Based now on all of the above, we can see with Matthew that *it was no easy thing* for Jesus to heal Peter's mother-in-law. "He touched her hand, and the fever left her." That sounds simple enough. And yet *if* Jesus would heal Peter's mother-in-law, He must *first* be willing to *suffer* – not just a fever, but the full wrath of God in all of the physical and spiritual tortures of the cross. It was no easy thing for Jesus to heal the people standing outside His door on that late Saturday night. When Jesus simply spoke the word, we can *know* that He never once spoke it flippantly; for every time He healed another, He could feel in Himself the coming wrath of God. It was no easy thing for Jesus to heal Peter's mother-in-law! And yet without even having to be asked, Jesus healed her. And He did so without any regret... without any resentment. He did so *just because He wanted to*. Matthew delights to tell us how Jesus tenderly and gently touched her hand even as in that very moment He could feel in Himself the coming agonies of the cross. That's a compassion that you and I will never be able to fathom or comprehend – never for all eternity.

So then Matthew would ask us all: If Peter's mother-in-law rose to serve Jesus when she had been healed of the fever, should we not gladly and joyfully rise to serve Jesus in light of the healing He purchased for us on the cross?

- ✓ 1 Peter 2:24 – He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law *symbolized* the much greater truth that He has turned back the wrath of God from us, and so it was also a *guarantee* of the fact that one day sickness and pain and suffering and all the last remnants of the curse will be no more (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). Is there *anyone* or *anything* that could possibly *hold us down* or keep us from waiting upon and serving Jesus – our healer and the restorer of our life? *By His wounds*, we have been healed.

- ✓ Romans 12:1-2 – Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Teaching our Children

- Q. When Jesus walked into Peter's house, what did He see?
A. Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed sick with very high fever.
- Q. Did Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law only because someone asked Him to heal her?
A. No! Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law because He *wanted* to and because He felt compassion for her.
- Q. How did Jesus show His tender compassion when He healed Peter's mother-in-law?
A. Matthew says that Jesus touched her hand.
Jesus didn't *have* to touch her hand (He could heal from a distance)! All He had to do was speak the word.
- Q. What happened later that evening after the sun had gone down?
A. *Many* people came to Peter's house to be healed by Jesus. And even though it was late and there were so many, Jesus healed each one – just like He healed Peter's mother-in-law.
- Q. Sickneses and physical problems (such as fevers, leprosy, blindness, colds, flus, cancers, etc.) are all *ultimately* the result of what?
A. They are all ultimately the result of the curse and God's judgment upon sin.
(Make sure your children know that all sicknesses are not the *direct* result of *personal* sin; John 9:1-3)
- Q. So when Jesus healed people of their sicknesses, what was He really doing?
A. Jesus was undoing the effects of the curse in people's lives. Jesus was reversing the judgment of God.
- Q. How can Jesus do this? How can He undo what God has done?
A. Jesus must be willing to suffer the full curse and wrath of God *Himself*.
- Q. When Jesus so gently and tenderly touched the hand of Peter's mother-in-law and healed her... in that very moment, what could He feel in Himself?
A. He could feel in Himself the coming agonies of the cross (see Scripture under VII. E.).
- Q. Was it an "easy" thing for Jesus to heal Peter's mother-in-law and all those who came to His door?
A. No! Jesus healed the fever of Peter's mother-in-law only at *great* cost to Himself.
- Q. What did Peter's mother-in-law do as soon as she had been healed?
A. She got up and began to serve Jesus (waiting upon Him and ministering to Him).
- Q. Do you think she served Jesus with a grudging attitude and only because she felt like she *had* to?
A. No! This was her *natural* and *joyful* and *willing* response to the gentle compassion of Jesus.
✓ When Jesus died for us, He turned back all of God's wrath from us and made it so that one day sickness and illness and every part of God's curse will be gone forever (see Scripture under Conc. C. 1.).
- Q. Since we have been given such a wonderful healing by such a gentle and compassionate Savior, and at such a terrible cost to Him, how should we respond?
A. We should respond just like Peter's mother-in-law. We should gladly and willingly and joyfully wait upon Jesus and look for every possible way to serve Him (see Scripture under Conc. C. 3.).
✓ Isn't it wonderful that we don't serve Jesus just because we "have" to?!? (Help your children to discover the **JOY** in serving Jesus.)

Luke 4:38-39

And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever,

and they appealed to him on her behalf.

And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her,

and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

Luke 4:40-41

Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him,

and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many,

crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

Matthew 8:14-15

And when Jesus entered Peter's house,

he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.

He touched her hand, and the fever left her,

and she rose and began to serve him.

Matthew 8:16-17

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.

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

Mark 1:29-31

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever,

and immediately they told him about her.

And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her,

and she began to serve them.

Mark 1:32-34

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.