

Jesus' Power over Disease, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 8:1-4

Code: 2257

We have the privilege this morning of returning to our study of Matthew's gospel. Take your Bible, if you will, and prepare to look with me at Matthew, chapter 8. Matthew, chapter 8. The end of our sabbatical this summer, we departed from our study of Matthew to share some things out of 2 Peter, chapter 1, and I think it was as the Lord would've had it. But now, with great joy and anticipation, we come back to our ongoing study of the gospel of Matthew. We've covered the first seven chapters, and now we proceed further in this tremendous and exciting gospel.

The 8th chapter through the 12th chapter is really, in many ways, critical to the understanding of the life of Christ and the message of Matthew. For in this section, Matthew records a series of miracles performed by Jesus Christ. There are countless thousands of miracles that are done, nine of which he singles out as examples of the power of Jesus Christ. They are really His credentials as the Messiah. They are those signs which point convincingly to His deity, for only God can do the things that He does. The sad part is that, after the miracles in chapters 8 and 9, after the preaching that occurs following that, the Jews conclude in chapter 12 that Jesus is of the devil. That was their conclusion. So in many ways this becomes the heart of Matthew's message. Christ does everything possible to manifest His deity, and they conclude exactly the opposite. And then in chapter 13, He turns from the Jews toward the establishment of a Gentile church. This is a monumental section of Scripture. Now you'll notice that it begins with three miracles: miracle of healing the leper in the first four verses; healing the man with paralysis, verses 5 to 13; and the woman with fever in verses 14 and 15. This is the opening triad of miracles. There are nine miracles in these two chapters. They come in three sections of three: three miracles, then a response; three miracles, then a response; three miracles, then a response; all designed to manifest the deity of Jesus Christ.

Miracles, you see, were God's way of attesting to the deity of His Son. They are creative miracles. They manifest power that is only defined by the essence of God. They are things that man could never do. They are supernatural. Now, this approach of giving credentials to the Messiah through miracles is not only Matthew's approach, but is also John's approach. Look with me for a moment at the gospel of John; and I just want to use it as an illustration so that you'll see the import of this issue. John 1:14. In John 1:14, we read this: "And the Word [and, of course, that refers to the Deity Himself, to God Himself], and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," John says. Then this: "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." John says Deity became man, and we beheld His deity. That's what he's saying: "We saw His glory. We saw the divine in the human. We saw essential Deity. We saw God." How, John? How did you see that? Where was it made manifest?

That's easy for John. John then proceeds from that statement to give a string of miracles in his gospel, performed by Jesus, that are the manifestation that He was the fullness of Deity Himself. And, throughout the gospel, the Holy Spirit calls us to make that conclusion.

Turn in John 5, to verse 19. I'm just going to give you a quick overview of this gospel. John 5:19: "Then answered Jesus and said unto them [that is, to the Jews], 'Truly, truly I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever things He does, these also do the Son in the same manner.'" In other words, Jesus says, "What you see Me doing is exactly what God can do." Now that is a monumental claim, frankly. Verse 20: "For the Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things that He Himself doeth; and He will show Him greater works than these, so that you may marvel." In other words, Jesus says, "Look, what I'm doing is what only God can do." Should make you marvel. Verse 36 of the same chapter, "But I have a greater witness than that of John. There's a greater testimony than that of John the Baptist, and it is the works which the Father has given Me to finish. The same works that I do bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me." How did He manifest deity? Through not only what He said, but even more so through what He did: his miraculous supernatural creative power. Only God can create, and the miracles of Jesus were creative miracles.

In John chapter 10 and verse 25, we find it again. "Jesus answered them [and again it's the Jews], 'I told you.'" That is, "I spoke and you believed not. You didn't believe what I said. You didn't believe My words. The works that I do in My Father's name or My Father's power, they bear witness of Me. You deny My sayings, but how can you deny My works?" Verse 32, "Jesus answered them, 'Many good works have I shown you from My Father. For which of these works do you stone Me?'" Sarcasm. It's obvious these have been supernatural. "For which of them do you stone Me?" Verse 37, "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. If I can't do what God can do, don't believe Me. If I can't show you that I'm God, then don't believe it. But if I do, though you believe not Me, that is, what I say, believe the works...that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." Chapter 14, verse 10 essentially says the same thing: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" In other words, in John 14:10 He is saying, "You don't believe that I and God are One? You have a problem with that? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself, and the Father that dwells in me, He doeth the works. Believe, literally, My words that I'm in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe Me for the very works' sake."

Chapter 15, you have the same thing in verse 24. "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin [that is, the sin of rejection] but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father. They saw it. They couldn't deny it was God, and they have manifested that they not only hate Me, but they hate God." See, that's the issue of the gospel of John. See the miracles? Conclude that He's God. And that is even stated as the purpose of the book in chapter 20 verse 30. John 20 verse 30, key statement: "And many other signs [or wonders or miracles] truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book." John says, "I've only given

you a sampling, like Matthew. It's just a sampling. Many others were done. Why? These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ." These, what are written? These signs, these miracles, and that you, "believing, might have life through His name." You see.

John's whole thesis is to present the miracles of Jesus as the affirmation of His deity, so that men might know and believe and be redeemed. Now go back to Matthew 8 and find that is exactly Matthew's purpose, as well. These are the credentials of the King. This is the proof that He is divine. Now, by the way, it comes at a very strategic point in the gospel of Matthew, because Jesus has just delivered a blistering sermon in chapters 5, 6, and 7. He has literally turned their religious world topsy-turvy. He has told them, in effect, that their teaching is wrong and their living is wrong. Their attitude is wrong. Everything they stand for, believe in, and hope for is wrong, and He never bothered to quote any rabbis or any of their well-known sources. He just repeatedly says, matter-of-factly, absolutely, dogmatically, "This is the truth." In fact, repeatedly, He said, "You have heard it said, but I say. You have heard it said, but I say." And over and over and over, He kept saying that, and when He was all finished, in verse 28, "It came to pass [chapter 7 verse 28] that when He ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His teaching." Why? Verse 29: "For He taught them as one having authority, not like the scribes."

I mean, He just said these things dogmatically. How did the scribes do it? They quoted other rabbis. They were fallible, so they needed a whole bunch of other fallible sources to support their material. Jesus just said it: unbelievable authority. And He overturned their entire religious system. He stripped them naked. He unmasked them as the spiritual phonies that they were; and, obviously, this brings up a very dramatic question. A first century Jew is going to say this: "Who is this saying these things? By what authority does He speak? Why should we hear this? Why should we listen to this? Why should we believe this? What gives Him the right to say these things and to affirm that they are true?"

And chapter 8 and 9 is the answer to that question. I'll tell you what gives Him the right. He is God. That's what does it, and that is what Matthew is saying in chapter 8 and chapter 9. He is showing beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus is God. And how do you know He's God? Because only God can create, and for two chapters, nine examples, Jesus creates situations, circumstances that do not exist, even physical limbs, and we see God at work. It presents the answer to the question, "By what authority does He say this?"

Now, let's look, first of all, at the beginning, the first three miracles. I want to give you some general thoughts about them. There are three: the healing of one with leprosy; the healing of one it says has the palsy (That's paralysis; and it could've been caused by many things.) and then one of a woman with a fever. Those three. And there are several key things to note about these first three miracles. Number one: They begin at the lowest level of human need, the physical. Life is more than physical, yes, but Jesus is also sympathetic about the physical. It's wonderful that the miracles of Jesus were not only miracles that dealt with spiritual things, or that dealt with comfort or riches or circumstances

or providence, but that they touched man at the lowest level of need, the physical. He goes to the depths of human disease. Later on, in the second set of miracles, He deals more with the spiritual; and in the third set of miracles, He even touches on the ultimate enemy of man, death itself, as He raises the dead. But in this point, He's dealing with that low level of human need, which shows us not only the power of Christ, but the sympathy of Christ.

The second thing I see in just kind of an overview is that He responds in all three cases to appeals, to appeals. This shows us His compassion. In the first case, the leper says to Him, "If You will, You can make me clean." In the second case, the friends of the centurion say, "The servant is in the house, sick of paralysis," and He says, "I'll come." In the third case, according to what Luke adds in the parallel passage, the friends of the family of Peter say to Jesus, "You know, his mother-in-law is sick, and it sure would be wonderful if you could go over there and take care of her." In all three cases, He responds to the appeal of the heart of people.

The third thing to note in these three miracles is, in every case, He acts on His own will. Though He is sympathetic and though He is at the same time deeply compassionate, He is also sovereign; and that is an important thing. In each case, He acts on His own volition. "I will; be thou clean." "I will come down and heal him." "He reached His hand and touched her, and the fever left."

And, fourthly, and this is beautiful. In each of these miracles, He touches someone who, in the terms of the understanding of the Pharisees and the Jews, was at the lowest level of human existence: first a leper, the scum of the earth; second, a Gentile; and third, a woman. In just that alone, there is a subtlety here that devastates the Jewish pride, the Pharisees' pride, and you see where Jesus really puts His emphasis: on the humble, and the meek, and the outcast. You know that the first person He ever revealed His messiahship to was a harlot in Samaria who wasn't even a Jew? That says something to the Jewish society of His day. So from the very start, He makes it clear that He is going to establish His authority by miracle power, but He's also going to show His sympathy for those who are hurting at the lowest level of human need. He is compassionately going to respond to the cries of their friends and those who have those needs, and yet, He is going to act sovereignly as the Lord that He is. And the, the sad thing, the thing that just breaks your heart, is that with all of this, they turned their backs on Him; and they conclude, in chapter 12, that what He does, He does by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They hated Him. In fact, they had to kill Him, because he upset their religious security.

In this section, His power is awesome, people. It's awesome. He cleanses a leper, heals a servant, raises up a woman, controls the sea, casts out demons, makes the blind to see, makes crippled people walk, makes dumb people speak, heals every single sickness that's brought to Him. Incredible display of power, and if you look backwards in Matthew, and go back and start at the beginning, you can see that this is just one more great category of affirmation of the messiahship of Christ. First chapter: genealogy. That attested to the legal qualifications of the Messiah. Second chapter: birth,

and all of the fulfillment of prophecy attested to the prophetic qualifications of the Messiah. And then you come to His baptism: attested to the divine approval of His messiahship. Then you come to the temptation: attested to His spiritual qualifications to be the Messiah. Then you come to the sermon: His theological qualifications. And now you come to the miracles, the most essential qualification of all, the proof that He is God. He's God.

By the way, chapter 8 begins where chapter 4 left off; the sermon is stuck in the middle. But when we closed chapter 4, do you remember what He was doing? Verse 23? "And Jesus went all about Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria. And they brought unto Him all the sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with demons, those who were epileptic, those who had paralysis, and He healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan." You see, this is right where He left off, isn't it? He went up in a mountain, preached a sermon, came down, and started it all over again. Thousands, uncounted numbers of healings, and He healed all who came to Him. And the first three we've kind of introduced to you. For this morning, we're just going to look at the first one. Beautiful, beautiful story. Let me read it to you: verses 1 to 4, just a short one. "When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, there came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' And Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be thou clean.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, 'See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.'"

That's it. At first thought, you say, "Well, isn't that nice?" Wonderful little story. Let me see if I can take you deep enough in it to see what it's really saying. Verse 1: "When He was come down from the mountain." What mountain? Well, the mountain where He had just been teaching the sermon, near the village of Capernaum. "Great multitudes followed Him." Why? Want to know something? Wasn't because they loved Him. Wasn't because they adored Him. Wasn't because they believed in Him. It was because they were curious, first of all. Because they'd never heard anybody speak with such authority, and they had never seen anybody who could go around healing people. He attracted a huge crowd, and they came down the mountain after Him, and they're all ready to see what happens, and it happens in verse 2. "And behold, there came [or literally in the Greek, *there approached*, and that's kind of an interesting word, *there approached*] a leper." Now what's interesting is lepers don't approach. This one did. Do you know anything about leprosy, what a leper is in the Bible? It's from the Greek word *lepros*, which comes from the root word *lepis*, which means *scale* or *scaly*. And basically, leprosy, as it's translated in the English, reflects this Greek word *lepros*. In the Old Testament, you have another Hebrew word that is also translated *leprosy* that comes from the Hebrew word that means *scale* or *scaly*, also. So, in both cases, it had reference to some kind of a manifest, visible, scaly skin—at least, the skin was part of the, the disease. Skin visible disease. A

scaly skin disease. It could go much deeper than that, as Leviticus 13 indicates, but that is the term they used.

Now, there's a lot of argument and a lot of debate about whether this leprosy, as it's called, and the Old Testament leprosy was the same as we know today, which is called Hansen's disease, which is the leprosy that we know about. There's a lot of people who argue about the words that are used and is it or isn't it the same as that kind of leprosy. Well, we can't be sure, because over the period of the centuries, diseases may take on new forms for whatever reasons, people building up immunities, or for whatever happens in human society, and whatever particular germs exist, and bacteria, and so forth. Diseases can take different form. Some can be eliminated altogether, and so we don't really know if it was exactly the same. But it seems best to assume, from the description of Leviticus 13, which we'll see in a moment, that it was extremely similar; and the only real comparison that we can draw to whatever this disease was will come from our understanding of the disease of leprosy. Throughout the history of study of these things, most people have drawn that parallel, and so I'll continue to do that as we look at it this morning.

A horrible disease found its way into the children of Israel's life. This disease, leprosy, as it's called in the Bible, was no doubt picked up in Egypt. Most of the classic writers feel that leprosy originated in Egypt and, by the way, it is caused—they now know in medical science—by a bacillus or bacteria called *mycobacterium leprae*. And this disease has been found in at least one mummy that's been uncovered in Egypt and it's manifest on the physical body (because of the mummification) that this particular person did have leprosy. So we know it stretches way back into ancient times. This disease then, of course, as the children of Israel were in the land of Egypt, was transmitted to them; and when they came into the Promised Land, they carried this disease with them.

Now, it was a problem, because of the horror of the disease itself. And so God, as he built in many laws to the life of Israel to protect them from plagues and things, gave them laws to deal with leprosy, so they would not contract this disease. Now, modern-day leprosy is only really communicable to less than 10 percent of the people. In other words, 90 percent plus of people in our day today cannot get leprosy, even if you got all of the bacilli in you, because it's just the way we're made today. We don't know whether the disease then was more communicable. There is a statement made in Luke 4:27 that there were many lepers in Israel, of whom only Naaman was cleansed. So it may have been highly communicable then, when it's less communicable today.

By the way, you might also be interested to note that it is on the rise in the United States of America, and the state that leads America in incidents of leprosy is California. Ten years ago, we had thirty to forty new cases a year, and now we're over 300. So it can be controlled also today by what is called DDS Dapsone, I think it's called. It's some kind of a drug that is used, and it can only control the superficial elements of leprosy. It can't eliminate it altogether, because it's one disease that you can't kill. It's there till you die, as far as they can tell. There may be some cases, but normally, that's the

way it runs.

So, in Israel came this disease, and God, wanting to protect them, gave them a very clear direction as to how to treat it. I'm going to read from the 13th chapter of Leviticus. I'll read it out of the NAS, because it clarifies some of the terms. You can listen, or you can look at it, if you have that version. But I'm going to read some, some lengthy passages here just to point it out. You'll find it fascinating how God directed them.

"The Lord spoke to Moses [Leviticus 13:1] and Aaron, saying, 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a rash [that's a better word than *scab*] a rash or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or one of the sons of the priest.' In other words, anybody who gets leprosy, bring them in to the priest. "And the priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and if the infection appears to be deeper than just the skin, [in other words, it's more than a superficial skin disease as indicated by the hair turning white down from the roots being infected, and if it looks to be deeper] it is then an infection of leprosy; and the priest shall look at him and pronounce him unclean. But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body and doesn't appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days." This is just to keep him isolated to give him the test to watch what happens. "The priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed, the infection has not spread, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days." Two weeks. "Priest shall look at him again on the seventh day, and if the infection has faded and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean. It's only a rash." And that could stand for psoriasis, eczema, what's called vitiligo, lots of things; just not a serious thing. "But if the rash spreads farther on the skin after he's shown himself to the priest for the cleansing, he shall appear again to the priest. Priest shall look, and if the rash spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It's leprosy." It keeps getting worse.

Now, there were some obvious cases where you didn't really need a two-week test, and in verse 9, he talks about them. "When the infection of leprosy is on a man, then he shall be brought to the priest. The priest shall look, and if there is a white swelling in the skin, and it has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh, then it's chronic leprosy, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean." And don't bother to isolate him for a week, because it's already very clear what he's got. "If the leprosy breaks out further on the skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of him who has the infection from his head even to his feet, as far as the priest can see, then the priest shall look, and behold, if this skin disease or leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean, if it's all turned white." In other words, if all he does is get a white thing all over him, and it doesn't break out in oozing, open, raw sores, then it isn't the leprosy that's serious. Herodotus and Hippocrates, in ancient writings, wrote about a disease known as leucoderma, which was something that attacked the pigmentation of the skin and turned the person kind of a white, patchy color; and it could've been that.

Or it could've been eczema or psoriasis or vitiligo or any of these other things that were harmless, less than serious skin disorders. In other words, if all he got was this stuff all over him of a very limited nature, just a turning white or a patchy pale color, then it wasn't the real thing, and you could pronounce him okay. In fact, if you look at leprosy today, and it could refer to this here; there are two kinds. There's one called lepromatous, which is severe, serious; and then there's one called tuberculoid leprosy, which is a harmless kind that just turns the skin patchy, and is gone in one to three years.

So these are the tests that were given and they had to be examined very carefully. Now, if he's got the severe kind, the rest of the 13th chapter deals with him. What do you do with this person? Well, verse 38: "When a man or woman has bright spots on the skin of the body, even white bright spots, priests look, and if the bright spots on the skin of their bodies are a faint white, if it's just a faint white thing all over him, it's eczema." That's the way they translated that Hebrew word, just something less than the serious disease. "He's clean. Now, if he loses the hair of his head, he's bald; but he's clean." Some of you are sighing a great sigh. "But if on the bald head or the bald forehead, there occurs a reddish-white infection, and the leprosy breaks out on the bald head," and you look at him and it swells and so forth, then it's leprosy. In other words, another examination.

Now verse 45 is the key. "As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache [that is, his mouth] and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" Leprosy is passed—and I read this just in an up-to-date LA Times journal thing on, on the, on the medical analysis of Hanson's disease—leprosy is passed when it is inhaled through the air. It comes from the mouth into the mouth. That's one way it is passed, and that's why, when he goes around, he covers his mouth. Also, they found that people have contracted leprosy when they have both touched the same object; that the bacillus can exist on the same object. For example, they have cases where people have gone in to get tattooed, and when they were tattooed by the same needle, they came up with the same kind of leprosy. So they had to take his garments to do away with those, as well. And then he spends the rest of his life going around with all his face covered, saying, "Unclean! Unclean!" He has to make an announcement everywhere he goes. So nobody will get near him. The Talmud said you can't get any closer than six foot to a leper, and, if there's a wind blowing, 150 feet is the limit. And there were sixty-one defilements in Judaism. Number one defilement, top of the list, was a dead body; and number two was a leper. Didn't go near him. Didn't touch him. R.K. Harrison, in a very important article on this Old Testament word for leprosy points out that all of the symptoms of Leviticus 13 could presage clinical leprosy. Very well could, and it needed to be distinguished, so that's why all these tests; that in obvious cases of leprosy, person was put out. Now serious leprosy, folks, is a terrible, terrible, terrible disease. In the first place, we can sort of control it today, so people can live a sort of a normal life. But in those times, would be utterly uncontrolled. The first thing that leprosy does, it attacks—apart from its physical symptoms, what you see, the patchiness and so forth—it attacks the nervous system and immediately anesthetizes the limbs.

People say, "Well, their noses just fall off, and their fingers fall off." Not really. Part of the problem is, when they lose all their feeling, they literally rub their extremities off. They found in the leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana, in the United States, that when they've studied people who have leprosy that this is what happened. For example, a man who has leprosy has ill-fitting shoes, and because he can't feel that they're ill-fitting at all, they rub his toes off. And a woman who works with her hands finds that she rubs her fingers off, because she has no sensitivity to what's happening to her hands. And they rub their faces the same way; and you add to that that leprosy further attacks the bone marrow. It infects, then, the blood supply. The bones begin to shrivel, and as the bones shrivel, they draw the skin and the tissue in so that they appear to have fingers like claws and feet like claws that do the same thing. And there is then that oozing that occurs, as well as the skin disease has its infection; and all of that combined when, when you use those infected, atrophying fingers, results in rubbing them off. Horrible thing. They literally lose their limbs.

It attacks the eyes and brings blindness, the teeth, and they fall out. It attacks the internal organs so that sterility occurs. Frankly, it's not that painful. It's just the most ugly thing imaginable in the world. Starts with a white or pink patch on the brow, the ear, the, the nose, the chin or the cheek. Then it begins to spread and becomes spongy, tumorous, bulbous, swellings all over the face. Then it becomes systemic, and that's when it begins to come into the liver and the bone marrow, the blood supply. You lose your feeling, blindness.

Dr. Huizinga has written about it: "The disease which we call leprosy today generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses original color, gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly. As the sickness progresses, the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch with deep furrows between the swelling, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble the face of a lion. Fingers drop off and are absorbed back into the body. Toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By this time, one can see the person in this pitiable condition is a leper. By the touch of the finger, you can feel it. You can even smell it, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease produces agents that attack the larynx, the leper's voice assumes a grating quality. His throat becomes hoarse, and you can not only see, feel, and smell the leper, you can even hear the leper; and if you stay with him for some time, you will find a particular taste in your mouth. All the human senses repulse at a leper."

This disease was feared, horrifying; and whether or not it could attack the total population or only a few, it was enough to want them to be out of the camp to, to protect the people. They have to go out of the camp. In 2 Samuel 3:29, there's an amazing statement. David was pronouncing a curse on evil Joab, and David said, "May his family never be without a leper." That is the worst thing you could say about someone, and the disease had no cure.

But you know what was even beyond that? Unbelievable? It wasn't bad enough to be ugly beyond all imagination. To add to that they were classified as ceremonially unclean, and God had a purpose. Leprosy, mark this, was the most graphic illustration of sin available to God. Sin defiles the whole body. Sin is ugly. Sin is loathsome. Sin is incurable. Sin is contaminating. Sin separates and alienates and makes outcasts of men. So every leper not only lived with the stigma of his own disease, but he lived with having to be a walking illustration of sin. Ceremonially unclean. Wretched. One of the rabbis in the Talmud said, "When I see lepers, I throw stones at them lest they come near me." One other rabbi said, "I would not so much as eat an egg that was purchased on a street where a leper had walked." They hated them. They despised them. They feared them. Isn't it shocking that Jesus presenting the credentials of His messiahship begins with such a man and ignores all the sick Pharisees in town.

Let's look at Him. Back to verse 2. Boy, I get wound up on these things. Almost forget there's a verse here. Now you know why the word *behold* is there? Huh? *Behold* or *lo* or, in the vernacular, *you'll never believe this*. "A leper came." Lepers don't approach. That's forbidden. It was unthinkable. Personal shame. I mean you wouldn't be seen. Social stigma. Old Testament law. The ceremony. You just didn't do that. You just went around covered, mumbling, "Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!" So no one would come near. This is incredible. Four things stand out about this leper. No. 1, he came with confidence, and, "Behold, there came a leper." I like that. He didn't crawl or sneak around: "Psst, psst." "Shoo." Just came. I like, and the verb in the Greek is, is good: *He approached*. Comes right up; I can imagine that crowd split fast, right up there. You know what I see in this? I see a man who senses so desperately his need that he really couldn't care less what anybody thinks, right? I like that. You see, people like him would be so devastated socially that they wouldn't show up in a crowd. This one did. He lost all sense of shame. He lost all sense of social stigma. He approached. He didn't even think of it. That's how deep his need was. Josephus tells us that lepers were treated like dead men. That wasn't going to stop him. He may have been dead in everybody's eyes, but he came. He came because he saw he had a very deep need and he wanted help more than he wanted to save his reputation. File that somewhere, will you?

Second thing, he came with reverence. Oh, I love this. "There came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord.'" Ah, we can't say much about his body, but we can say a lot about his soul, can't we? There were the Pharisees all decked out, all their fancy garb, fancy robes. Their little hats they wore. The beard trimmed to a T. Inside: wretched, rotten, dead men's bones. Here was a leper: outside vile and wretched and filthy and on the inside beautiful, reverent, worshiping. You know what I believe? I believe when he said, "Lord," he wasn't using it in the title sense of *sir*. I believe he knew he was in the presence of God, else why would he have worshiped? *Proskuneo*. *Fallen prostrate*. Here he comes up to Jesus, falls prostrate before Jesus, and says, "Lord." I don't know where he got his information, but there'd been enough going on in his area to know. There had been healings upon healings upon healings. Maybe one of his friends had been healed. But he comes and he worships,

and men prostrate themselves before kings and before God. I believe he came because he had a worshiping heart. I believe he was in the presence of God, and he knew it; and it was wonderful to see that his soul was turned toward God; and he came to worship first. That's because he understood the soul was more important than the body. He came worshiping. He came exalting God. Before he sought anything for himself, he sought something for God. File that somewhere, will you? That's another important thing.

Third, he came with humility. Don't you like this? He says, "Lord, if Thou wilt." "If You will." That's humility. He didn't demand anything. He didn't speak his will as if Christ had to comply. He didn't come and list the reasons why he had to be healed. He didn't come and try to affirm his own worthiness. He didn't bellyache because of the fact that he got this disease and a lot of other folks didn't. He didn't talk about his rights. He didn't even talk about his desires. He didn't even say, "I'd like to be healed." He didn't even say that. He only said, "If You wanted, You could. I'm not saying myself what You ought to do, because You're the Lord." Don't you like that? A far cry from the stuff you hear today where people are told to demand healing out of God, to demand wholeness, to claim their healing. This man had no such thing to claim. He worshiped first; never asked for anything; just said, "I know You could if You wanted to." I guess I agree with Lenski that the leper is willing, if Jesus shall so will, to remain in his living death. I guess I believe that he would've gone away still believing if he was a leper, or he wouldn't have worshiped first, and he wouldn't have left out any request on his own behalf. It manifests a pure heart.

Finally, he came with faith. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." *Dunasai, dunamai, dunamis. Power, dynamite.* That's the word in the Greek. "You have the power. You are able. I know that. I am convinced of that." And, by the way, Luke tells us, and Luke always gives us the clinical analysis of everything, because he was the doctor. He says, "He was full of leprosy." And he said, "You can do it." Where did he get that information? Hey, maybe he was around in Matthew 4 and saw it all going on. "You can do it." Beloved, when a man says, "If You will, You can do it," that is faith at its highest point, because it knows that God is able; and it submits to God's sovereignty. There are lots of people who believe; they say they believe He's able, but they want to corner Him that He has to do things. There are other people who question whether He can. A true faith says, "I know You can. I don't know if You will." That's the highest level of faith: but whatever, that's your choice. So he came with confidence, because he had a deep need; with reverence, because he saw God; with humility, because he realized that God was sovereign; and with faith—he knew he could do it. What happened?

Verse 3: "And Jesus [watch this] put forth His hand and touched him." Now that's all it says in this text, but it could be added, "And the whole crowd gasped." You don't touch lepers, folks. Leviticus 5:3 says you are never permitted to touch the uncleanness of a man. But you know what a leper probably needed more than anything in the whole wide world? Just to be touched by somebody who was clean. He touched. He didn't have to touch him. He could've gotten on a roof and said, "Be clean,"

and the angels sang and the earth shook, and thunder. No big dramatics. I love that. I love the, I love the simplicity. Just some very simple—one of the greatest proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is the lack of comment by the Bible writers. I mean if I had said this, seen this, I'd have gone on for 18 pages: "and then the finger began to ..." And, you know, you don't. There's a lack of that. One of the great proofs of inspiration is the absence of that, because men would make big deals out of it. No, just touched him.

"He said, 'I will.' [I will. It's My will.] Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy was cleansed. Immediately, all Jesus' miracles were immediate. Bothers me when people say, "Well, I went to the healer, and I was healed, and ever since then, I've been progressively getting better." That's not healing. "Jesus put forth His hand and touched him." You know, when we touch defilement, we get defiled. When He touches defilement, the defilement goes away. When we touch a disease, we get contaminated. When He touches a disease, it gets cleansed. That's power. I mean I don't know what that scene was like, but I can imagine. Those shriveled up claws instantly becoming beautiful hands, as if the skin of a baby. The feet, the face, incredible. Jesus touched him. He was clean immediately. His power: shocking. The forehead eaten away. The eyes with their absent brows and lashes. The scaly, bloody skin rubbed off. The nose and throat and eyes destroyed. The fingers and toes like claws and worn off. And instantly, he's whole. You know, I just, I just say to myself, "All the modern so-called healing fades into absolute nothingness in comparison with that kind of an omnipotent display. You can—listen—you can line up all the so-called healers in the world, and they can pick out any leper they want, and they're not going to do this. Let the so-called healers be silent. Their claims are folly in comparison to the power of Christ. So foolish when you read about the, all around the world, every, every civilization has its supposed healers. Not like this. They don't create fingers. They don't create feet. He did, immediately.

Verse 4: Watch this. "And Jesus said unto him, 'See thou tell no man.'" Don't say a word about this to anybody. Oh, my heart, that is painful; to nobody. "But go your way and show yourself to the [literally used the word for temple] to the priest in the temple, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." What is the first test when Christ has invaded your life? One little word. Starts with O. Obedience. Says: "All right, you've been healed, now do this. Two things. Number one, do what Moses said to do. Keep the law of God." And Moses, in the Old Testament, had an amazing thing. When a leper was cleansed, he had to go to the temple and, I mean, it was amazing. Just to give you an illustration of it, I'll run through it very rapidly. Leviticus 14, here's what happens. The guy believes his leprosy has been dealt with, all right? In the event that this happened; and, as I say, there may have been isolated cases when there was a healing.

First of all, you had to take two birds, and you had to kill one of them over running water. In addition, they take cedar, scarlet, and hyssop. You take them with the living bird, dip it in the blood of the dead bird, and then send the living bird to fly away. It's a picture of resurrection. Then you wash yourself and your clothes, shave yourself. Seven days are allowed to pass, and you're reexamined. Then you

shave your hair, your head, and your eyebrows. Sacrifices are then made consisting of two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb, three-tenths of a measure of fine flour mingled with oil, one other measure of oil. Then you had to touch all the stuff on the tip of your right ear, right thumb, right big toe, mixed with blood; and then the final examination; and if the cure was real, you were given a certificate for your wall: "Ex-leper lives here." Well, that's what He wanted to do, was to fulfill Leviticus 14: Go take care of all that. You say, "Well, I can understand that. He wanted him to obey." See, Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to what? Fulfill the law. And while he was devastating the system of the Pharisees, He didn't want them to think for a moment that he was violating God's Word.

Now, you say, "Well, why did He tell him not to tell anybody for?" Think about it. Some people say, "Well, He didn't want to stir up a crowd following Him just as a miracle worker." And that's very possible, because it became difficult for Him to function—didn't it?—soon after this, because the crowds were so great He had to get away. Others say, "Well, it's really because Jesus didn't want the people to see Him as a power who could throw off Rome and look at Him as a political leader," like they did. Remember in John when they tried to make him a king to overthrow Rome? And others say, "Because this was the time of His humiliation and he didn't seek exaltation." And there may be truth in all of those, but let me tell you the best reason. If you'd read the rest, "See thou tell no man." Just read the rest, and you'll know why. "But go your way and show yourself to the priests." Why? Here's the whole issue. "You go down to the temple, and you go through this whole Mosaic thing. You got an eight-day examination. Offer yourself with your friends as a, as a leper who's been cleansed. Let them go through the whole shooting match testing you; and when they're all done, they're going to conclude, 'This leper is cleansed.' And then you may say, 'Would you like to know who did this? Jesus of Nazareth did this,' and then they are trapped in their own conclusions." See? Pretty powerful. The priests will confirm that he's clean, and they'll discover it was Jesus; and by their own testimony, and their own examination, they will confirm the power of Christ. Humph, and it all hinges on the fact that he hurried to Jerusalem and didn't spread it around, or the word would get there first that Jesus did it, and then they wouldn't be interested in examining him.

Well, you know what happened? The guy didn't do that. He shot off his mouth everywhere. Mark tells us that. He just got so excited that he failed to obey—and so the story, in that sense, kind of sad that he didn't do what he was told—but for this morning, I don't want it to end there. I want you to think about this. Jesus said, "Which is more difficult? To heal disease or forgive sin?" He said that a couple of times in different words. You know why? Because all the while that He was doing these kinds of miracles, He was not only revealing His power over disease, but every one of them was an illustration of His power over what else? Sin. Sin. And I see in this an analogy. This text, to me, is analogous to a conversion. Follow this thought in conclusion: leprosy, ceremonial unclean, demonstration of sin, it's just like sin. Sin is pervasive. Sin is ugly. Sin is loathsome. Sin is communicable. Sin is incurable. Sin makes you an outcast. But the leper came with confidence. Why? Because he got desperate enough over his leprosy, right? That's how conversion happens. People don't get saved unless they get desperate over the loathsomeness of the disease of sin. And, beloved, that is so missing in the

evangelism of our time. The man came. He lost all the social stigma. He lost all of the fear of being ostracized. He didn't care about that anymore. He was overwhelmed with the loathsomeness of his disease. Coming to Christ is not getting on the bandwagon. It's being wretched and knowing it.

Secondly, he came worshiping. I believe that true conversion occurs when desperate people come worshiping God, not seeking things for themselves, but seeking God's glory, a recognition of His majesty, a sense of awe, Lordship. "Lord," he says, "It's up to You." I think true salvation demands that kind of wretchedness and that kind of affirmation in reverence of worshiping Him as Lord.

Thirdly, he came humbly. I think true salvation doesn't take the perspective of you doing God a favor. There's no self-will, no self-centeredness, no sense of worth, worthiness, no sense of value, no rights, no claims, no nothing. It's the meek who inherit the kingdom.

Finally, he came with faith. He believed He could do it, and you can't be saved without faith. There must be an overwhelming wretchedness in sin. There must be a worship of the lordship of Christ. There must be humility and faith, and you'll be touched and cleansed when you come on those terms; and may I say that the disease of sin is infinitely worse than the disease of leprosy? And then when you're saved, you know what the Lord says? "Do two things, will you? Number one: Will you obey the law of God? Will you obey the law of God? And number two: Let people discover for themselves that Christ changed your life, so it's not just verbal." Isn't that an interesting thing, that analogy? It's better for you to say nothing and let the world see that Jesus changed your life by their own examination, than for you to shoot off your mouth and not be able to support it with the way you live. Here was a guy running around, "Jesus changed my life. Boy, look at me. I used to be a leper. Hosanna!"

And somebody says to him, "Hey, why aren't you down and showing yourself to the priest?"

"I'm going to get to that." A disobedient life in the midst of a testimony is meaningless. The testimony is rendered invalid. Be obedient; and, in the midst of your obedience, God will manifest out of that the transforming power of Christ. It's your life that speaks.

So we see in this lovely story the healing of the soul from sin in an analogy. Well, someday when I get to Heaven, I'm going to say to that guy—because I believe he's going to be, he's there now—I'm going to say, "What? How come you didn't go to Jerusalem?"

Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for our time this morning; and what a thrilling, thrilling experience it is to see Your power again, speaking to us across these 2,000 years from the day this man lived, ever yet as vivid as then. Touch our lives today, especially those in our midst who have the leprosy of sin. Cleanse them. May they be pure before this day is spent.

While your heads are bowed and your eyes closed just a second, if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, oh, my. If leprosy sounded fearful to you, you don't even know the half; to be in sin and under the judgment of God forever. May this be the day that you come to Jesus Christ. If the Spirit of God speaks to your heart, and you feel Him inside of you, sense His voice drawing you, will you be obedient to that? I trust so. He'll touch you and make you clean. He'll even forgive your disobedience, though it grieves Him.

Thank You, Father, for our time, for the wonder of Your power, as we've seen it expressed in Christ; and, oh, we're so thankful that He's touched us and made us clean. May we be faithful to obey, and may the world in its examination know that Jesus Christ transformed our lives. His is all the praise. Draw to the prayer room those that You would have to come. We can help in this most critical decision. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).