

THE FAITH OF A LEPER

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Matthew 8:1-4

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INTRODUCTION

[Matthew 7:28-8:4](#) (2016 ESV) – 28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. 1 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. 2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” 3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

Jesus amazed the crowds, because He taught as one having authority – the authority of the Author, in fact – and not a scribe or preacher who can only repeat the words of an authority.

Large crowds immediately followed Him; He had not yet begun offending them. When He did, they would abandon Him as quickly as they had followed ([John 6:66](#)).

In the Sermon on the Mount we see that Jesus spoke with power and authority.

But Jesus did more than speak with authority; He also acted with authority. [Matthew 8-10](#) contains a series of episodes that demonstrate Jesus’ power and authority, primarily through miracles, but also through His authority over His disciples.

TRANSITION: The demonstration of Jesus’ power and authority begins with the healing of a leper. Let’s talk for a moment about leprosy.

LEPROSY

Modern leprosy is called Hansen’s Disease.

It infects nerve fibers, especially in the hands, feet, and face, leading to a loss of sensation. The loss of sensation causes injuries to go unnoticed, and infections and abscesses can easily set in and cause permanent damage.

Hansen's Disease is curable through the use of multiple antibiotics over a period of one to two years. The cure does not reverse whatever damage the disease has already done.

Biblical leprosy may have been Hansen's Disease, or any number of other infectious, debilitating skin diseases.

[Leviticus 13:45-46](#) requires that lepers wear torn clothes, have long, unbound hair, cover their face with their hand, shout "Unclean" wherever they go, and live apart from others. All of these were warning signs to passersby that the person had leprosy.

Violating those "social distance" rules could result in being chased away from the area, perhaps even being stoned. It was a lonely, tragic way to live.

The leper is the first man to be described as coming to Jesus for help. At the end of [Matthew 4](#) Jesus is described performing miraculous healings in the area of Galilee, but this is the first time a particular person comes to Jesus for help.

And what a man he is - a leper! He has an incurable, terminal disease. He is outcast from society. His condition may have been repulsive to the crowd, in which case he could easily see the crowd's response.

We must presume that [Leviticus 13](#) is being followed - the leper's clothes were torn, his hair was long and tangled, he covered his face with his hand, and he was shouting "unclean" to warn others to keep their distance.

But he is so desperate for healing that he is willing to risk even greater torment by coming up to Jesus.

TRANSITION: We can learn some things from this man's approach to Jesus; would you notice with me four faith lessons from the leper?

FAITH THAT JESUS IS AVAILABLE

> And behold, a leper came to Him ...

Behold is important; Matthew wants us to pay close attention to what happens here.

God had been “unavailable” to this man, at least as far as the sacrificial system was concerned. The Temple presented a series of obstacles to approaching God: the Gentiles’ Court, the Women’s Court, the Men’s Court, the Priests’ Court, the Sanctuary, finally the Holy of Holies. The leper could have prayed, and no doubt did pray, but he was unable to get close to the Temple, much less go into the Men’s Court.

But Jesus was right there, right in front of him, and was available; there were no barriers between the leper and the Lord. The invitation of [Matthew 11:28-30](#) was a constant in Jesus’ ministry:

Matthew 11:28–30 2016 ESV

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus may have not yet spoken those words, but from the moment He began His public ministry, they were, if you will, His attitude toward sinners.

Let me encourage you to write down this reference and memorize these words; they are powerful in evangelism.

FAITH THAT JESUS HAD AUTHORITY

> ... and knelt before Him, saying “Lord ...”

His physical posture acknowledges that Jesus had a POSITION of authority. He kneels in humility before Him as someone would kneel before a throne. And his words acknowledge that Jesus had authority WITHIN HIMSELF.

The meaning of Lord ranges from a polite “sir” to a reference to God Himself. The context tells us what the leper meant: he wanted a divine healing. He viewed Jesus as having at least the authority of Elijah and Elisha, able to perform miracles at will. He may have viewed Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Anointed One sent by God, with divine authority and power. He may have even worshipped Jesus as God in human flesh, and acknowledged His authority to that extent.

I want to remind you that Jesus held His own Lordship in very high esteem. In [Luke 6:46](#) He says,

Luke 6:46 2016 ESV

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

This is not sinful pride, but a recognition of truth. Jesus was Lord during His earthly ministry, and remains Lord today. He did not slowly become Lord as time went on; as the Christmas hymn Silent Night says, Jesus was Lord at His birth. And Jesus is Lord forevermore. He is the Lord of glory who was crucified, buried, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, is now interceding for His people, and will one day return in glory and judgment.

The final words of the Bible testify to this:

Revelation 22:20–21 2016 ESV

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

The physical posture and words of the leper tell us that he believed in Jesus’ authority.

FAITH IN JESUS’ SOVEREIGNTY

> ... if You will ...

This could also be translated if You **DESIRE** or if You **WISH**.

For the leper, only one thing stood between him and his healing: Jesus’ will. The disease itself could not resist Jesus’ will. The religious leaders and crowds could not resist Jesus’ will. Satan and all the demons of hell could not resist Jesus’ will – they tried, and failed. This man’s sin could not resist Jesus’ will. His weak faith could not prevent Jesus from healing him, if that is what Jesus wanted to do.

This is the exact opposite of the arrogance of so-called faith healers in our time, who demand, command, insist, swagger around, shout, and pretend to be spiritually powerful. If they possessed actual power from God, they wouldn't need to put on a show or call attention to themselves. And obviously, if they possessed actual power from God they would be performing actual miracles, which they never, ever do.

There is really only one unknown in this entire event: what is Jesus' will?

FAITH IN JESUS' ABILITY

> ... You can make me clean.

Or, You are **ABLE** to make me clean, or You have **POWER** to make me clean.

Jesus had already gained a reputation for healing all sorts of illnesses, as Matthew writes at the end of [Matthew 4](#). Jesus had already proven His power beyond any doubt. Jesus lived out the truth of [Jeremiah 32:17](#),

Jeremiah 32:17 2016 ESV

'Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

The leper believed that, if Jesus willed to heal him, he would be healed. The ability to heal was already there. He didn't think that Jesus could try to heal, or attempt to heal. He knew that Jesus could heal if He chose.

So let's review the faith of the leper.

- He believed in Jesus' availability.
- He believed in Jesus' authority.
- He believed in Jesus' sovereignty.
- He believed in Jesus' ability.

JESUS' RESPONSE

JESUS RESPONDED WITH TENDERNESS AND LOVE:

- > **And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him ...**

No one touched lepers; it was unheard of. But Jesus touched this man. The leper was still kneeling, so perhaps Jesus touched his head, or his shoulder. We aren't told, but I like to think that Jesus cupped his face in His hand – a loving, kind, tender touch.

JESUS RESPONDED WITH AGREEMENT:

- > **... saying, I will; be clean.**

There is no need to talk Jesus into doing what He desires to do. The leper doesn't need to argue, or defend his request, or tell his story.

We see that Jesus' will and power are inseparable. He has the power to do whatever He wills. If He does not do what we ask, it is not because He lacks the ability, but because He wills something else.

JESUS RESPONDED WITH POWER:

- > **And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.**

We are going to see a lot of miracles in Jesus' ministry, so let's understand the three ways in which God works: miracles, providence, and coherence.

Miracles are instant reversals of natural law and circumstances. Jesus walked on the water, which is a violation of the laws of physics.

Providence is a natural event that brings about the will of God. In order to pay their taxes, Jesus once sent Peter fishing. Peter caught a fish that had a coin in its mouth. Fish like shiny things – that's why fishing lures work – so the likelihood is that the fish grabbed a coin that fell from a boat, and Peter caught it shortly afterward.

Coherence is an event that takes place through the free actions of human beings. Judas freely decided to betray Jesus, and Pilate freely decided to order His crucifixion, but [Acts 4:28](#) says that those involved in Jesus' crucifixion did whatever God's hand and God's plan had predestined to take place.

Miracles, providences, and coherences are all equally decreed by God. A coherence is no less a sign of the power and majesty of God than an instantaneous healing.

Jesus' healing of this leper was a miraculous event. The leprosy was instantly gone, with its outer sores and lesions, and its inner infection in the tissues. If this healing was like others Jesus performed, then every affect of the disease was removed as well, and all the damage was undone. Jesus' healings were complete, never partial.

JESUS RESPONDED WITH SUBMISSION TO THE LAW OF GOD:

- > And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it; He proves that here.

[Leviticus 14](#) provided a means for lepers to be pronounced clean. They had to go to a priest and be thoroughly examined. The priest would take two birds, and kill one over a basin of water, and then dip the dead and live bird into the bloody water and sprinkle the person. The leper was to wash his clothes, shave his entire body, and then bath in fresh water. He could then reenter the camp or the city, but had to live in the open for seven days. After seven days he was to shave his entire body and wash in fresh water and wash his clothes again, and at that point he was declared to be clean.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law of God, and not abolish it, and that's what He requires of this man.

BRINGING IT HOME

I think the lesson is clear: we need to have the faith of a leper; that's appropriate, because we ARE lepers; sin is worse than any sort of disease.

We need to believe that Jesus is AVAILABLE.

He loves and cares for us, [First Peter 5:6-7](#) says. He cares for all of His creation, but especially those who are saved through Him. He is a God who is near, and not just far away. He is a friend that is closer than a brother. In [Revelation 3](#) and 4 there are letters to seven churches, some of which were very faithful, and some of which were almost not churches at all. In each letter Jesus says that He knows them: "I know your works, I know your tribulation and poverty, I know where you dwell." He is with us.

Believe that Jesus is available today, this very minute.

We need to believe that Jesus has all AUTHORITY.

He is Lord of all things, and all circumstances, and all people. He possesses all authority, not only over rocks and animals, but over people as well. He is Lord over every man, woman, and child in existence. He is in a place of authority as the Messiah, the Savior. And He possesses inherent authority within Himself as God.

Believe that Jesus Christ is YOUR Lord, and that His authority touches on everything that you do.

We need to believe that Jesus is SOVEREIGN.

There is only one autonomous Being in existence, and that is God. He is self-existent, self-reliant, and self-sufficient. Nothing happens apart from God's sovereign decree, whether we think that event is good or bad. Before creation He decreed what would happen in precise detail from the moment of creation until the end of time, and that is exactly what is taking place now. This can be distressing for people – they wonder how it can be that God would decree the death of a loved one, or a natural disaster. But God exists and operates on a scale that we simply cannot comprehend. And it's not more comforting to think that God wants to prevent evil, but is powerless to do so. In that case He would not be God at all, just a bigger version of ourselves. There is no event so evil that God does not use it for His glory.

And we need to believe in Jesus' ABILITY to save us.

One of my favorite verses of Scripture is Hebrew 7:25 – write down that reference and memorize it:

[Hebrews 7:24-25](#) (2016 ESV)

[Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Oh, He lives forever, and His saving work continues forever, and therefore the effects of His saving work continue forever. He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him. This is not simply the uttermost of our need, but the uttermost of time and eternity. And this salvation is worked out by His constant, unending intercession as our High Priest. He is wonderfully, perfectly, majestically, eternally ABLE to save.

My dear fellow leper – Jesus Christ can save you. If you have not believed it up to now, I pray that you will! If you do believe, then I pray that you will be so enraptured by this truth that you will be carried away in confidence and peace, and take this truth to the lost who so desperately need to hear it!

Let's pray!