Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus' Power over Disease, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 8:5-15
Code: 2258

I'd like you to look with me in your Bible at the 8th chapter of the gospel of Matthew. Matthew, chapter 8. And we're going to be continuing in our study of the 8th chapter. We began last time, and it's an exciting thing to be in the gospel of Matthew for many reasons, but I keep thinking about this one particular one. It's so refreshing and so exciting to see Jesus walking through the world, touching human need and human life. It's different than studying the vast, sweeping prophecies of Daniel. It's not like the logical, theological treatises of the apostle Paul. It's not like the historical, covenantal approach of the writer of Hebrews. There's just something fresh and living and practical about seeing Jesus walk through the world, and that's exactly what we have the privilege of doing, beginning in this 8th chapter.

Now, particularly in the 8th chapter, we noted to you last time that our Lord expresses His authority. Having preached this monumental sermon in chapters 5 through 7, He faced the inevitable question: "What gives You the right to speak like that? Who do You think You are? Where did You come from? What is Your authority?" And so that is the question to which the following chapters are the answer. In effect, what chapter 8 and 9 says is, "I'm God. I came from Heaven, and I have all authority." That's the answer, and Jesus demonstrates His deity. He demonstrates His heavenly supernatural power in a series of incredible miracles that could be explained no other way than that God was present among men. So Matthew very carefully continues in his presentation of the kingship of Christ, here giving us the credentials of the King, showing us that He has a right to say what He said. He has a right to do what He did because of who He is. He is God, and no other explanation fits these series of miracles.

Now let me give you just a little bit of background. You have to understand how really dramatic the whole scene was. In the day of Jesus Christ, disease was rampant throughout the world. The world was literally filled with disease and, frankly, medical science was, for all intents and purposes, well nigh nonexistent. So, disease could not be dealt with properly, and so you just sort of let it run its course, and you always had the sick and the dying in your midst perennially. There was a tremendous fear of disease. There was the pain and the suffering and the anguish that goes along with disease, and there were no miracle drugs to alleviate that. There were plagues that wiped out cities, wiped out countries, and were greatly feared. There were more incurable diseases than we have now, and so that was a world literally filled with disease. People didn't live very long. They died very young; was not abnormal to die in your 20s from disease.

Now, the Bible talks about many of the diseases that existed at the time of Christ and in the Old Testament times. Let me just give you some idea of the panorama of the diseases that the Lord would've confronted, and these are sort of categories under which there might be many different diseases. The Bible talks about atrophy, and atrophy would encompass diseases like muscular dystrophy, which is a condition in which the muscles refuse to absorb the food that's brought to them by the blood, so they grow thinner and weaker. Atrophy would also include poliomyelitis, a common disease in that time brought by a virus that comes in the bowel and then attacks the central nervous system, causes paralysis and atrophy. Bible talks about blindness. There was rampant blindness. It came about very commonly through birth; when the child was born, passing through a mother who was infected with gonorrhea. There was the blindness of trachoma. That was the blindness that came because of unsanitary conditions. There was the blindness of the brilliant sunlight, of the heat, the blowing sand, the blindness that came through war and accident injury. And then there were many times people with boils. Boils would include carbuncles and abscesses and infected glands and things of that nature. Then there was deafness: deafness because of birth defect, deafness because of wound or injury, deafness because of infected middle ear or infected inner ear. The Bible talks about dropsy, and dropsy is a, a way to describe an edema condition, where there is a retention of body fluids, and that can be caused by a lot of things. Bible talks about dumbness or mutism, the inability to speak. It talks about dysentery, which was caused by amoeba or bacteria or worms; disease of the colon, and the digestive track and processes. There was epilepsy, and epilepsy would encompass seizures, petit mal, grand mal, and other things. There was hemorrhaging. The Bible talks about bleeding problems, which could include fibroid tumors and carcinoma. The Bible talks about speech impediment and speech disorder under the concept of aphasia. It talks about indigestion, which is probably a more severe thing, which would be a stomach disorder. Bible talks about inflammation, probably referring to strep and staph infections. It talks about pestilence, which would be the plagues carried by mice and rats. It talks about skin disease (and I mentioned some last week) and there are many, many of these. The Bible discusses diseases called tumors, and they could be a wide range of tumors. And then it discusses ulcers. There are three other diseases, particularly in the New Testament, and they appear in the three miracles of chapter 8: leprosy, paralysis, and fever.

Now, the sum of all of this is that all these diseases existed in Jesus' time in many forms and were, for all intents and purposes, unalleviated. There was no way, really, to deal with these diseases; and so the people became very aware of the doom that sort of hung over their heads in the inevitability of disease. And along came Jesus, and He touched human life at the point of its greatest pain, the point of disease. And for all intents and purposes, beloved, and don't ever forget this, Jesus literally wiped out disease in Palestine; and the monumental nature of such an expression is beyond description. We can't understand it, because we live in a society that can handle disease. Oh yes, there are some diseases that are elusive to us. Cancer and heart disease may get us sooner or later, but for the most part, we have eliminated other diseases. And even in the diseases that bring death, we have the capacity, through drugs, to bring about a certain alleviation of pain. In that society, there was no such

thing; and Jesus swept through with His healing power and healed thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people. I mean it was a staggering revelation that He was God. That's why, as we saw last time, He repeatedly said, "Believe Me for the very works' sake." How can you deny this, this all-encompassing, widespread, massive healing that He had done?

In Matthew chapter 12 and verse 15, it says, "But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from there. [That is, the Pharisees. “And great...” Don't try to follow me; I'm just going to read you a couple of verses.] And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all." In Matthew 14:14, the same thing. It says, "And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion toward them and healed their sick." He healed them all. He healed all who came to Him. The Bible tells us: he came, healed him. He banished disease from Palestine.

It's important to note how different He is than the contemporary so-called healers. I've incorporated a chapter in my book on the charismatics on the subject of healing, and I noted there how Jesus healed. Well, let me just remind you of those major points. First of all, He healed with a word or a touch. There were no gimmicks, no exercises, no folderol, no fanfare, no nothing; just a word and a touch. Just say the word, just touch. Secondly, He healed instantaneously, instantaneously. That very hour, it says, and the bleeding, the woman with the bleeding problem in Mark was healed immediately; and the ten lepers were healed instantaneously. And in Luke 5, immediately the leprosy departed from him. And the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda immediately became well. And the blind man, when he washed his eyes, saw instantly.

Thirdly, He healed totally. There was never a recuperation. Can you imagine that you were 35 years and never taken a step, and Jesus made your legs whole and told you, “Get up and walk?” Why, even if your legs were whole, you couldn't walk. There would be rehabilitation. There is never rehabilitation in any miracle Jesus ever performed. Never. Was instant. It was total. Immediate.

Fourthly, Jesus healed everybody. He didn't have to screen out the tough cases. He healed everybody. Everybody. He didn't send away long lines of disappointed people like the so-called healers of today. He healed everybody. Luke 4:40 says, "And while the sun was setting, all who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on every one of them, He was healing them."

Fifthly, Jesus healed organic disease, the real stuff: crippled legs, withered hands, blind eyes, paralysis, the kind of healings that would show a miracle beyond doubt. He didn't heal low back pain or some supposed functional disorder.

And sixthly, and this is where Jesus really departs from everybody else, Jesus raised the dead. In the process of all of this, people, you've got to understand: This has never happened in the history of the world; and what the Jewish people are seeing with this miraculous work of Christ is something for

which there is only possible a divine explanation; and that's what makes the Pharisees' unbelief so utterly incredible; and it shows the depth of the sin in their hearts. They would not believe in the face of incredible, inexplicable evidence.

Nonetheless, Matthew indicts them again in this section by pointing up the credentials of Jesus; and out of the thousands of miracles, he picks three for this chapter. Now, last week, we saw the first one in verses 1 to 4, the wretched man, the wretched man. Look at the chapter, "When He was come down from the mountain, [that is, from teaching the Sermon on the Mount] 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. Jesus said 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.'"

Now, the most despised man in society was a leper. The severest, ugliest, worst imaginable disease was leprosy. It also was ceremonially unclean, so it became a living illustration of sin. So the man was not only an outcast because of the disease itself, but because he was a living, walking illustration of sin; and, yet, such a man came to Jesus. Now, this would be an incredible statement for the Pharisees to hear, an amazing miracle for them to have thrust upon them by Matthew, because they couldn't imagine why anybody would bother with a leper. There must have been a lot of Pharisees who weren't feeling well and could have used a healing. Why an outcast of the wretched nature of this man? But we saw how wonderfully Jesus reached to the very lowest levels of society. He did things in the face of the haughtiness and the pride of the Pharisees that they never would've done. He showed that the extent of His kingdom was past the high and the mighty to the low; that He was reaching out to embrace in His arms the people that nobody else would touch; that His kingdom was not what they thought, not for the super pious, but for the desperate, the hurting. And so He touched a man with leprosy and the man was healed.

Remember, I pointed out to you there were four things that were so wonderful about the man? First of all, he came with confidence. In other words, he didn't care if he was a leper. He got rid of the social stigma. He got rid of the embarrassment, and he came because he was desperate. And then he came with reverence; says he worshiped. And then he came with humility. He said, "If You will." And then he came with faith. "You can make me clean. I believe it." And when a person comes to Christ in desperation, worshiping in humility, and in faith, that person can be really redeemed; and so the healing of the leper became, for us then, an analogy of salvation; and He told the leper two things. Number one: "Obey the law of Moses. Go right to the temple and do what you should." And, number two: "Be a witness to them." That's what should happen in our lives, too, after we've been redeemed. We obey, and we give testimony. So we saw Jesus heal the leper. The dregs of human society He embraced in His arms. And what a rebuke it was to the supercilious, condemnatory pride of the Pharisees.

We move from the wretched man to our story for today. The respected man, verse 5, the respected man. Now, here we find a man who also would be by the Jews considered an outcast, because he is a Gentile. Worse than that, he is a Roman soldier, a member of the occupation army that had invaded and occupied their precious land. Normally, he would be hated, close to a leper; but our Lord heals in his behalf; and, again, what the Lord is saying is this. The extent of the kingdom is for the down-and-out and the outcast and the Gentile; far broader than the parameters the Pharisees had drawn, far broader.

Let's look at verse 5. "And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum..." Many commentators, by the way, think all three of the miracles happened the same day. He finished the sermon, came down the mountain, entered Capernaum, and all this happened the same day. It's possible. He entered into Capernaum. By the way, Capernaum is that lovely city on the north of the Sea of Galilee, a city which doesn't exist anymore, because Jesus pronounced a curse on it. One of the most beautiful spots I've ever seen in the world; and, yet, there's not a city there anymore. Just ruins, because Jesus cursed the place. They never rebuilt it. They built places all around it, but not there. But in that lovely little place, Jesus resided and stayed, perhaps at the house of Peter, because Peter had a house there. Even to this day they have the ruins of that house. They believe it to be his house. So Jesus entered into Capernaum, and he spent a lot of time there. "And there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him." Now, Matthew goes right for the facts; and Matthew goes right for the, for the interaction between the centurion and Jesus, because of Matthew's purpose. But the facts are elucidated a little bit in Luke, because Luke has a comparative passage in the 7th chapter. You don't need to turn to it, but I'll just kind of fill in some details from Luke. Luke tells us that the centurion didn't actually go to Jesus, but he sent some Jewish people with this message. So Jesus does interact with the centurion, but through these Jewish people who have come to Him. The centurion did not come himself, but rather sent these Jewish people. And it was because he felt unworthy to be in the presence of Christ and he felt unworthy to have Christ in his home, so he sends these Jews in his behalf and they speak to Jesus for him.

Now, let's talk a little about a centurion. Every time you see a centurion appear in the New Testament, he's a good guy. It's really amazing. It's as if the Lord—and there were a lot of bad centurions, I'm sure, but it's as if the Lord—purposely picks out some of the most hated people in Palestine as illustrations of goodness and faith and saving grace, to show the extent of His kingdom is to reach beyond Israel. Every time you find a centurion, whether it's the guy who was there at the crucifixion, or whether it's Cornelius, or whether it's this guy, they're all good guys; and they all wind up, at least I think most all of them, in being redeemed. And it's, it's sort of a, a slap in the face again of that exclusivism that existed then that had no room for a Gentile, especially a Roman soldier.

Now, can I add another thought? If it wasn't bad enough to be a Gentile, it was worse to be a Roman soldier; and if that wasn't bad enough in itself, it was worse to be one other thing; and that was this.

The soldiers of the Roman occupation army were not really sent from Rome. They were trained in the community or the area where they were being occupied. And what they did, according to history, what they did in Palestine was they found non-Jewish people in that area and they drew them into the Roman army and trained them. This man in Capernaum was, no doubt, a soldier under the troops of Antipas. And if he was a non-Jew living in this area, it is highly likely that he was a Samaritan. And if it was bad to be a Gentile, the worst kind of Gentile was a Samaritan, because a Samaritan was a Jew who had intermarried into Gentile lines, and that was to sacrifice his Jewish heritage, the worst imaginable kind of Gentile half-breed.

So here you've got a guy who's a Gentile. He's the worst kind of Gentile, a Samaritan. He's the worst kind of Samaritan. He is a member of the occupation forces of the Roman army who are oppressing Israel. Now, any Pharisee is going to say, "Why in God's name would You ever do a favor for somebody like that?" That's just the point. They had no perspective on the parameters of the kingdom. It was confined to them: “Us four, no more, shut the door.” That was it. And Jesus throws that deal wide open, and it was more than they could handle, and they hated Him until they finally killed Him. But he comes in the, the presence of Jesus through these mediating Jews that Luke tells us about, and this is what he says. Verse 6: "Lord," [and, by the way, *Lord* there means more than *sir* . There is bound up in that thought of *Lord* all of the centurion's thinking about the deity of Christ. I think he's using it in its true, divine sense. "Lord, my, [He used the word *pais* in the Greek, which means *my child*.] my child lies at home sick of the *paralutikos*." He's a paralytic, sick of the paralysis, grievously tormented, or suffering tremendously or suffering severely. Now, the word *pais* is used here, and it means child. Luke uses the word *doulos*, which means *bond slave*. And the question comes up: Was he his child or his bond slave? The answer is it was rather common to have a child slave in the house, a young boy. And that's what it was, a boy servant, a boy slave. And so he says, "My boy slave is at home sick of the paralysis." We don't know whether it was polio or whether it was a nervous system or brain disorder or a tumor. We just don't know; but he was paralyzed and in tremendous pain.

Now, there's something beautiful about this. I like this centurion. I like him first of all here because he cared about a servant, and that sets him apart from just about everybody else in the Roman world. In fact, in the Roman Empire, slaves didn't matter. If they suffered, it didn't matter. If they lived, it didn't matter. If they died, it didn't matter. They were of no consequence. Aristotle, for example, says, and I quote, "There can be no friendship and no justice toward inanimate things. Indeed, not even toward a horse or an ox or a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common. A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."

They had no rights. Gaius, the Roman law expert said, "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over his slave." That was Roman law. Don't like your slave, kill him. Varro, the Roman writer who wrote so much on agriculture said, "The only difference between a slave and a beast and a cart is that the slave talks." Only difference.

Cato was another Roman writer; was trying to give advice to somebody who was having trouble economically. He said, "Look over your livestock and hold a sale. Sell your worn-out oxen, your blemished cattle, your blemished sheep, wool, hides, any old wagons, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else, else is superfluous." So, you see, the Romans viewed a slave as a thing; but not this centurion. He isn't asking on his own behalf. He says, "Hey, my boy servant is paralyzed." He's an excellent pagan. He's an excellent pagan.

You know something? He must have been to have these Jews bring this message to Jesus on his behalf. I mean most centurions would go to a group of Jews, if they were Samaritan Gentile centurions, and say, "Would you do me a favor?" They'd say, "Huh? You've got to be kidding. Out of our way, fella!" Say, why in the world did these Jews come to Jesus on the behalf of this guy? I'll show you: Luke 7, most interesting. Just listen to this verse. "And when they came to Jesus, the Jews, the elders of the Jews, they besought Him earnestly." They really got involved. "Oh," they said, "oh, do this," and they gave Him this little message here, "His servant is lying home sick of the paralysis, grievously tormented." And they said, "Do this, for he is worthy for You should do this. He's worthy." How can a Gentile be worthy? Here it is: "He loves our nation, and he built us a synagogue." Comes down to economics, money, guy made a big investment. He loved their nation. He built them a synagogue. Now I know even more about this centurion. Hah! He's, he's even understanding something of the truthfulness of their religion. He's a God-fearing Gentile like Cornelius. He realizes that he's dealing with a people who are a covenant people of the living God, and he makes an investment in them. He loved their nation, and he built them a synagogue in Capernaum. I've been in Capernaum. I've stood in the ruins of the synagogue there. They say the footings of the synagogue came from this day, and maybe they were purchased by this very centurion. He built them that synagogue. When you do a favor for those people, they respond like that, and so the elders came and said, "Boy, You ought to do this for him."

You know what interests me, too, is that they knew Jesus could do it. Everybody knew He could heal. There wasn't a debate about that; but the hardness of their heart didn't want to take a step further and accept Him as Messiah and Savior. So here is a good Gentile who loved Israel, and we should love Israel. We really should. They are God's chosen people. I don't think anybody loves the Jews more than I do. They're all my favorite people: Abraham on down to Jesus and Paul and Timothy. I spend more time with them than I do with Gentiles, in the study of the Word.

And he loved them, too. He loved the nation, and he built them a synagogue, and it was apparent that he was a good Gentile, and he was gentle. He loved his slave. He was humble. Do you know, he wouldn't even come to Jesus himself, because he didn't feel worthy? And you know he didn't want Jesus in his house, because he knew enough about Jewish ceremonial teaching that a Jew was never to go in the house of a Gentile. And he didn't want to violate that. The Jews had some strange beliefs, you know, that the Gentile utensils were dirty. They wouldn't eat off a Gentile—or use—a

Gentile utensil. They, they believed that Gentiles aborted their babies and threw them down the draft in the house. Therefore, the house was polluted by a dead body, and they had all kinds of strange things that the rabbis had invented to keep them apart from the Gentiles. And he even wanted to honor those ceremonial traditions.

He's humble. He's loving. He's sensitive. He really has a beatitude attitude. He's ripe to get a transformation, and that provides the background. And when he says, "Lord," in verse 6, it's the Lord in the fullness of what it means. In case you doubt that, look at verse 10. Jesus said, in the middle of the verse, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." *This is the greatest faith I've ever seen.* Faith? What do you mean? Faith in the reality of who Christ was; that's what it has to mean. He believed Jesus was God. That is the epitome of faith, and Jesus says his was that kind of faith. When he said, "Lord," he's affirming the lordship of Christ. And what a rebuke this is to the Jews, for here is a Samaritan, half-breed, Gentile soldier from Rome. Jesus says, "He has the greatest faith I've ever seen." What a shock.

And it isn't on behalf of his own need. He says, "My boy servant lies at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." And you know what I see in that, that's so beautiful? There's no request in verse 6. He just gives Him information, and then the Jews say, "Do it. He's worthy. Do it. Do it." But he doesn't presume to ask that. His prayer is a prayer of information. "Lord, here is the need. I lay it before You. I accept Your sovereignty and Your choice." What was his disease? Paralysis, the impairment of sensation or muscle function by injury or disease to the spinal cord, the brain, or the nerves. We don't know what caused it, but the effect was impending death.

Then comes our Lord's response in verse 7: "And Jesus said unto him, [gave the word back] 'I'll come and heal him. I'll come and heal him.'" So he tells the Jews sent by the centurion that He's going to come to the Gentile's home. He's going to come to the centurion's house. He's going to heal the, the boy. In fact, Luke then says they all start moving down the road, and they're heading for the house, and the centurion sees them coming, and he panics, because he doesn't feel worthy to be in the presence of Christ, and he doesn't want them to have to violate their law by coming in the house, and he can't get the boy out of the house because of his condition.

And so he sends a messenger real fast in verse 8. "The centurion answered and he said, 'Lord, I'm not worthy that You should come under my roof. Don't, Lord, don't come any further. I'm not worthy of that. I can't allow You to enter my house. I can't allow You to come into my presence. I'm not worthy.'" Oh, I love that. You know, people, there are some people who think that they, they should become a Christian to do God a favor, that they need, that He needs them. He, we're not even worthy to enter His presence. "I'm not worthy." What a beautiful scene this man; this is a man's man. You didn't become a centurion by going from a desk job into this. You became a centurion by working your way up through the troops, through the ranks. This was a guy who was tough. He had to lead a hundred men. That's what a centurion did. He handled a hundred men. He was a drill sergeant, tough, combat

oriented; but what a gentle, humble, meek, sensitive, loving tenderness; and all this for a sick slave?

A true, God-fearing Gentile like Cornelius; and now his faith becomes evident at the end of verse 8. Listen to what he says, "You don't need to come under my roof. Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." “Oh,” you say, "where'd he get that information?" Listen, he'd been around. He saw what Jesus was doing. He said, "Just say the word. That's it. You don't need to come in. I know the authority that comes out of Your mouth. Just speak the word." I believe he knew that He was God, and that he was in the presence of God. "All You have to do is speak."

And then verse 9, he gives this little statement I think is so good: "For I'm a man under authority, having soldiers under me. I say to this man, 'Go!' and he goes; to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this!' and he does it." What he's saying is, "Hey, I understand Your authority. There might be some around here saying, 'Where'd You get this authority? Who do You think You are? By what reason or rhyme do You speak this way?' But I know a man with authority when I see one. I've seen what You've done. I've seen the power of Your Words. I understand authority."

Now watch the reasoning of verse 9. It's reasoning from the lesser to the greater. He says, "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this man, 'Go!' and he goes; another man, 'Come!' and he comes; and to the servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." Now watch what he's saying. "I am a man who is under authority, and I understand authority, and I exercise authority. How much more authority must You have who are not under authority at all, but are the supreme authority of the universe?" He's saying, "Here I am under authority, and I can command things to happen. You are above all authorities. How much more can You but speak the Word, and it'll happen?" Boy, this is great faith, isn't it? “You don't have to come, just say it.”

Now, the next verse is really interesting. "When Jesus heard this, He marveled." Now you know something? You got to have a pretty unique kind of faith to amaze Jesus. Think about it, because, really, He knows everything. He has seen it all, and when it says, "Jesus marveled," you know that is some kind of statement. It tells us that Jesus, in His humanness—it's a glimpse of His humanness—was literally amazed at the faith of this Gentile. He's surprised.

By the way, it was a taste of things to come, because there's been a lot of other Gentiles who've had that kind of faith in Christ. Many of them are sitting right here this morning, and it's a severe rebuke to the Jews. Look what he says in verse 10. "He marveled and said to them all around Him, 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith." He could've said period, but just to put the knife in, He said, "No, not in Israel." And the implication is, "I should've found it here. You're the people of the covenant. You're the people of the promise. You're the people of the inheritance. You should've had this kind of faith, but I have never found it here, not this kind of faith." Great faith; he commends this Gentile.

Oh, He had found faith among the Jews. No question about that. We saw that in Matthew 4. Sure He had found faith, but never in this kind of combination, never this much virtue. I mean love is there, affection is there, thoughtfulness is there, humility is there, sensitivity is there, absolute confidence in the power of Christ, assurance that He is God in human form. You know, even the disciples, Jesus said about them, "Oh, ye of [What?] little faith." They were disciples, and they weren't too sure who He was. Thomas, after His resurrection, says, "I'm not too sure." Philip says, "Show us God." He says, "You've been so long with Me, and you don't know?"

But this man had great faith. It is a monumental foretaste of the kingdom Jesus gives them, that Gentiles will have greater faith than Israel. Listen to me. That is true today, is it not? The church predominantly is a Gentile church. Israel still rejects the Messiah, and Jesus goes on to make this clear. One of the most devastating statements, verse 11, "I say unto you [listen to this] that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven." Stop right there. Now, there is coming a great, glorious kingdom. There is coming a millennial kingdom and an eternal kingdom in the future. And in that kingdom, God's wonderful promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will come to pass. They are the people of the covenant. They were the ones through whom God brought the covenant. There is an essential Jewishness in the future of God's plans for the world, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent the great covenant of faith. The gospel came through Abraham's seed. Salvation came through Abraham's seed. We are blessed in the tents of Shem. We are sons of Abraham by faith. Our blessing comes in Abraham; so we, in a sense, are part of that same covenant. So there is a Jewishness to the kingdom, but the thing He's saying in 11 is this: "Many shall come from east and west and sit down with them." Who are the many? The east and the west. The main line, the point at which this begins is Israel; and you go east and west from there and you encompass the Gentile world. And what He's saying is, "The kingdom will be filled with Gentiles."

You want to know something? They didn't believe that. That was a shocking statement. This was contrary to all their teaching. They believed that, before the kingdom came, all the Gentiles would be destroyed. That's right. If you read the, some of the apocryphal literature like 2 Baruch, chapter 29, it pictures the, what they believe is going to be the great feast, where all the Jews will sit down with Messiah. And it says in that apocryphal passage—but it does reflect the thinking of the Jews at the time—it says, "The Jews are going to sit down at a great feast, and they're going to eat behemoth and leviathan." Now *behemoth* is the word for *elephant* and *leviathan* is the sea monster, massive whale. I mean they're going to have a feast like no feast ever was where they eat elephants and whales. Now, that's symbolic of an incredible, unlimited, massive amount of food. It's going to be the feast to end all feasts, and it's for the Jews. The great messianic banquet; and never, for a moment, did they believe that Gentiles would be reclining at the table with them. I mean, in the first place, that would mess up the meal anyway, because it's going to have to be kosher. The kingdom has encompassed the Gentiles, hasn't it? Two thousand years later, here we are, and the church is filled with Gentiles; and we'll sit down someday in that millennial kingdom in the future with Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, if that isn't devastating enough, verse 12 really puts the final nail in the coffin: "But the sons of the kingdom...” Who are they? Jews. Acts 3: "You are the sons of the kingdom," said Peter to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "The Jews shall be thrown out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Now, that is a very, very strong statement, devastating statement, incredible statement. And they're called sons of the kingdom because, by right, they are the inheritors. The promise is to them. The privileges were given for them. But when the kingdom comes, they're going to get thrown out. Why? Why? Because you don't enter the kingdom on the basis of a physical seed; just because you're Jewish doesn't mean anything.

You know, in John 8, they want to argue with Jesus about that. And so they get into this little dialogue about the fact that we are the sons of Abraham and, as such, boy, we have it all together; and we have it all settled; and that's the way it's going to be. And Jesus says, "'I know you're Abraham's seed; but you seek to kill Me. You're trying to kill Me because My word has no place in you, and I speak that which I have seen with My Father, and you do that which you've seen with your father.' They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father,' and Jesus said unto them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But you seek to kill Me.'" And then He says, "You are of your father, [Whom?] the devil."

You can't know how they hated Him for saying that: The sons of the kingdom were going to be thrown out. They forfeited their inheritance by unbelief. They annulled their promises. They lost their kingdom rights; and when proudly demanding entrance, they're going to get thrown out. To where? Verse 12. Outer darkness. Outer darkness. That's a Jewish thought. Jesus is speaking in their vernacular. The rabbis taught this. "Sinners in Gehenna will be covered with darkness," so says the Talmud. The Jews believed that sinners went into darkness. "And that's exactly where you're going," Jesus says, "where sinners go, away from the light of God's presence."

Some people are confused because it says that hell is a place of darkness and also a place of fire, and they wonder how you can have fire without having light; and that's part of the supernatural quality of hell, that there will be fire, fire of torment, and along with it, total darkness. Phenomenon created by God for eternal punishment. Outer darkness, that's a place; just like heaven is a place. And the horror of that place can be seen in the phrase at the end of verse 12: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." That's the effect of the darkness: the loss of all happiness, the loss of all joy, the rage of helpless despair, the excruciating torment of eternal darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

Thirteenth chapter of Matthew, 42nd verse: "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Chapter 13, verse 50, "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Chapter 22, verse 13, "Then said the king to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" Chapter 24, verse 51, "And cut him asunder, appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Every one of those is a quote from Jesus. He talked about that. I know people think Jesus just talked about love and hearts and flowers, but He didn't. People say, "Oh, you know, you're too strong," and, listen, I have never preached a sermon as strong as any one Jesus preached, never. I've never said anything as devastating as what He said. I noticed lately, Bailey Smith, who's the president of the Southern Baptist denomination, made the statement that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews; and he's really suffered in the press for that, but he's right. God doesn't hear the prayer of any unregenerate man. The Bible says that.

I was interviewed this week. The Associated Press came by, and they wanted to interview me. They're doing a national story on mass murders, and they asked me, “Why mass murders?” They want a theological viewpoint, and I just told them, "Well, people do that because they're vile and evil, wretched sinners." And they said, "Well, why do you say that?" I said, "Because the Bible says that. And if you let man go to his own devices, that's exactly what he'll do.” I said, "The Bible says evil men will get worse and worse. They used to kill one, then they killed dozens, and now they're going to kill hundreds if they can, because evil men will get worse and worse. As society takes off the restraints and lets man's depravity run, this is what you're going to get." At the end of about an hour and fifteen minutes, what should've been a ten-minute interview, we had a good discussion at the end. The girl, who was very gracious and asked wonderful questions, said to me, "You know, people might think you're strange because of these answers. Why are you so convinced that these are the reasons?" I said, "Very simple. The Bible says so, and that's the bottom line for me." She says, "That explains it." You can be firm when you have the Word of God; and the word of Jesus is, that people who reject the Messiah, even if they're the sons of the kingdom, are going to get thrown into outer darkness. How much worse for the Gentile, who never knew the covenant promise, to reject the Messiah?

And so He gives a sermon that was not forgotten, in the midst of this miracle. And then verse 13: "Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' And his servant was healed in the very same hour." Jesus says, "You can all go back home. He's healed." Can you imagine that little guy all of a sudden being healed? Popping out of that little bed, off that mat, saying, "I don't know what you did, sir, but I'm healed." Can you imagine if the centurion believed what he believed before, what he must've believed after?

You say, "That little phrase, 'As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee,' can we claim that?" Not necessarily. He said that to the centurion. Paul believed that God could heal him. God didn't, right? That's a sovereign choice. Sometimes He'd heal people who had no faith. In fact, if you want to know the truth, the Bible doesn't say the little boy had any faith at all. He healed him for the benefit of the centurion and everybody else in history who'd read this story. I think there's one more centurion in heaven, frankly, and probably one more little boy. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? "I reach for lepers, and I reach for outcast Gentiles, because My kingdom encompasses those who believe, who believe, not those who are of some particular race."

Now just in case the Jews might completely come apart at the seams, He adds one more healing in the next two verses. Very brief; I'm just going to mention it. Look at it: "And when Jesus was come into Peter's house..." And the other gospels tell us it was on the Sabbath, and they had been to the synagogue. In fact, all of these, as I said, may have happened the same day. And they went over to Peter's house. You know, they do what we do. They go to synagogue or church, and then they go home and have dinner, but they were having a problem there. The other writer, Mark it is, tells us that Andrew was there, and James was there, and John was there; so you got Peter, Peter's wife, James, John, Andrew, and Jesus. You got six people, and they got a real tragedy. How can you have Sabbath dinner when mother-in-law is sick? Right? That's what mother-in-law's for, right? How can you possibly have a decent meal? Plus it puts a damper on the whole operation. So the others come to Jesus, according to Mark's account, and they say, "Come on home with us and heal her so we can have dinner." So, you know: first things first. You know, why not? Nothing wrong with service; give her an opportunity to serve. "When Jesus was coming into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying and sick with a fever." Peter was married. We know that, because 1 Corinthians 9, he says later on his ministry, Paul says, it's not wrong for Peter in his ministry to lead about a wife, which means that she traveled with him in some of his ministry. And so here is his mother-in-law.

Now, the Jews used to get up, the Pharisees used to get up, and they said the same thing every morning. This was their standard statement: "I thank Thee that I am not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman." They believed that lepers and Gentiles and women, sort of in the same category. They had a very low view of women; and for Jesus to throw in a healing of a woman, you see, is just another indictment. And a mother-in-law, I mean, you know, that's even going beyond. So He is, He is really slapping in the face of all their tradition. Verse 15: "He touched her hand, and the fever left her." The hypothalamus, I'm told, in the middle of the brain, controls the body temperature and keeps it at 98.6. And it can become diseased; and sometimes infection comes from other parts of the body; and, in her case, could've been malaria, which was very common to that part. And when your body begins to fight it off, it raises your temperature, as you know. Whatever it was, temperature can go up to 108 degrees. We don't know what hers was, but the indication of the other account is that it was so severe she could die from it. And Jesus reached out His hand and touched her, and immediately, "The fever left her and she arose and got about making dinner." She ministered. Do you know that's what she should do in, in thanks for the healing? I'll bet she whipped up bagels and gefilte fish or whatever, like, like they'd never had. St. Peter's fish, maybe, that comes out of that sea. That's what they call it now. But they had a great time.

You know, there's something wonderful about that. I, I think the reason that you have the, the little miracle here about the mother-in-law, she's Jewish. And it might have been hard for the Jew to accept the leper; but then to accept a Gentile; and then to hear the words of Jesus that they're going to be shut out of the kingdom. And so Jesus immediately drops back in this healing of a Jew, almost as if to say, "Yes, I've turned to the Gentiles. Yes, the kingdom will embrace the Gentiles; but I'll never

turn aside My people Israel. There'll be healing for them, too." Isn't that right? Don't you find that in Romans? Where he says: Sure, the original root and stock was Jewish; the Gentiles have been grafted in; but the day is coming when Israel will be grafted in again to the stalk of blessing. There's coming a day for Israel again.

And I see that inherent in the simplicity of this miracle. She was immediately healed—the power of Jesus Christ made manifest. If you can deny that He's God in the face of these things, it is not because there is no evidence. It is because there is no faith in your heart, and there's no faith there because your heart is bound by sin. Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful again today to have walked with Jesus, spent, as it were, a day with Him. We feel like we were there. We can almost feel the dust on our feet, the wind in our faces, the warmth of the sun, as He trod the dusty roads of Capernaum, can almost sense the exhilaration in the heart of the centurion, almost hear the questions of the little boy. We could see the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders in the corner trying to explain the inexplicable, trying to figure out what to do with this One who overturned everything they stood for. We can sense the joy in the little house of Peter in Capernaum as his mother-in-law was made whole and hear the questions of the disciples, who asked Him how He did it and wondered at the presence of God in their midst.

Father, may we be truly worshiping the Son of God. I pray that there be no one in this place who would go away, who would leave, who does not know Jesus Christ, who has not believed. We know that faith is a gift that You give; and we pray, Lord, that You would give it this day, that no one may go into outer darkness to experience eternally the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For those of us that are Christians, Lord, may we believe as much as this Gentile believed in Your power. May we be as faithful as the mother-in-law, to get up from our healing and serve: for our lives have been touched, too, and we've been healed of sin, the greatest healing. May we be so faithful as to serve. May there be no end to the ongoing gratitude of our hearts. May there be no diminishing to our thankfulness, so that we live a life of service to the one who touched us and made us whole. We pray, too, that You'll draw to Yourself today all of our hearts, that those that You would have to come into the prayer room and the counseling room might come and settle any matters with You. We pray these things for Your own glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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