

Bearing Our Infirmities

Matthew 8:1-17

Jesus loved in word and deed. He has been up on the mountain teaching the multitudes the good news about His kingdom, and now He comes down to comfort and heal all of their diseases and demons. Moses received the law up on Mount Sinai and came down to find Israel engrossed in idolatry and immorality that caused a plague to break out (Ex. 32:35). But Jesus, the greater Moses, comes down with good news and begins a healing the broken and afflicted in Israel and beyond. Jesus bears our infirmities.

The Leper

A leper comes to Jesus and worships Him, an act of great faith, saying: “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean” (v. 2). Lepers had a skin disease that confined them to the life of outcasts: “Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Lev. 13:45-46). This tragic disease endangered the community, but it also made the one who carried it ceremonially unclean. To touch someone who had leprosy would make you in need of cleansing before you could enter back into community or worship with God’s people. The uncleanness spread, and that was dangerous. In our terms, this is like touching a zombie with all the gross and scary connotations—your hand sinking in to a dead man walking. Matthew tells us that Jesus put out His hand and touched him: “I am willing; be cleansed. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (v. 3). Instead of his uncleanness and death passing to Jesus, Jesus’ health and holiness is passed to the leper. Christ didn’t come to abolish the law, but to fill it (Matt. 5:17), so He quietly tells the man to go and offer the sacrifice Moses required as a testimony (v. 4). He is now ready to worship the Lord and come back into His community. Notice the leper’s faith. He doesn’t even ask Jesus to heal Him, but acknowledges His power to do so: “Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean.” This passage is not primarily applied by focusing on physical healing. This leper, just like you, would one day be completely overtaken by death. The apostles exhibited the apostolic works in signs, wonders, and mighty deeds (2 Cor. 12:12). We still pray and see people healed of physical ailments from time to time, but what we see consistently is the healing grace of Christ overwhelming the defilement of sin and bringing us near—forgiven, cleansed, renewed, restored, unashamed and unafraid—to God. Sin does not permanently defile us if we come to Jesus to be cleansed. Whether you have done awful things or awful things have been done to you, Christ can touch you and make you clean. But you need to come to Him and acknowledge that He can. This is obviously not a thing we do to earn forgiveness and healing. It’s basic sanity to go to the doctor if you need to be healed. Martin Luther said, “God brings us into His kingdom while we drink our little jug of Wittenberg beer.”

The Centurion’s Servant

The centurion talks like the leper, stating a fact that demonstrates faith in Christ: “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented” (v. 6). The parallel account in Luke says the servant was dear to him and near to death (Lk. 7:2). He is a junior officer under Herod Antipas’ command, who cared about the Jewish nation and built them a synagogue (Lk. 7:5). He knows how authority works, both having superiors above him and men under his command, and therefore knows all Jesus needs to do is command the thing to be done (v. 9). Jesus marvels at this great faith, surpassing anything He found in Israel (v. 10). The only other time Jesus marvels in the gospels is at the unbelief of the Nazarenes (Mk. 6:6). The

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centurion believes that Jesus can command and accomplish this healing, sending the Holy Spirit to do the healing, and that he is unworthy to have Jesus come under his roof (v. 8). In order to be healed by Jesus, you have know you are not worthy of His grace (which is why it's *grace*), and that He is able to give it to you. Jesus calls this "great faith." He saw that many from east and west would come to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven while the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness (vv. 11-12). This vision of God's kingdom as a feast comes from Isaiah 25:6: "And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people. A feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the narrow way and the few who find it, false prophets bearing bad fruit, people who would build their lives on sand and hear from Him, "I never knew you" (7:13-28). The high priests, scribes and Pharisees, and many synagogues in Israel—all circumcised, Torah-memorizing, Sabbath-keeping, sons of the kingdom—rejected Jesus. But this didn't stop the centurion from believing in Him and having it done for him, his servant healed from that very hour (v. 13). And it didn't stop Jesus from fulfilling His mission, knowing it would overcome the world.

Peter's Mother-in-Law

A leper couldn't get near the temple. A centurion could only come into the Court of Gentiles. A woman could only go to the next area called the Court of Women. Jesus is bringing people to the Father in heaven, and not to an earthly temple that was just a copy of the heavenly. Peter was married as good popes ought to be, and his mother-in-law was sick with a fever (v. 14; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). The church father Jerome thought that all the apostles except for John was married. Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman, and He gladly healed Peter's mother-in-law who served Him in response and likely had an ongoing ministry of hospitality and service at that house in Capernaum (v. 15; cf. 9:10-13).

The Many

The leper, centurion's servant, and woman are healed and restored, but that evening many who are sick and demon-possessed come to Jesus for healing (v. 16). Matthew says this happened to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (v. 17; Is. 53:4). We usually think of this verse being fulfilled in Jesus' death on the cross, but it also applies to His ministry. Jesus did not walk around as a bionic man, filled with superhuman strength and power waiting to be unleashed. He was a Spirit-filled man who never sinned, fully God but also fully man and therefore capable of pain and exhaustion. When He bore our sicknesses and grief, it cost Him. When the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years touched Him, power went out of Him (Lk. 8:46; cf. Lk. 6:19). We don't know exactly what this means that Jesus bore our sicknesses, but we know He got tired, sad, moved with compassion, that He wept, looked, loved, touched, marveled, prayed, and constantly spoke as one with authority from God the Father. He told the multitude to "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (7:7), and in this passage He makes good on His word. All who come to Christ for grace and healing receive it. Tragically, some would rather weep in the outer darkness than laugh in the light. The good news of Christ is that you don't have to be an outcast. All the lepers, Gentiles, forgotten women and multitudes with their issues and demons are invited to come to Christ.