

Calvary Chapel of Mercer County

Can He?

Matthew 8:1-4

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Well good morning friends. Welcome back. I hope your Christmas celebration was wonderful. We return this morning to our verse by verse look at the Book of Matthew. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 8.

Matthew 8 begins a new section of the Book of Matthew. Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 are those chapters which record for us Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. Let's remind ourselves of the flow of events. Look back to chapter 4:23ff. We read,

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. So His fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and He healed them. And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Matthew 4:23-25

(And) seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them.

Matthew 5:1-2



For three chapters now, Jesus taught his disciples what it was going to mean for them to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. He spoke to them about the attitudes they would be marked by. He spoke to them about anger and lust and divorce. He spoke to them about turning the other cheek. He taught them how to pray and how to live a life of faith without drawing attention to yourself. He taught them what Lordship would look like and how to establish your life on the only firm foundation.

Now, as we move into chapter 8, Jesus and the disciples that had made the trek up the mountain with Him, return back to the bottom of the hill and immediately get thrust back into action. Let's read the opening four verses of the chapter.

When He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 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."

Matthew 8:1-4



Now, don't forget, this sermon which covers three chapters in our Bibles, would have only taken about 20 or 30 minutes to actually preach. It's taken us about ten weeks to make our way through it, but presenting it as He did would have only taken the Lord about a half an hour to complete. And so, the very people that were at the base of the hill when He went up the hill, are there again now when He comes back down. And, as we see in verse 1, they immediately start crowding around Him again.

When He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.

Matthew 8:1

The last thing this crowd of people had seen Jesus do was heal ***every disease and every affliction among the people*** (4:23ff). And so, now that Jesus has returned, the crowds expect Him to pick up exactly where He left off.

One of those people is a man that is described as a ***leper*** in verse 2.

And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean."

Matthew 8:2



Leprosy has always been known as a horrible disease throughout history. Leprosy is a disease that attacks a person's nervous system. It kills the nerves – particularly in the extremities – and deadens the pain leading to all sorts of injuries and infections that go unnoticed by the sufferer. It is only relatively recently (late 1800's) that physicians have been able to contain the effects of leprosy in a person's life. Leprosy still exists today both in the developed and undeveloped world.

Today, leprosy is more commonly referred to by the name *Hansen's Disease* after the doctor that discovered how to isolate the bacteria that the disease and limit its' effects. In Bible times, and even beyond, to contract leprosy was devastating for an individual. In fact, it was compared to a person having died. In many ways, the person had died. Because of the belief that leprosy was highly contagious, the leprous person was immediately put out of the community and isolated from society (except from those who also had leprosy).

According to Jewish law and customs, a leper was required to keep themselves at least six feet from another individual. (150 feet if they were up wind from that person). Their disease brought alienation and isolation from society and more importantly their family and friends. Lepers were treated as untouchables unable to have physical contact with any one that



they might expose to infection. Leprosy, therefore, brought physical alienation.

Leprosy brought its victim spiritual alienation as well. A person with leprosy was considered ceremonially unclean and as such, unfit for worship at the temple or in the synagogues. Not only that, but first century Jewish rabbis taught that leprosy was a direct judgment of God. That is, that those that had leprosy were being judged by God and therefore terrible sinners. So, not only did leprosy bring physical alienation, but because of poor teaching, it led to the perception of spiritual alienation as well for the person suffering from its effects.

Leprosy had no cure - even today it doesn't have a cure; (it can be contained, but not cured.) As such, leprosy and hopelessness went hand in hand. A person with leprosy would have to bring them self to the place of accepting that that rest of their life was going to be one of alienation, loneliness and hopelessness. This was their allotted lot in life and there was nothing that could be done about it. Unless of course, a person would come on the scene that could heal **every disease and every affliction.** *If only.....*

Now, I don't know this for certain, but I have my suspicion that the scenario that we have here went something like this. Jesus in chapter four is encountering folks with all sorts of diseases



and infirmities and He is healing them. Sick people are being brought to Him and He is healing them. People that have various diseases are being brought to Him and He is healing them. Paralyzed people are being healed. People suffering from seizures are being healed. Even the demon-possessed are being delivered from the tormentors.

Now in my imagination, I picture that there is someone there observing these things that is thinking to himself about his friend, or his father or his brother that is suffering the effects of leprosy and thinking to himself *If only Jimmy were here to be healed of his disease*. Then Jesus goes up the mountain to teach His disciples and this guy thinks now is my chance. It's going to take Him at least 10-15 minutes to get up the hill and another 10-15 minutes to get back down plus whatever time he spends up there. *That gives me at least 45 minutes to go, find my friend, and bring him back here in time for when Jesus comes back down*. And then, at full sprint this guy takes off for the leper community to tell his buddy about the Man that is healing ***all manner of sickness and disease***. Finally getting to him and convincing Him to come with him to see this Jesus.

And so, the instant Jesus comes down the hill it seems, there is this man that falls down before Jesus and says, ***“Lord, if You will, You can make me clean.”***



And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, “Lord, if You will, You can make me clean.”

Matthew 8:2

I want you to take notice of something here where it says the man ***knelt before Him*** (KJV worshipped Him)

And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying,

Matthew 8:2

This man is not just respectfully bowing before Jesus or even genuflecting before Him, but as the KJV words it, he is *worshipping* Him. That’s significant, because it is God alone that is to be worshipped. And notice, Jesus doesn’t rebuke the man for doing so.

When Cornelius in Acts 10 fell down and began to worship the Apostle Peter, Peter lifted him up and said, *Don’t do that. I am a man just like you.*

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”

Acts 10:25-26



When Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14 figured out what the people of Lystra were doing (ie worshipping them as gods) they tore their clothes and said, *What are you doing? We are men just like you that came to teach you not to do this sort of thing.*

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God...

Acts 14:14-15

When John the Apostle fell before an angel in Revelation 22 and began to worship that angel, the angel stopped him and said, *I’m a fellow servant like you. Worship God.*

And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you

Revelation 22:8b-9a

That’s why it stands out that Jesus doesn’t rebuke this man for worshipping Him and there are only two explanations for why He doesn’t. They are:



1. That Jesus is a scoundrel that wrongly received the worship of this man. Or,
2. That Jesus is God and rightly received the worship of this man.

I'm going with option number two.

And, so again the man comes to Jesus, falls down before Him worshipping Him and says, ***"Lord, if You will, You can make me clean."***

And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean."

Matthew 8:2

This man, notice, has absolute confidence that Jesus can heal Him. The question is whether or not He would heal Him. This man must have been present when Jesus taught His disciples to pray *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done* because he doesn't come dictating to Jesus what He must do, but simply presents his petition and leaves it to the will of God. Again, he knew with certainty that Jesus could heal him. The question was whether or not Jesus would heal him. Whether He was willing to or not.

Well of course Jesus would want to heal this man. *Why wouldn't Jesus want to heal this man? Doesn't Jesus want to*



heal everyone? I wish He did, but the fact is, we see examples in the scripture (and in our day) where folks are not healed. Jesus can do it, but for whatever reason from time to time He chooses not to do it. Perhaps the best example of this is the example of the apostle Paul who came to Jesus multiple times with his infirmity (which he calls a *thorn in his side*)

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

II Corinthians 12:8

and yet for whatever reason it was not God's will for that infirmity to be removed saying instead to Paul, *My grace is sufficient for you.*

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

II Corinthians 12:9

God could remove this infirmity from Paul, yet He chose not to instead using it as an opportunity for Paul to learn about the sustaining and strengthening grace of God even through life's difficulties.

So, for this guy back in Matthew 8, it is not a question of if Jesus could heal, but if He would heal. And, as we see in verse 3, He would. Verse 3,



And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:3

And just like that, the man’s disease was gone. All of the alienation; all of the separation; all of the hopelessness - gone in an instant. With just one touch, the man is completely set free from all of the effects of his disease. Did you notice that? With just one touch.

Jesus didn’t have to touch this man to heal him. In fact, in just a couple of verses (vs 13) he heals a guy that is not even present with him with just a word. Actually He doesn’t even really say a word, He just informs the guys that what he has asked has been accomplished. Jesus didn’t have to touch this leper, but this leper did need to be touched.

This same account is recorded for us in Mark chapter 1 and in that account, Mark adds that prior to reaching out His hand and touching him, that Jesus was moved with *compassion* or *pity*.

Moved with pity, He stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”

Mark 1:41



When was the last time this leper had been touched? When was the last time he came into the presence of others and they didn't scatter in all different directions to avoid accidentally brushing up against him? When was the last time someone looked him at him with compassion, reached out their hand and laid it upon his shoulder?

Jesus didn't have to touch him, but he does so because that is what the man needed (emotionally). Jesus knows how to enter into each of lives and provide for us exactly what we need. He's a gifted minister (that's an understatement) and thus He ministers not according to a formula, but rather according to the need of the one He ministers to. I'd encourage you, if you minister in any way to others, avoid the trap of formulaic ministry. Follow the example of Jesus. Everyone is different. Everyone is reached in slightly different ways.

Now, this account is not over. Notice in verse 4, we read,

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."

Matthew 8:4

Seriously. You want me to tell no one? How's that going to happen? What does Jesus expect this guy to tell his family when he suddenly shows back up at home after many days or



years being absent? Actually, that is not Jesus' point. His point is not that this man can't tell anyone of what happened to him, but rather not to run around promoting Jesus as the *HEALER OF ALL DISEASES*. Because that is not why Jesus came.

It is recorded for us seven different times in the gospels that Jesus instructed people not to speak of the miracles He did for them. (Matt 8:4; 12:16; 17:9; Mark 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). Yet, He preached the good news before thousands and commanded His disciples to go throughout the world and do likewise.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19-20a

Jesus was not a circus act. His goal was not to perform great wonders and draw great crowds. In fact, almost without exception, each time you see a crowd gather around the Lord you will either see Him slip away or you'll see Him say something so hard and so challenging that many of the people will slip away on their own accord.

Jesus will heal throughout the gospels. Jesus continues to miraculously heal today, but this was not the reason for His coming. Jesus did not come primarily to deal with mean



temporal condition. He came to deal with man's eternal condition.

Jesus could heal every one of every ailment, but the day would still come when they came to the end of their days and then what? That's the problem He came to address – man's spiritual ailment; his sin problem which separates Him from a holy God.

And so He says to the man, *Don't tell anyone* with the exception of the priest as Moses commanded.

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."

Matthew 8:4

In Leviticus 13 (which is not a chapter you should read while you are eating) Moses presents us with the instructions for a diagnosing a person being with a skin disease. It's a lengthy (and somewhat repulsing chapter) explaining what the person should do; what the priest should do; how a final determination is made whether or not the problem is or isn't leprous, etc.

In Leviticus 14, Moses presents instructions, for dealing with a leprous person who believes he has been cleansed. In verse 2 of Leviticus 14, we read,



This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest...

Leviticus 14:2

All sorts of additional instructions are then given for what the priest and the person were to do. Based on this command then in Leviticus 14, Jesus sends this man to the priest so that he can be pronounced clean.

Try and imagine the priest's response when this man presents himself. No doubt the priest is caught a bit off guard. Despite the fact that there was a law for this, lepers rarely presented themselves as having been cleansed. (In fact, there is no record in Jewish historical writing of one doing so). At the very least, it was extremely rare.

I imagine then that when the man came presenting himself to the priest and said something to him like, *I am here to present myself for you to pronounce me as having been cleansed from leprosy*, that the priest ran into the backroom and quickly began searching his Bible for the instructions on how to actually pronounce someone as having been cleansed from leprosy.

This just wasn't something they dealt with every day – if ever. Here's a question: Why doesn't this priest that is being asked to do what no priest (or at least very few priests) before him has been asked to do, why doesn't he go out and inquire of



Who it was that healed this guy? This healing of a disease that was incurable should have been a tip off to some degree to at the very least go out and investigate.

Who knows, maybe he did. - The record doesn't say one way or the other. What we do know is this that the vast majority of priests and scribes of Jesus' day did not go out to inquire of Who Jesus was and what He was doing. They did come out to challenge Jesus (ie *By what authority do you do these things?*) But with rare exception, did they come to see if He indeed was the Messiah.

The religious folk had made up their mind. They had established their systems (and Jesus didn't fit into them). They had ceased to be wowed by the miraculous and as a result missed the Messiah from heaven. They had developed in their minds a picture of Who the Messiah would be and Jesus didn't fit that mold and so they rejected Him.

Does that happen to you? Have you ceased to be wowed by the things that God has done and is doing in your life? Have you placed God neatly in the box you have created for Him and refuse to allow yourself to consider that He may actually be working outside of that box?

This account of the leper here as Jesus comes down off the mountain is a significant one. This is the first individual healing



described by Matthew in his book (previously we were told of His healing ministry in a general sense). This is the first specific case presented to us. Let's stop and consider then a couple of things about this healing.

One, despite the fact that leprosy is an incurable disease, God nonetheless made provision in the law for a person that would be cured of this disease. Which tells me this: No one is beyond hope. That which is impossible with man is not impossible with God. God is not limited by the laws of nature nor is He limited by the apparent circumstances.

A second thing here I notice here is the way in which this man approaches Jesus. As I've said, leprosy was a horrible disease. It was terribly disfiguring. I've chosen not to show you a picture of people that suffer with advanced forms of leprosy. I'll let you do your own google search. It's hard to look at. Despite the fact that this man was suffering from this terrible disease; despite the fact that he was ceremonially unclean; despite the fact that he was an untouchable in his society, this man comes to Jesus anyway.

Throughout the Bible, leprosy is presented to us as a type of sin. Like leprosy, sin alienates a person from God and others. Like leprosy, sin starts on the inside and then begins to manifest itself on the outside. Like leprosy, sin hardens our



senses and makes us oblivious to the damaging effect of that which is harmful around us.

So a lesson for us here is this: It is not your responsibility to clean yourself up first before coming to Jesus. This man comes in all of the effects of his leprosy and presents himself to Jesus. If he were to try and clean himself up first, he would have never have come to Jesus – and he would have never been healed either. Even so, we take note that nowhere are we called to clean ourselves up first before coming to Jesus. He is the One that does the cleansing. Come to Him in all of your sin and in all of the effects of your sin and allow Him to cleanse you.

One final point this morning and this is related to the title of our sermon. This man answers a key question for each of us - Can Jesus heal?

Settle once and for all in your mind and in your heart that the answer is 'yes'. Can Jesus heal your struggling marriage? The answer is yes. Can Jesus heal your addiction? The answer is yes. Can Jesus set your loved one free from that which binds them? The answer is yes. Can Jesus restore the joy of your salvation which has long since dissipated? The answer is yes.

Come to Him in your hopelessness – that's His specialty – make your request known to Him and allow Him to do His healing work.