

Sermon Outline

“Authority to Heal,” Matthew: The Life and Words of Jesus, Part 25 – Matthew 8:1-17 – Joshua Harris – January 27, 2013

I. Introduction

- A. Jesus has just finished teaching what we call “The Sermon on the Mount”. He’s been teaching about what it means to live in the Kingdom of Heaven, to live under God’s rule. Now Matthew transitions from teaching to narrative (or story). He’s showing us Jesus in action.

II. Jesus Has the Authority to Heal

- A. Authority is when someone has the power or right to give orders and enforce obedience. It speaks of power, the ability of one person to bend the will of something or someone else to his own.
- B. In Matthew chapters 5-7, Jesus taught with authority. He didn’t reference the teaching of others but made authoritative proclamations, “*I say to you...*” Matthew tells us in chapter 7:28 that this is exactly how the crowds responded to his teaching. They were “*astonished at his teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.*” Matthew then shows us that Jesus doesn’t just teach with authority – he has authority. He walks down from the mountain and demonstrates his authority.
- C. In Matthew 8:1-17, the author wants to make a point by grouping together these miraculous accounts of healing. The obvious take-away is that Jesus has total authority over sickness. Jesus has no problem making people well. He doesn’t beg or even ask sickness to go away. With a touch, with a word, sickness is gone. Immediately, at that very moment – from leprosy, which at the time was a seemingly incurable disease, to a paralyzed man who wasn’t even present, to a common fever. Jesus has all authority.
 - 1. Confidence in Jesus’ authority is demonstrated by the simple yet profound response of the Roman centurion. He tells Jesus that behind his authority is the authority of the Roman Empire. When he commands men to action, they obey. The centurion applies this same concept to Jesus and with a notable faith says, “You have all the authority of heaven behind you. You don’t even have to set foot in my home. You can command this sickness what to do. Just say the word.” This centurion demonstrated remarkable faith and confidence in the authority of Jesus.

III. Jesus Has a Heart of Compassion

- A. Power and authority devoid of compassion is terrifying. In Jesus, his authority is never exercised apart from kindness, tenderness and compassion. There is neither coldness nor

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distance from those he encounters. He leans forward with sympathy and alleviates the suffering of others.

- B. Jesus' compassion is on display in the three stories. Each of the three people that Jesus heals was marginalized in the Jewish culture – a leper, a Gentile and a woman. Lepers were unclean and excluded from society. The Roman centurion was not only a Gentile; he was also part of the despised occupying army. And though Matthew doesn't highlight this, women in Jesus' day had a very low social status and very few rights.
- C. The healing of the leper is particularly illustrative of Jesus' compassion. Leprosy was a description for many different skin conditions. The worst cases persisted and could be extreme – the decay of flesh and the loss of hands and feet. As long as a person had leprosy, they were an outcast. The Law of Moses stated in Leviticus 13:45-46: *"The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp."*
 - 1. Anyone who touched a leper became unclean. They were cut off from their families and the rest of society. Instead of receiving compassion, many people assumed that the leprosy was a sign of God's curse. They or their parents must have sinned.
 - 2. But Jesus pushes past all these cultural taboos. We know he can heal with a word. But instead Matthew tells us he stretches out his hand and touches him. Instead of being infected with the leper's uncleanness, Jesus infects the leper with health and healing and makes him clean!
 - 3. Jesus' concern and compassion continues even after the leper is healed. He instructs him to follow the guidelines of the law for presenting himself to the priest so that he can be restored to society. He's not only concerned with healing but also with relational restoration.

IV. Jesus Has a Mission That Touches the Whole World

- A. What can we learn about Jesus' mission and purpose for coming into the world from this passage? In these stories, Matthew gives us three clues.
 - 1. When he heals the leper he tells him not to tell anyone. Jesus is not preoccupied with gaining fame as a healer. Does he know that the crowds simply want miracles and will not understand that his mission is greater than only physical restoration?

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2. Another important clue is how Jesus responds to the centurion's faith: he talks about the global mission of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus has not just come to heal people in first century Palestine. Instead, Jesus says *"Many will come from the east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness."* Salvation is not a matter of ancestry. It is a matter of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. According to Jesus, Jew and Gentile, alike, will recline together as sons of the Kingdom.
3. Matthew closes these three stories in verse 17 by telling us that the signs of healing Jesus performed also served to fulfill ancient prophecy. He quotes Isaiah 53:4, *"He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."* Isaiah 53 is the passage in which the prophet points to a suffering servant, fulfilled in Jesus, who will be wounded for our sins and be crushed for our iniquities, who will bear the sins of many. The whisper is that the "many" will include Jews and Gentiles.

V. Conclusion: Our Response

- A. Jesus wants us to put our faith in his power and authority. We can learn from the two men who came, not demanding, but with a quiet confidence in his power to heal. The leper said, *"If you will, you can make me clean."* The centurion said, *"Just say the word."* We need to come like the leper, acknowledging that Jesus is not obligated to heal, but simply to ask and trust that however he answers is an expression of grace.
 1. Craig Keener writes, *"To acknowledge that God has the right to decide whether to grant or refuse a request is not lack of faith, it is the ultimate act of dependence on God's compassion and takes great trust and commitment for a desperate person."*

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 8:1-17.
2. Do you truly believe that Jesus has the authority, power and compassion to heal you? How do you understand and process prayers for healing when healing does not occur?
3. Consider Jesus' warning to the Jews in response to the centurion's faith. Are there spiritual or religious experiences in your past or present that you rest on instead of a vibrant faith in Christ Jesus?
4. In your experience with the Lord, do you see Jesus as one who is kind, tenderhearted and compassionate? Are you able to draw near to him in your weaknesses, disappointments and trials?

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5. Jesus healed 3 people who were marginalized in first century Jewish culture. In what practical ways can you imitate Jesus' love to the marginalized and outcasts who intersect with your world?
6. In this passage, what clues does Matthew give us of Jesus' global mission?
7. For each of us who have been born of God, how can you cultivate a vibrant faith in Jesus' authority and compassion - for yourself, as well as those around you?