

**The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path**

Sermon Series: "The Gospel of Matthew" (Epiphany 2019)

This Week's Theme and Scriptural Focus: "Healing the Sick." **Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26.**

This Week's Mark(s) of Discipleship: **Hope** (I can engage and endure the struggles and challenges in my life because of the person, promises, and power of Jesus Christ).

□ Day #1--Monday, February 4th. Read: Matthew 8.1-4. Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

Is Jesus the true King? If Jesus is a king, what kind of king is He? Beginning in chapter 8 and continuing through Matthew 9, our lesson from yesterday, Matthew reveals the power of Jesus over all of human life; Jesus is the true king and rules over a kingdom of justice and love. This week, we will spend some time looking at each of the "proofs" of the nature of Jesus' kingship. Today, in our passage under consideration, Jesus demonstrates His power over defilement.

Much has been written on this disease of leprosy. It was (is) an incredibly hideous disease that created, physical, social, and spiritual pain. In antiquity leprosy was a symbol of "sin," as it was loathsome, spreading, and incurable—like sin. Added to this was the theological belief that physical disease was the result of sin in a person's life. And while the ceremonial ordinances for detection and cleansing prescribed by the Law of Moses (Lev 13:1–14:57) described a remedy "for sin and for uncleanness" (Ps 51:7; 2Ki 5:1, 7, 10, 13, 14), Jesus' healing of the man was a fitting manifestation of the work which He came to accomplish. With this man, Jesus is restoring and renewing a member of Israel, giving him his faith-community back, through giving him a new future.

Would Jesus heal the man with leprosy? Notice that the man was hopeful, but of Jesus' willingness to heal him he was not so sure. The man would need more knowledge of Jesus than he could have had to assure him of that. But one thing was certain: the man with leprosy had nowhere else to go. He came to Jesus and heard Jesus' words: "I am willing..."

- Has the Lord ever healed you or someone you know?
- What are some common fears people have?
- Meditate on the passage and hear Jesus' words to you: "I am willing..." Jesus is willing to *love you, change you, and heal you.*

Consider/Reflect: Do you feel that your future is hopeless? Do you feel "cut-off" from your faith-community? Today, take your situation to Jesus. Jesus does his best work in impossible situations.

□ Day #2--Tuesday, February 5th. Read: Matthew 8.5-13. Examine: The Text and its Relationship to other Passages.

Today, we see "King Jesus'" power over distance; Jesus can heal with His word even while not being present. What is significant in this story is that it is a Gentile, a non-Jew, who comes to Jesus. This Gentile approaches Jesus who he believes has power, a "Lord" (as did the leper, Matt. 8:2) and requested healing for a servant of his. Luke uses the Greek word "*doulos*" ("slave"), whereas Matthew uses "*pais*" ("boy"), which may suggest

the slave was young. He was paralyzed and suffering intensely, and he was near death (Luke 7:2). When Jesus said He would go and heal him, the centurion replied that would not be necessary. As an Army officer, he knew how to give orders, he understood the principle of authority. An individual with authority does not need to be present to accomplish a task; his orders may be carried out by others even at a distance. It is this man's faith and understanding that Jesus marveled at—according to Jesus, it was great faith!

Consider/Reflect: Does Jesus have authority in your life? Is Jesus Lord? Reflect upon these questions and like the centurion, surrender to Jesus' authority in your life/situations.

☐ **Day #3--Wednesday, February 6th. Read: Matthew 8:14-34. Explore:** The background to this text(s).

In these corresponding passages, Jesus displays his kingly, messianic power over *disease, disciples, nature, and demons*. Today, I want to focus on one of Matthew's themes throughout his Gospel: *discipleship*, as reflected in Matthew 8:18-22. Because great crowds followed Jesus, and opposition had not yet begun, many would-be disciples wanted to follow Him. However, Jesus is honest about the *costs* of following Him.

To describe this cost, Jesus uses a title, its first use in Matthew. Jesus is the "Son of man." It comes from Daniel 7:13 and is both a messianic title as well as a claim to kingship. Further proof of the priority of discipleship is found in verses 22 and 23. Matthew 8:22 could be rendered, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead." Jesus was not asking the man to be disrespectful to his father (who was not yet dead), but to have the right priorities in life.

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright believes that following Jesus as His disciple is a commitment to Jesus, who gives His authority to His people, the church, in order that they can go to the places where the world is in deepest pain, to be the people of God and offer the hope of God to all. Are you ready to follow?

Consider/Reflect: [Pray]: "Jesus, your heart is gentle and humble. You do not force; you do not pull or push; you do not coerce. You want us to come freely to your heart and trust that we will find there the peace and joy we most desire. The only thing you want is trust. You can only give your heart to those who come to it in trust."¹

☐ **Day #4—Thursday, February 7th. Read: Matthew 9:1-8. Explore:** The Background to this Text.

This passage is the opening text of a collection of healing narratives, that lead up to our Gospel lesson from last week. This healing story, like the bleeding woman and the death of Jairus' daughter, involves the power of Jesus and the faith of the one in need. Jesus demonstrates his power over sickness and storms, but what could He do about sin? Here, Jesus forgives the man's sin. Was the man's physical condition the result of his sin? We do not know. However, what we do know is that Jesus dealt with the sin problem first, for this is always the greatest need.

The theological point is that Jesus claims an authority that was only ascribed to God and specifically, achieved only through Temple sacrificial system. More important than the healing of this man's body was the cleansing of his heart. Yet he went home with both a sound body and a heart at peace with God.

One other point about this lesson; notice the faith of the friends. The paralyzed man, unable to help himself, has four friends with love and faith who will stop at nothing to bring their friend to Jesus. Sometimes, when our faith is weak or missing altogether, we need the faith of our friends to carry us through. We need each other!

¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Eternal Seasons* (Indiana: Sorin Books, 2003).

- Do you have friends who would "carry you" during times when you can't make it on your own? If not, decide today to nurture your friendships. If you do, thank God for each person. Also, do your friends know that you would carry them in difficult times?

Consider/Reflect: [Pray]: "Jesus, you have authority over body and soul. You also know my greatest need. I ask that you, in your holy wisdom, would meet my need; even if it is not what I think I need! Give me the wisdom and peace to be patient with your movements in my life. Amen."

☐ **Day #5-Friday, February 8th. Read: Matthew 9.9-13. Embrace:** God and His guiding you through His Word.

In this text, we hear the call of Matthew the tax collector and author of this Gospel. As Craig Blomberg describes, "Matthew's station was probably located on the landing stage of the lake, where commercial ships would arrive from territory outside the rule of Herod Antipas. The "tax" Matthew collected then would more specifically have been *customs duties*."²

While Matthew uses his name "Matthew" in this text only, Mark and Luke refer to him as Levi. As we know, Matthew responds to Jesus' call and follows Him! Afterwards, Matthew hosts a party for Jesus and all of his fellow tax collectors, as well as other "sinners," attend the party! Just who are these "sinners?" Blomberg notes that in first-century Judaism, the descriptor "sinners" was...

...used...in at least two specialized senses: (1) *Am-ha-aretz* ("the people of the land"), i.e., the vast majority of Jews who did not follow the stricter sectarian regulations of the Pharisees; and (2) particularly grievous sinners—the most criminal and disreputable types of people in society. Here "sinners" carries this second sense, since Jesus and his disciples themselves were *am-ha-aretz* and would have provoked no objection simply by eating with their own kind. The combination of "tax collectors" with "sinners," "prostitutes" or "Gentiles" ("pagan[s]") recurs throughout the Gospels (Matt 11:19; 18:17; 21:31–32; Luke 15:1). Such references became idiomatic, demonstrating how unwelcome the tax collectors were to the Pharisees. Various factors in different times and places fueled this hostility, including the tax collectors' support for the levies of the Roman government, making some view them as traitors to their country. They also regularly defiled themselves by contact with Gentiles and often were dishonest and unscrupulous—charging more than they were required to so they could keep the additional profits for themselves.³

Jesus' reply to the criticisms of the religious leaders may have already been at that time a well-known proverb. Jesus has come to heal people of various "sicknesses."

The Lord's response demonstrated that His ministry is directed toward those who realize they have a need: Only sick people need a doctor. The Pharisees did not think they were sinners (sick) so they would never have sought out the Lord (the Physician). The Pharisees always brought the proper sacrifices, but they were totally lacking in compassion toward sinners. When mercy is lacking, then religious formalities are meaningless (cf. Hosea 6:6).⁴

Consider/Reflect: "That Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners may not shock Bible readers today. We think of Him as the friend of sinners. But it was shocking to many first-century Jews that Jesus would practice table fellowship with such people (cf 11:19). Jesus is unlike any other Jewish rabbi. This festive banquet is His opportunity to call to faith people who are conscious of their unrighteousness. Jesus sits with them, not because

² C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

they are worthy, but because He is merciful. He wants sinners included in His kingdom. [Pray]: Dear Jesus, thank You for inviting me, a sinner, to Your marriage supper. Amen.”⁵

□ **Day #6--Saturday, February 9th. Read: Matthew 9.18-26. Embrace:** God and His guiding you through His Word.

Jesus’ teaching that He has come to heal the sick is now going to be literally manifested in two significant and related ways. Jesus has the power over sickness *and death*—the ultimate sickness! As we explored last Sunday, in this text we see two very different people who are in need and on opposite ends of the social spectrum. First, a “ruler” comes to Jesus asking for healing for his sick, twelve year old daughter. While on His way, another “daughter,” who has suffered for twelve years, is healed by Jesus; yet in a very paradoxical way! Blomberg comments:

Mark and Luke add his name (Jairus) and explain that he is a ruler of the synagogue (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41), i.e., a layman who is responsible for the order and progress of worship...however, an obstacle intrudes in their path—another needy person. A woman has been “bleeding” for twelve years, i.e., hemorrhaging in between her normal menstrual flows. To have survived that length of time shows that her life is probably not threatened at this particular moment but also points to the incorrigibility of the illness. Like the girl who is dying, this woman would be viewed as ritually unclean, an even greater stigma than her physical problem...All three Synoptic Gospels make it plain that even if Jesus did accommodate the woman’s superstitious beliefs in some way, her faith alone brought about the conditions that made healing possible...Praiseworthy faith does not doubt God’s ability to act, but it does not presume to know how he will choose to act. The word for “healed” in vv. 21–22 is more literally *saved*.⁶

Jesus arrives at the ruler’s home and finds “flute players” and commotion from the people who are mourning with this family. “Loud mourning and wailing characterized Jewish wakes. Even the poorest people were required to hire at least two flute players and one wailing woman to perform these services (*m. Ketub.* 4:4).” Jesus’ insistence that the girl is not dead but only sleeping generated laughter from the disbelieving crowd. Jesus’ point, of course, was that in His healing power and authority, death is only sleep for His people. And, this power will now be manifested once again! Matthew tells us that Jesus put the crowd outside. However, according to Craig Blomberg:

“Put outside” seems too mild a term for [the Greek word] *ekballō*, which can be translated *throw out* or even *exorcise!* Jesus evicts the mourners probably to regain some calm and decorum inside. Mark 5:40 indicates that he brings the girl’s family into her room, possibly restricting onlookers to those who had faith. Jesus takes the girl’s hand and lifts her up, bringing her to life again. *Korasion* may refer to a “girl” near the age of puberty; Mark 5:42 says she was twelve years old. *Egeirō* (“got up”) means *raise up*, both in the sense of getting out of bed and coming back to life. This “reawakening” is arguably Jesus’ greatest miracle to date, though he will perform two more revivifications, one with Lazarus, after four days of death (John 11; cf. the son of the Nain widow in Luke 7:11–17)⁷

Consider/Reflect: “These miracles benefit a woman and a girl. Generally, girls were not as highly prized by families. Among pagans, infant daughters were more likely than their brothers to be abandoned after birth. But Jesus does not see women and girls this way...In His sight, all alike have sinned, and all alike are justified by His grace (Rm 3:23–24). [Pray]: Jesus, Savior of all, cheer me by touching my heart with Your saving power. Amen.”⁸

⁵ *Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

⁶ Blomberg. *Matthew*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Lutheran Study Bible*.