

**Jesus Heals**

~ Matthew 8:1-15

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June 7, 2015

There's quite a difference between knowing about someone and knowing them. We may hear about someone in the church, at school, in the news or in our industry. We may see them in class, on the platform, on TV or making a presentation. We may know their name and a little about them from what they've said or what we've seen.

But we don't really know them until we spend time with them – talking, listening, working side by side, living with them, eating together, sharing life. I remember when I first heard about the guy I'd room with to do schooling. We wanted to save on the cost, so they just took names & paired us up. I knew his name was Chris and he pastored in Michigan. Would we get along? Would we room together more than one 2 week course?

Fast forward 13 years. Chris & I have roomed together about every year since 2002. He's moved from Michigan to Illinois. I moved from Ontario to Alberta. We communicate off & on throughout the year, pray for each other and our families. Yesterday his oldest daughter got married.

From knowing about Chris 13 years ago, I now know him much better. But there's more to be discovered & hopefully more time to do that.

Knowing about someone is a lot different than knowing them.

Some of you here may not know much about Jesus. Matthew's explanations are helping you get to know Him more. Others might conclude we already know Jesus. We might say "He's the Son of God." We might confess He is the Christ or Messiah, the Son of the living God. We might think we've already heard the story. Or we might wonder how knowing more about Jesus could possibly help us with what we face in life right now.

There's a difference between knowing about someone and knowing them. If you're a Christian here today we might be tempted to conclude that you know enough about Jesus and there's no need to know anymore. But I invite you to consider what the Apostle Paul said. He got to know Christ pretty well. He writes in Philippians 3:8 "I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Paul concluded there was nothing greater than knowing more about Jesus. Though you may know

some about Jesus; though you may know Jesus through the years of your Christian walk there's more to discuss as Matthew will reveal to us more about Jesus. I want to invite you to come and discover more about the one who walks with you every moment if you are one of His.

Matthew will write about Jesus' healing ministry. We will first look at who Jesus' heals. Then we will ask "Why Jesus heals?" Then think about His healing work in our own lives.

### **Matthew 8:1-4 (ESV)**

**8** When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. <sup>2</sup>And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." <sup>3</sup>And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. <sup>4</sup>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 comes down from the mountain and is still followed by great crowds. Even though He has given some hard teaching, they are astonished at his authority. He did not appeal to other authorities. He claimed authority in Himself and His words. But then a leper comes to him. Now we might read "leper" and not think much of it. But it was very unusual and culturally unacceptable for the leper to come to Jesus.

When we think of leprosy, we likely think of Hansen's disease which affects the skin and extremities of the patient. This picture was part of a photo essay taken in 1886 of people with leprosy. It is probable that the term leprosy of the Bible covered a wide range of skin ailments such as dermatosis, psoriasis, lupus, ringworm and other suspicious skin disorders. Because the ancients believed all skin diseases were contagious, they isolated people with skin disease. In Judaism, a leper was required to call out "unclean, unclean" to anyone approaching to prevent the spread of the disease. Colonies of lepers developed on the outskirts of cities. In Leviticus 13 and 14, the law laid out instructions on what to do with lepers and necessary steps for reintegration in the community. But you were only allowed to enter back into community when you were cured.

This leper is still a leper. He may not have looked the best. He was potentially a health hazard and certainly unclean ceremonially. Yet he has likely heard about Jesus' healing ministry described back in Matthew 4:23-25.

Maybe he's desperate. So he's willing to break social convention and come to Jesus. He kneels before Jesus and makes a simple faith statement. "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Though "Lord"

was a common way to address nobles or those in superior position, the fact that he kneels may indicate an act of worship and recognition that Jesus was no ordinary Lord. Notice, the leper does not demand healing from Jesus. It is Jesus' decision. But the leper believes that Jesus has the power to heal.

So the first answer to our question "Who does Jesus heal?" is **An unclean leper with a humble faith.** Jesus' response shows His great heart. But first, he does something that must have shocked the crowd and his disciples. "And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him." You didn't touch lepers let alone stretch out your hand towards them. You pulled your hand away. But Jesus is not afraid to touch the untouchable. Nor is he concerned about being ceremonially unclean because He's about to deal with the uncleanness. He declares – "I will & am willing. Be clean." Jesus does not simply declare the man clean externally as if he has performed some religious rite. Matthew makes clear for us the event. "And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

So imagine that man looked a little like the person from 1886 we just saw picture. After Jesus spoke the word, the power of God would go into the man's body. It would heal the illness or the infection. It would correct the distortion of the skin. The man would no longer bear something physical that would require him to call out unclean.

Jesus verifies this healing by instructing the man to start the process of being restored to the community. "Say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them." Jesus instructs the man not to spread the news at this point likely because He doesn't want people to know Him as just a wonder worker. There's a lot more to following Jesus than milking miracles out of Him. But He does instruct the man to follow the law and go show himself to the priest. "This will be proof to them," Jesus says. It may be public proof that the leper is cured and may return to society. It may prove to hostile priests that Jesus actually does respect Old Testament Law. Or it may bear witness to Jesus' mission announcing that the Kingdom of God has arrived. Regardless, at Jesus' touch, nothing remains undefiled. Far from becoming unclean himself, Jesus makes the unclean clean.

Who else does Jesus' heal? Matthew introduces us to another unexpected candidate.

### **Matthew 8:5-13**

<sup>5</sup>When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, <sup>6</sup>"Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." <sup>7</sup>And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." <sup>8</sup>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.<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>[c]</sup> 'Do this,' and he does it."<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel<sup>[d]</sup> have I found such faith.<sup>11</sup> I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,<sup>12</sup> while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."<sup>13</sup> 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.

Back in Matthew 4:13, we learned that Jesus moved his base of operations to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. As Jesus goes back into the city a centurion approaches him. Now remember at the time of Jesus, Palestine as it was then called is occupied by the Romans. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army in charge of between 80 to 100 men.

Now the Romans were occupiers. So the general population despised them and looked for deliverance from them. On top of that, Romans were Gentiles or non-Jews. The Jews were the chosen people of God. Some had concluded that Gentiles would be excluded from God's future kingdom. So there was some considerable animosity between Jews and Romans as there would be in any military occupation situation.

The centurion however does not approach Jesus to cause trouble but to make an appeal. He also calls Jesus "Lord." He is not appealing for himself but for his servant who is paralyzed. The centurion notes that his servant suffers terribly. Some commentators argue that centurions were not allowed to have families with them in the field. It would be too distracting. So this servant may have been like family to the centurion.

Jesus responds in verse 7. The ESV translates the verse "And he said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'" But there's something unusual about the way Matthew pens this verse. The text literally says "I myself will go and heal him." But Greek documents from that time were written without punctuation. So we don't know if this was simply a statement by Jesus or a question. It could be "I will go to heal him" or "I will go to heal him?" Why might Jesus put this statement in the form of a question? Well, the servant was in the centurion's home. The centurion was a Gentile. Jews did not go into Gentile's homes because they believed they would become unclean. So it could be that Jesus is examining if the centurion actually wants Jesus to break protocol and do this. Or it could be that Jesus is testing the centurion's faith. Maybe he wants to find out what this centurion really believes. After all, the Romans were pagans and prayed to pagan deities. Did the centurion expect Jesus to perform the expected pagan ritual?

But the centurion's heart is revealed in verses 8 and 9. First, the centurion confesses Jesus as somehow superior to him. He admits he is not worthy to have Jesus come to his home. But then he declares a faith in Jesus that is even more striking. Did you notice what he asks for at the end of verse 8? He believes Jesus can heal from a distance with just a word. "But only say the word and my servant will be healed."

**Who does Jesus heal? The servant of a Gentile soldier with a great grasp of Jesus' authority.** Then the centurion goes on to unfold his understanding of Jesus' authority.

"For I too am a man under authority;" the centurion is under the authority of the Emperor. He represents the emperor. So if a soldier disobeys the centurion's order, he is indirectly disobeying the emperor himself. The centurion has authority to command his soldiers to come and go backed up by the Emperor. So he applies this same understanding of authority to Jesus. Jesus is under God's authority. So when Jesus spoke, he spoke for God. The centurion reasons that Jesus word, backed up by God's authority, is able to heal sickness.

This deep understanding of Jesus and His authority causes even Jesus to marvel. Now God doesn't marvel or get surprised by anything. But Jesus has taken on human flesh and emotions. So it was possible for him to experience some surprise. Here was a Gentile who did not have the benefit of teaching in the Old Testament. And he understands Jesus' identity. Yet Jesus has seen no one among His own country man with this kind of trust.

Jesus sees an opportunity to announce something that the majority did not grasp. Gentiles would be included in God's future kingdom. Verse 11 – "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus describes the Messianic Banquet foreshadowed in the Old Testament like Isaiah 25:6 – "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." This great banquet was embellished in later Judaism to the exclusion of Gentiles. Some believed that only God's chosen would be there. If you were a son of Abraham, a Jew by ethnicity, you were automatically in.

But Jesus paints a shocking picture. People from all over the world will come to recline at the table with the Jewish patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. People reclined at tables because in that time they lay sideways on couches with their heads towards the table and their feet away from it. But Jesus says Gentiles

will recline at the same table with Abraham? Well this was bad enough news to some that they'd have to make room for Gentiles.

But it gets worse in verse 12 – “while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The sons of the kingdom were Jews. But no descendant of Abraham could be lost – could they?

Is Jesus saying that membership in the kingdom of heaven and invitation to this great banquet is not based on race? Might believing Gentiles take the place of unbelieving Jews?

Yes. Jesus makes this clear in the last phrase of verse 12. They will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These were symbolic Jewish descriptions of the fate of the ungodly. Weeping may reflect a response to the pain of separation from God. Gnashing of teeth may refer to despair. Outside darkness is away from the light of the banquet. This declaration must have shocked many of Jesus' listeners. Yet it is consistent with the Old Testament prophets who consistently called Israel back to God. And it is consistent with God's plan from the beginning where many nations would experience blessing through Abraham. This is not an absolute reversal for the patriarchs who are Jews would be there as well as Jesus' disciples. But Jesus points to the reality that the place of God among His people will no longer remain solely in the Jewish nation.

After these stunning words, there is the matter of healing. Jesus, the one under authority of His Father, uses the authority and power of God to heal from a distance. The centurion's servant is healed at that very moment.

Matthew goes on to briefly describe another healing.

#### **Matthew 8:14-15**

<sup>14</sup>And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. <sup>15</sup>He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.

**Who does Jesus heal? A woman with a fever.** Jesus goes into Peter's house. Now this might surprise some of us because we understand that to follow Jesus means to leave behind everything and follow him. Peter did leave his net at once and followed Jesus back in 4:20. But this following did not require Peter to abandon his home and family members. His mother in law lives with Peter. This could have been a common

occurrence because girls were often married off very young to men. So the men would die earlier in the marriage and leave the woman a widow. It was the children's responsibility to care for their aged parents.

Peter has his mother-in-law in the house sick with fever – maybe malaria. Jesus does not appear to be in a public ministry setting at this point. A need arises and He desires to meet it. So he may break social norm a little by touching the woman's hand. Yet in touching her, the fever leaves her. The healing is so instantaneous and complete that she gets up to serve a meal. We all know fevers aren't healed by touching hands. An infection has to be stopped that enables the body to cool down and return to normal temperatures. That takes a while. And when your fever slows down or stops, you usually take time to sleep and catch up after you're body has been through such a fight. But Jesus touches her hand and she is healed so completely that she gets up and enters into work.

Matthew gives us one more healing description before he reaches his main point.

**Matthew 8:16** <sup>16</sup>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.

Word spread that Jesus was in town. People bring to him those oppressed by demons and the sick. It was believed that many illnesses were caused by demons. Yet here Matthew identifies some were oppressed by demons and some were sick. Jesus heals them all. The spirits are cast out with a word, never by a touch and without the conscious participation of the victim. The sick are healed often by a touch and almost always in response to the patient's faith.

**Who does Jesus heal – The demon oppressed and the sick.**

So we've answered the question who does Jesus heal. But now we come to the larger question. **Why does Jesus heal?** Besides the obvious immediate help to those He heals, is there a larger purpose? Matthew reveals it to us in verse 17.

**Matthew 8:17**

<sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

But what does this mean? Well, we've seen this fulfillment formula before in Matthew. Before Christmas, we saw this again and again – all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet – "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son; and you O Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means

least among the rulers of Judah, Out of Egypt, I called my son; a voice heard in Ramah weeping and loud lamentation. Now Matthew draws us to another prophecy from Isaiah.

If you were with us at Easter, we looked at the passage he quotes from Isaiah 53. It is the most famous prophecy of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4 which states "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." These refer to our sins and sorrows. Isaiah goes on to make this clear by saying "He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was laid upon him and by his wounds we are healed." So Isaiah really emphasizes how Jesus took upon himself our sins so that we could be healed through His sacrifice.

What does Matthew say? "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." But Isaiah said "He took our griefs and bore our sorrows." What is going on Matthew? Now Isaiah was written in Hebrew. Matthew writes in Greek. There was a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was in widespread use during Matthew's time. But Matthew doesn't use the wording from the Greek translation. It's like he makes his own translation from Hebrew to Greek.

So there are basically three possibilities I can think of. One – Matthew was a really bad translator. He just messed up. Two – Matthew was a really bad dude and changed the Scripture to make it say what he wanted it to say. Three – Matthew understood a deeper meaning of Jesus' healings that pointed to a much bigger purpose.

How does Jesus take our illnesses and heal our diseases? The Old Testament Scriptures and Jewish tradition believed that all sickness was caused directly or indirectly by sin. So you could become sick because of something sinful you did that results in illness. Or you could become sick because we live in a fallen world. Sickness is part of this fallen world. Why is the world fallen? It goes back to the original sin of Adam and Eve.

But what does this have to do with Jesus healing ministry? Well, the ultimate root of all sickness is sin. Jesus conquered sin through his suffering, death and resurrection. Sin is being progressively overcome and eliminated from our lives. When we came to Christ, we were saved from the penalty of sin. As we grow in Christ we are saved from the power of sin. When we die in Christ, we will be saved from the presence of sin. What will those who die in Christ one day receive? A resurrection body – You can go to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 to



read all about it. That resurrection body will be completely healthy and never get sick. So through Jesus suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus has laid the foundation for the destruction of sin which is the root and cause of all sickness. So sickness will one day be destroyed and we will be completely healed.

But there are times in Jesus' ministry and in our lives today, where Jesus chooses to heal to give us a taste of what's coming and to show us that He has already dealt with the ultimate root of our sickness. So Matthew ties Jesus healing to the cross in a deep understanding of Jesus' ministry.

**Jesus has come to take away the "sickness" of His people.** Jesus takes away the sin sickness of His people through His death on the cross. Jesus has come to take away a side effect of that sin sickness that shows up in our lives as physical, emotional and mental sickness. Some of you have experienced Jesus' healing in your own lives. Jesus heals directly. He heals in response to the prayers of His people for themselves or one another. He heals through medicine and doctors. If you've ever been sick and are now well, you have experienced in some way the healing touch of Jesus.

This Jesus desires to make people whole. "I will, be clean. Go. Let it be done for you as you have believed. It shows Jesus' willingness to reach out to the marginalized, isolated, untouchable and the hated.

Yet the question remains. If Jesus did all that during that time, why am I not healed today? Or why is my loved one not healed? Or dare I ask for such healing? Or do I have the faith of the centurion?

But this passage guides us with these kinds of questions. It calls us to come like the leper. He humbly asked and left the choice with Jesus. Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus answers such requests of His people in two ways – Yes, be healed right now. Or Yes, you will be healed but not right now.

This passage does not justify healing on demand. The cross certainly brings the benefit of healing but it does not mean we can demand the gift whenever we want it. Nor can we demand an early bird application for our resurrection bodies. The timing is up to Him. He will certainly heal our sin sickness today. He may heal our physical or mental or emotional illness today. But He will certainly heal them when we receive our resurrection bodies.

So if we're Christians here today, we can pray the prayer Jesus prayed in the garden before going to the cross. "Father if it is possible take this cup from me. If you are willing Lord, you can heal me today." Jesus

has the power to heal by the spoken word or from a distance or by a touch. But we also pray “not my will, but yours be done. If you choose that I must drink this cup Lord, please grant me your strength to drink it.” God will provide just as He provided Jesus with strengthening by angels to go to the cross.

There’s a big difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Him. If you don’t know Christ, you need Him, to come to Jesus like the leper – humbly, admitting your need for forgiveness and wholeness. He will come. Or if you have assumed that because you attend a “Bible-believing church” or come from a Christian family, you’re automatically in. Heed Jesus’ own prophecy here. Ensure you are one of his by coming humbly before Him now.

So my friends, I want to invite to come before the Lord today and admit your need for whatever healing you’re aware of. Restoration; repair; illness; disease; grief; sorrow; reshaping of my brokenness. Jesus will provide what He decides you really need.