

## Focus Text

“When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” **(Matthew 8:1–4, ESV)**

## 1. Following Faithful Crowds

**“When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.”  
(Matthew 8:1, ESV)**

Matthew has already prepared us for the onslaught of popularity Jesus would receive. Jesus preached with an authority beyond what an average scribe would have. He declared the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed who God considered to be the blessed ones. Now, as we continue in Matthew's gospel, Matthew is changing our viewpoint by showing us Jesus' actions and miracles that will back up the profound authority in His teachings. As Jesus comes away from the sermon, He now has a crowd following Him. So will He use this newfound popularity for fame, wealth, and notoriety? Or will Jesus show us the humility and meekness He proclaimed to us in the beatitudes?

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” **(Matthew 7:28–29, ESV)**

[illegible]

## 2. The Leper's Leap of Faith

“And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”” (**Matthew 8:2, ESV**)

As mentioned before, until now, no one has addressed Jesus as Lord besides John the Baptizer. Now, however, a Leper comes and kneels down before him. First, the crowd would have recoiled from seeing this man in his unclean state. He was required by the law to stay away from the city and shout “unclean” if anyone approached him. He is in violation of the law of Moses, but in desperation, this man stands before Jesus in hopes of being healed from this deadly disease.

Next, the man identified Jesus as the Lord. This is no diminutive nickname but a proclamation from the leper about who Jesus is. The Lord of all creation, who has authority from God to bend the natural world to His will. Some onlookers may have seen both the violation of space and calling Jesus a divine title as unthinkable and scandalous. If that, however, wasn’t crazy enough, he finishes with a profound request to heal him from this infectious and deadly disease. Leprosy was not something that could be cured easily, and for most, this was a death sentence as well as a life in isolation, where your only companions were others who were suffering the same fate as you. If breaking the law and using the title Lord weren’t proactive enough, this takes the cake, asking for a divine miracle from Jesus in faith.

One profound lesson we can learn from the leprous man is that walking with God requires boldness and humility. On one hand, this man broke all conventions in coming right up to Jesus. But humility in kneeling, head bowed, and asking God for something that only God can do. He believed in his heart that Jesus was different from any other rabbi he’d ever seen. He believed Jesus had the divine authority and power to end his suffering and restore him to the community from which he was ostracized. Boldness in faith is trusting the Lord with our lives, and humility is realizing we don’t demand from him but humbly ask and allow God the right to do what only he can. Now we wait to see what Jesus will do...

“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.” (**Leviticus 13:46, ESV**)

“The title does not appear on the lips of outsiders and is not simply polite speech.<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of this christological dimension the expression “if you will” becomes understandable. Everything depends on the sovereign will of Jesus who himself appears as the Lord who has his authority from God”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 10 On κύριε as a form of address cf. Geist, Menschensohn 349–64.

### 3. Transformative Touch

“And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” (**Matthew 8:3, ESV**)

Jesus responds in kind to the leper. He reaches out His hand and touches him. On the surface, this story is filled with simple compassion, yet in this time and culture, both Jesus and the man with leprosy step out of traditional norms to accomplish this healing miracle. Jesus doesn’t need to touch this man to heal him. We will see Jesus heal people with a single word, and also from a distance. When Jesus acts, it is often with intent and purpose. Here, Jesus is demonstrating that loving a neighbor involves going above and beyond in kindness. You can imagine those in the crowd who have been offended at the leper running up to the rabbi, even knowing they should be out of the town. As well, Jesus touches him! This would be equally scandalous for Jesus to do.

Jesus then states He wills it and for the leper to be clean. One part of Jesus’ miracles is the immediate nature of their occurrence. This displays divine power over the natural order. When my mother ordered me to clean my room, I obeyed quickly because she was the boss of the house and I would get a spanking if I ignored her request. Jesus is being portrayed in Matthew’s gospel as one with a divine level of spiritual authority. These miraculous actions don’t dilly dally; they happen in an instant. Scandalous action aside, what Jesus does for this man reflects the love of God. He can now rejoin his family and society because the Master has pronounced him to be clean!

“or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt;” (**Leviticus 5:3, ESV**)

“This gesture proves at least as shocking as the leper’s original approach and request. Matthew’s readers will soon learn that it was unnecessary for Jesus to touch the man in order to heal him (see vv. 5–13), so obviously he is making a point by means of an action that others could easily interpret as breaking the law (by defiling himself; cf. Lev 5:3). Whether or not he actually did defile himself is debated (since his touch made clean the unclean) but largely irrelevant. Jesus’ gesture made clear that he was not concerned with others’ taboos and dramatically demonstrated that God’s love extends to even the most outcast of society. The cleansing, which was even more significant ritually than physically, was instantaneous. No one could fairly doubt that a miracle had occurred.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

#### **4. Obedience Openly Showcased**

“And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”” (**Matthew 8:4, ESV**)

In the final action of this story, Jesus tells the man to keep this healing secret from anyone. Matthew is implying that no one saw what was happening, or that the man had leprosy. But Jesus instructs the man to go to the local temple and give his offering after being pronounced clean! Jesus is making sure in this conclusion that the glory of the healing goes to God, not Himself, ironic, of course, because Jesus is indeed God with skin on! But, at this early moment in His ministry, Jesus wants to make it clear that He hasn't come to steal the spotlight from God but works as an agent of Him on earth! If you would like to read about the offering, it can be found in Leviticus 14:2-32.

#### **Application**

In this story, we are invited to take two different actions:

1.) Boldness to approach God's throne of grace. The leper approached Jesus without hesitation. He knew that the only one who could heal him was the Lord of all creation. How many times in our lives have we approached God with timidity, believing that we are bothering Him with our struggles? Jesus wants us to approach Him with conviction and boldness. This week, spend time alone with God, even if it's just 5 minutes a day, and pray boldly with conviction to God about your trials, needs, fears, and desires. Be like the leper who breaks the conventional rules to get close to Jesus!

2.) Humility and Praise! What Matthew makes clear in this story is that God is in charge. The leper was not healed because he was bold; he was healed because God is gracious. Jesus tells Him to give all the glory back to the Lord in the temple. When you are praying boldly this week, things are going to happen! Don't let your ego slip in and tempt you into thinking it's because you pray so boldly! If God responds to you in any way, even if the Lord reveals that He is not going to give you your heart's desire, thank Him anyway. God will provide to you what you need in the right moment, and it is our job to be humble in the receiving of His grace! Finally, once God has spoken to you, give Him all the glory. Don't even think this belongs to us; instead, like Jesus instructs, we give all the praise back to the Lord because He is worthy.

Happy Praying! “God, we thank you for your graciousness to us in our lives! Come and be our Lord and make us clean, by your power and love. Amen!”