

He is Willing!

Call to Worship: Psalm 136

1st Scripture: Isaiah 55

2nd Scripture: Matthew 8:1-4

Introduction

As we now find ourselves on the other side of the Sermon on the Mount, an important observation emerges, which is important to note, before we hone in on the text that we have just read. And this observation would have been extremely important to both, the Jews who were actually experiencing the ministry of Jesus, firsthand (as recorded by Matthew), and the Jews who were reading the Gospel of Matthew, as it was delivered to them by Matthew. What then is the observation I am talking about?

First, let us look at Matthew 4:23-25, the text immediately preceding our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, before we come back to this place. [Read Matthew 4:23-25]. What do we notice, that is abundantly taking place, just before Jesus makes His way up the mountain to give the Sermon on the Mount? He is healing large amounts of people (vs. 23- "...and healing all kinds of sicknesses and all kinds of diseases among the people." And again, vs. 24- "and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him...etc." And so, immediately before our Lord preaches this sermon, Matthew states that Jesus was performing a large amount of miraculous healings, and of all varieties. So, that would include such things as healing the deaf, the blind, the paralyzed, those with crippled body parts, lepers, those possessed by demons...etc.

Now, fast forward to immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, and what do we find? The first three events recorded, involve the Lord healing a leper (our main text), a paralyzed and dreadfully tormented servant of a centurion (vs. 5-13), Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick and with a fever (vs. 14-15), and many who were demon-possessed and sick (vs. 16-17). And so, the very clear and basic observation that we can make here (and what we can often see throughout the ministry of Jesus, in general), is that, these very important teachings of

Jesus (which He had just declared that, the one who hears and does them is the one who is truly wise and blessed) are thoroughly surrounded by miraculous healings, which were meant to be signs that would authenticate and affirm the teachings themselves. In other words, the miraculous healings were God the Father's way of authenticating the teaching ministry of Jesus, so as to drive all to give diligent heed to all that our Lord taught. To this end, both the Jews that witnessed the miracles firsthand, and the Jews who witnessed the miracles by way of reading Matthew's Gospel, and all of us (for that matter), who witness the miracles through Matthew's Gospel, are primarily meant to see the signs as "signs," which are to bring our focus *not* upon the signs themselves (which sadly, so many people do today), but to that which the signs are meant to point, namely, the teachings of our Lord.

So many miss this, and that is why so many in the Charismatic Movement wind up with such a shallow faith. They emphasize the miracles and the betterment of this present life, and miss the very purpose of these miracles, which is to emphasize the teaching of our Lord, which we are to "hear and do." Jesus never said, "Whoever hears these sayings of mine *and receives a miracle* (or takes an interest in miracles), He will liken to a wiseman who built his house on the rock...etc. In fact, just prior to this, He said that many who call Him "Lord, Lord," on the last day, He will declare to have never known them, even though they have declared to have done many miracles and signs in His Name. Those who are accepted are *not* those who perform or are the recipient of miracles, but rather, those who do the will of God, which is to obey Jesus. This cannot be stated enough, brethren. That is why they were called "signs and wonders." They point to, and authenticate the One who performed them, so that, we will hear Him and do what He says, recognizing that through Him, in the end, we will overcome death and every illness, which sin has brought into this world. We will be made whole in Christ, but that physical wholeness will come later. For now, as the Apostle Paul has stated, "although the outward man is perishing, *inwardly*, we are renewed day by day." Spiritual thriving comes, in fact, often through physical discomfort. This is our *present* reality. Those who suffer with Christ now; those who presently identify with His sufferings, will inherit the fullness of eternal life when we are soon with Him. Our hope is in a painless, joyful, *future*, where there is no more suffering, sorrow, tears, pain or death. Let me just leave you with one more text that will attest to the main

point I am putting across here, before we move on to address our main text. [Read Hebrews 2:1-4; emphasize and comment on vs. 3-4; the signs authenticated the message; what was spoken!]

I. Jesus Cleanses a Desperate Leper

“When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came...” As we have already noted, when Jesus came down the mountain, with the multitude following Him, immediately, He was to attest to the authenticity of His teaching (in the presence of all who had just heard Him on the mountain) by exhibiting the power of God in healing a desperate leper, who would now approach Him.

And so, we are told, “And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him...” Now, for a few moments, before moving on, we need to appreciate the gravity of what takes place here, which would have certainly had a great impact on all who were present. For a leper to approach Jesus, in any sense, would have been a bold move. But, for a leper to approach Jesus while He was being followed by a large multitude of people, would have been really bold. Obviously, he had heard about the great healing miracles that Jesus had done already, including the healing of other lepers, which compelled him to take such bold steps. Desperation has a way of doing that to someone, doesn't it?

But, consider the leper's condition for a moment. From a physical standpoint, the leper was one of the most pitied to be people, of that age. To put it bluntly, you had a flesh-eating disease, which continued to eat right into your insides, and there was no cure at the time. Often times, it led to a slow and painful death. Now, if that's not bad enough, from a societal standpoint, you were an outcast. You could not live among, work among, fellowship among, be among the people. You had to live outside and away from civilization, in one of a number of leper colonies along the outskirts. And it was only if and when your leprosy was cured, that after going through a cleansing process and receiving the approval of the priest, you could rejoin society and live among the people again. Being that there was no available cure, basically, only a divine act of intervention could cure the leper. [***Could not enjoy the temple benefits - that which represented fellowship with God and being accepted by Him***]

Now, to make matters even a little bit worse, when any traveler/s passed by your area, or came anywhere near you, as a leper, you were required to cover your face and to shout aloud, “Unclean, Unclean, Unclean!,” warning the travelers of your nearby presence, so that, they could stay away from you. Leprosy was a painful, debilitating, humbling and terrible disease. And those who had it were often, not only looked down upon, but viewed as divinely cursed, from the standpoint of the general population.

Can you imagine living such a painful and shameful life? Now, let me ask you this. If you knew that there was a possible cure, how desperate would you be to get to that cure? How far would you travel to obtain it? We can hardly imagine the seemingly hopeless and dejected life of a leper, during the time of our Lord, but hopefully, the picture I have painted, which probably, actually, under-appreciates the reality, can help us enter into what has taken place, when our Lord had come down from the mountain, in accordance with Matthew’s account, here given in our text.

We are told that the leper dared approach the Lord, and that, in the presence of the multitude. Again, no doubt, He had heard of our Lord’s ability to heal such ailments. And so, he does what any thoroughly desperate and dejected outcast would do, upon reaching our Lord. He falls down before Him, and we are told, “he worshiped Him.” Now, I might be wrong, but isn’t worship only to be offered to God? A few chapters earlier, didn’t Jesus refuse the temptation of the devil, to fall down and worship him (same Greek word), in order to gain all of the kingdoms of the earth? Didn’t Jesus respond to the tempter by declaring that the Scriptures say that we are to worship God alone? And whenever individuals sought to fall down and worship the apostles (such as happened to the Apostle Paul on one of his missionary journeys) or an angel (such as John had done when he received the Revelation), didn’t they command the kneeler to get up, avowing that they were mere servants of the living God, and not worthy of worship? Well, that’s okay, because surely Jesus had done the same thing here, right? No! Indeed, it would have been wrong for Jesus *to refuse* this worship, and He had rightly accepted it because He alone was truly God in flesh. Jesus was the God/Man! And so, He didn’t even flinch for a moment here, or on any of the occasions where people ascribed worship to Him. Jesus was not a mere servant of God. He was God Himself who had become a servant for us!

And so the desperate leper, longing to be cleansed; longing for both physical healing and societal acceptance, bowed down and worshiped the Lord. And here is what happened next. “And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, *saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”* Consider the simple and humble faith of this man, which greatly benefitted him because its object was the Beloved and gracious Lord of glory! What a way to come before the Lord! What a testimony for us, and for all, to see the type of simple faith which finds Jesus. There’s humility, “Lord if you are willing...” This man knows that he has no legal right to benefit from Jesus. He has nothing whatsoever to offer the Lord, to merit His kindness. He’s a poor leper, outcast. He knows that His hope rests completely on the free willingness of the Lord, to heal and save him. And he calls Him “Lord,” granting Him that title of ownership and respect.

But then, furthermore, he adds, “Lord, if you are willing, *You can make me clean.*” He acknowledges and confesses that he knows that the power of God rests on this Jesus. He puts forth a faith that is willing to avow what so many upperclass and wealthy religious leaders could not acknowledge, namely, that this Jesus was able, of His own will, whenever He so wished, to exercise divine power in the healing of the sick. A simple and yet profound profession! Something the religious elite could not grasp; a privilege incapable of being gained by affluence or status, was given to this dejected, outcast, leper. And so, carrying such a weighty demeanor of humility, both in his outward actions and by his desperate words, the leper, normally rejected and frowned upon by all who crossed his path, lays himself forth at the mercy of the Lord of glory. And how then does our Lord respond, in the presence of this great multitude? Does He stand aloof, unwilling to associate with and draw near to this outcast of society? Certainly, that’s what the religious leaders would have done. They had no time for the average peons of society, let alone the perpetually unclean. Surely, they would have brought the law down upon such sinners.

But, we are given in verse three such a profound response from our Lord, meeting the lepers actions and words, with actions and words that would do us all a lot of good to thoroughly ponder. First, we are told, “Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him...” Now, if you consider all of the miracles that our Lord had performed, and which are recorded in the scriptures, you will find that He did not have to touch the individual whom He was healing. Sometimes He did, and sometimes He didn’t. Indeed, He even healed a centurion’s servant from

afar. But, in this particular case, I believe that our Lord's touch was an expression of a deep sense of compassion for this man, and His words certainly affirm this. Remember, exposed leprosy is contagious, which is one of the reasons they were to be put away from the general community. And often times, people with leprosy were missing some of their extremities, and were deformed in various ways, depending upon where the leprosy was, and how far it had progressed. Because of this, the natural instinct is to draw away, when you behold someone with leprosy. But, our Lord reaches out and touches this man. He shows him, as it were, that although he was an outcast, put out from society at large, He was also very precious, valuable and beloved by His God. There is no question that this was a loving and affectionate touch, here given by our Lord.

And as He had done this, no doubt, He looked this man in the eyes (elevating him to the true worth he had as an image bearer of God), and said, "I am willing; be cleansed." And so, the Lord answers the leper's humble, desperate plea, in kind. "If you are willing, you can make me clean." "I am willing; be cleansed." What a glorious picture of the genuine love and compassion that our Lord has toward desperate, needy people. He is willing! And the moment He tells the leper to be cleansed; at that very moment, and not a minute later, he is cleansed. We are told, "Immediately his leprosy was cleansed." That which had ate away at his body; that which had ate away at his very life, bringing him great physically pain and shame, was immediately removed, and the man was made whole! What a testimony to both the ability and willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to hear the cry of the desperate sinner, which we will further consider in a moment.

Let us just note for the moment that immediately after this, we are told, "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.'" Wanting to avoid gaining too much publicity (he already had a multitude following Him), lest anarchy against Rome should ensue, and His coming sacrificial suffering should be compromised, He exhorts the (now healed) leper not to tell anyone what had happened. And then He commands him to fulfill the Mosaic laws regarding the restoration of a leper, by offering the proper sacrifice and showing himself to the priest, who would give him the approval to return among the general population. Even though the man was

absolutely cleansed, the Lord would not allow him to bypass the Mosaic laws for completing the restoration process. While the priest would not truly need to authenticate the cleansing, this would serve as a testimony of honoring the law of God, before them. And so, Jesus orders him to do that.

To this end, Matthew's Jewish audience would also see that, contrary to the accusations of the religious leaders, Jesus did not contradict the Mosaic laws, but rather, kept them perfectly, in principle, if not in need. And they would also already begin to see that He sought to keep things somewhat quiet, until He had fully accomplished redemption. Clearly, our Lord's commands to those whom He had healed, to keep silent, indicate that He was not trying to usurp the Roman authorities, and that His coming suffering and death were not unknown to Him. Indeed, He was going out of His way to ensure that nothing would keep Him from going to the cross, where He was intentionally heading, unto the salvation of His people.

II. Jesus is Willing to Save

Now, keeping in mind that our Lord had just finished preaching the Sermon on the Mount, which spoke of, and illustrated the fact that, a righteousness greater than the Pharisees and the Scribes was necessary to be part of His Kingdom, here we find not only a miraculous authentication of all that He had said, but also, a complimentary expression of His willingness to bring about, the very things that He had stated were necessary to inherit the Kingdom of heaven. You see, when you view the Sermon on the Mount, from a purely human standpoint; that is, from the perspective of obtaining that kind of righteousness in our own strength, anyone, with even a shred of honesty would say that there is no way that any human being could *naturally* exhibit that kind of righteousness. It is just not naturally in us. It is everything that is contradictory to the natural, fallen man. To command such things to the natural man would be like commanding individuals to sprout wings and fly around the world. It is impossible. And to that end, it is frightening, because, while it is naturally impossible, it is also *necessary* to exhibit those virtues, if one is to be welcomed into the eternal Kingdom of God. In other words, we must look like that which is described in the Sermon on the Mount, but we have no natural ability to sincerely produce (from the heart), anything that is taught in the Sermon on the Mount. And so, that is a

dilemma of the gravest kind, isn't it? The question begged then, would be, "How can I possibly attain to that kind of a righteousness? How can I exhibit such fruits from my heart? I am filthy! I am corrupt! I am unclean! And unless *God Himself* does something in me, I have no hope of ever walking in such virtuous ways. Well, that is where the true power of this historical event, ordained unto the perfect time, comes into play, for the multitude (and for all who read Matthew's Gospel) as a sign that offers, in full, to meet the desperate need that we all have.

You see, from a physical standpoint, there was no more desperately hopeless situation than that of a leper. As we have seen, there was no cure for leprosy. It was a gradual death sentence, which ate away at the body, working its way into the vital organs. Beyond the shadow of any doubt, our Lord would also have us see here, a real picture of the spiritual leprosy of sin, which eats away at the soul, ultimately destroying the whole person, in due time. Sin brings physical pain, spiritual corruption and alienation from God and the people of God. It makes us unclean and wholly defiled. To that end, we are desperate, and *naturally* without the hope of being reconciled to God, let alone, being transformed so as to exhibit the quality of righteousness presented by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

But, Jesus, the Son of God, Himself, is the means of obtaining those glorious ends. Because of His righteous life, and because of His worthy sacrifice, He is more than able to provide the atonement that is necessary to pay for all of our sins (to make us clean), and the heart that will begin to live a life that is pleasing to God, in keeping with the virtues that have been described in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is able! But furthermore, equally important, He is also willing! He is willing to cleanse and to save any and all, who humbly come to Him, like this leper did, in truth. Do you see that, friends! That is the glorious message here! Jesus is saying, "Yes, God requires holiness! Yes, God's standard is greater than the standard which is met by the Pharisees and Scribes! Yes, God's standard gets down to the heart! But, I can save and transform you, so that you meet that standard! I have met the standard which merits salvation in full, and I can provide the righteous living (in you) which springs out of obtaining that salvation.

And how then is all of this obtained? Is there some complicated, out of reach formula, which must be understood and solved? No! Just like the leper, there is the need to recognize our need. We need to recognize our sinful condition, and then we must go to Jesus (by faith),

humbly asking Him to wash and cleanse us, through His shed blood. It takes humility and sincerity. And if you come to Him with that kind of a heart; if you come to Him, desperately acknowledging your need of His cleansing power and grace, you will find Him willing! Always willing! And there is no stain of your sin, whatever you have done, all combined, that is beyond the cleansing power of His sacrifice! He will abundantly save/pardon!

And brethren, those who have already benefitted from such a glorious, free salvation... you know your past. We are a testimony to this reality. We can relate to the leper, can't we? What did we find, when we came to our Lord, empty of ourselves, overwhelmed by our sinful condition, pleading for Him to be willing to save us? Did we find Him stand-offish? Did we find Him reluctant? No. He reached out to us, as it were, and said, "In spite of all of your great and damnable offenses, I am willing. Be cleansed!" And we were immediately cleansed! We were immediately justified in the sight of God! We were righteous at that very moment, and we began to walk now on a new path, where godly virtues, springing out of our hearts, began to grow. And little by little, we are continuing to grow more and more into the image of our Beloved, blessed, glorious Savior!

[The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25