

Title: Preaching that lives
Text: Matthew 8.1-4
Theme: The Healing King
Series: Matthew #45
Prop Stmtnt: God's care for the broken fulfills and illustrates his power to save.

While Ukraine struggles to piece together a coalition government, one thing is certain: the former president's private life is no longer private. His opulent life, along with a fleet of cars including some of the top brands in the world, have been uncovered and revealed to the world. This has not endeared him to the people. It is a question that nags us all the time, isn't it? What is the leadership really like? I recently finished a book this week entitled, "Seeking Allah, finding Jesus." It is the story of Nabeel Quereshi who was raised as a devout and determined follower and defender of Islam. Nabeel's faith was challenged on a number of fronts by his exposure to the arguments for Christianity, but while challenged, he remained unconvinced until he researched the life of Mohammed for himself. What he, as a Muslim discovered about Mohammed, from the writings of other Muslims rocked his world. What Nabeel thought Mohammed taught and some of the things that Mohammed did, were totally at odds and could not be reconciled. His faith collapsed under the weight of truth. It was, on many levels, devastating.

This is what I love about Christ! The closer you look, the more beautiful He is. We not only read about the words of Christ, we read about the works of Christ. We listen to his teaching and then we watch his actions. His words and his life are in perfect harmony.

Read Text:

I have a GPS that is very helpful for telling me where I am at the moment and what turns I need to make, but when I am on a long trip it is not very helpful in telling me where I am in relationship to the entire route. Our study of Matthew's gospel is like a long trip. Each sermon is a small portion of that trip that must be seen in light of the entire journey. Let's not forget where we are going. Matthew is writing in order to convince us that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. He is the King of the Jews and the Son of God who came in fulfillment of the OT prophecies. I have entitled this series: Behold your King! The King is not only our King, which is overwhelming in and of itself, but our King is amazing, attractive, engaging, loving, forgiving, embracing, life-giving and eternal.

Last Sunday, we finished up the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) is the first of five major teaching passages or sections that Matthew records. I use the five fingers of my hand to remind me of how Matthew's gospel is written. We have just finished the first section of teaching (words) of Christ. Matthew is now going to tell us about some of the works of Christ. The works of Christ are chapters 8 and 9 that come in between the first two teaching sections. But, I not only want to point out what is written, but how it is written. The Bible is fascinating. It is amazing literature. In these two chapters (8-9) there are three groups of three miracle accounts. There are the first three (8.1-15), then some additional material (8.16-22), then three more miracle accounts (8.23-9.8), then some additional material (9.9-17) and finally three more miracle accounts (9.18-34). This morning, we are going to look at the first one of first

three. Now, I point these things out, because Matthew is structuring his gospel account in order to make a point. These accounts are not random. If we miss the point, we risk using the Bible in a way that it was never intended. Let me explain what I mean.

Several years ago I talked with a dad whose son (high school) was diagnosed with cancer. The dad had been very involved in his religion, and led his family to participate as well. When the son's diagnosis was made, the dad went to his religion (Roman Catholicism) for some answers and help. He was given basically, nothing. He wasn't giving up on God, but the religion that he had trusted in for so long had nothing for him at this critical time in his life, so he branched out. He found a church that was much more engaging, connecting, exciting, and radically different than what he had been used to. People were friendly and welcoming and the talks that were given were actually about Jesus. The first Sunday his family went the talk was on the miracles of Jesus. The point was, Jesus is a healer and Jesus can heal you too. He could hardly believe it. The timing seemed perfect. He and his family decided they were jumping in. They committed to going back and being part of this group because what they heard was exactly what they believed they needed to hear. The problem was, the cancer did not go away. Jesus did not heal, like this dad thought he would and thought he should and thought he heard and his boy did not live. What do you do when Jesus does not do what you think he ought to do?

Now, please listen carefully. When we read of Jesus' power to heal, we tend to react the exact same way that the people did who actually saw these miracles. What did they do? They went bonkers! They wanted him to heal everyone! And guess what? There is no end to the number of people who need to be healed because everyone gets sick and needs to be healed. Even the people that Jesus healed got sick again. How do I know that? Because the people he raised from the dead, died again. His primary purpose was not to heal! The healings that he did were miraculous and they were amazing and they were wonderful and there were a great gift to those who received them, but all of his miracles were a means to a greater end. Jesus healed and performed other miracles in order to validate his message. But, the message of Jesus tended to be ignored, overlooked or rejected. Many people were so desperate to be healed; they really didn't care about the other stuff. It is no different today. We want to take a dose of Jesus, like a pill, if he will make us feel better. But Jesus is not a pill to make you feel better, He is the King who rules and he is an amazingly gracious King who saves, because he loves. But make no mistake, He is King. The healings he performed pointed to a greater salvation that he came to accomplish. Don't miss this now! People wanted the former (healings) because they understood that need, but didn't want the latter (salvation) because they did not realize the depth of their problem.

Why is there sickness in this world? There is sickness in this world because there is sin in this world. If you only deal with the sickness, but you never deal with the sin, then you will never get rid of the sickness. Jesus demonstrated his power over disease in order to illustrate a greater truth; and it is a greater truth. He can conquer sickness, because he conquers sin. And what is more, in conquering sin, he conquers death! Sickness is not our enemy, sin is!

So, when Matthew records these first three miracle accounts (8.1-15) Matthew gives us some divine commentary on it (8.17). "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah..." 600 years earlier Isaiah said that the Messiah was going to come who would take our sicknesses and diseases upon himself because he took our sins upon himself. He took our illnesses and bore

our diseases because (chapter 53) “All we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on him (Christ) the iniquity (sin) of us all.”

So, even as Matthew is writing this, he does not want you to miss the point of this event in the life of Christ. Christ did not come to heal (end of story). Therefore, you can be healed. Christ came to give his life as a ransom for many. Christ came to live in your place. Christ came to this earth as the Son of God who became a man. In his living on this earth, he walked with, talked with, touched and was touched by people. He felt their sweaty, dirty hands. He smelled their breath as they spoke. He handled their germs when they passed him food with their hands. He was in the trenches of life with them. And when he healed them (and he did not heal every single person in the country), but when he healed them, it was not a show. He was not performing. He felt their sickness. He, who was not sick, felt their sickness. He took it upon himself. Just as he who was not sinful, became sin for us when he went to the cross. He identified with us. He became one of us. He knows your sickness. He knows your disease. He knows your loss. He knows your suffering. He is moved by your weakness. But, he does more than just feel and empathize, though he does that perfectly. He died in your place, so that sin does not have to own you and so that one day, your broken, diseased body which will die, will rise again to die no more. These miracle accounts are here so that you will look for the greater miracle. These are mini-rescues from the consequences of sin that illustrate THE rescue from the wages of sin.

But, that is lost on many people today. And that was certainly lost on many then as well. It was not lost on Matthew. Watch how Matthew sets the scene for us because what happens here is like a test. Jesus has just taught some incredible stuff. Now, he lives it. Here is what I mean. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful” (5.7). The response of Jesus to this leper is saturated with mercy.

Did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill them – 5.17

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people – 6.1

Did for someone what he would want – 7.12

1. The setting (1)

Matthew gives us the setting in verse 1. “When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.” Do you get the picture? Jesus had just taught them and they were fascinated. They were buzzing. There was excitement. He had hit a home-run, know what I mean? He had them right there, it seems, in his hand. And now, they were following him. Great crowds followed him up the mountain (4.25) and now great crowds followed him down (8.1). He didn’t lose them. There was momentum. This movement had feet to it. They looked like they were on board. Whenever great crowds follow a person, the person usually ends up acting like a jerk. When great crowds follow a person, the person usually does not have time for the little guy. I mean, that stuff about “blessed are the poor in spirit” is compelling. It resonates with the people and gets high marks in the focus groups. If you were running the Jesus campaign, his opening speech was pure gold. This stuff will make brilliant commercials. He got the downtrodden demographic with that line about the meek. And, if the camera had a close up when he said “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, you had your poster shot. But, while you can use that humility stuff as a slogan you cannot actually operate like that because you would never make it time to your next big event. Seriously, does anyone really think that the

King of the earth has time for the little guy? Yes He does!!! Now, there is one more thing that I really ought to point out because it is another little nuance in the story. Who else

2. The contrast (2)

There are several things that are taking place all at once. First of all you have the contrast of:

A. A single leper vs. great crowds

Have you ever been part of a great crowd that is moving? They are following. There is noise. There is rumble. There is excitement and anticipation. There is a sense of direction, even destiny. And in contrast to these great crowds, there is a single man. They are moving, but he is kneeling. They were in a group, but he was by himself. They were the crowds, the people, the audience and he was a leper.

Both Mark and Luke record this event. The man is desperate. Luke says that he actually “fell on his face.” The crowds were excited but this man is desperate! He is so desperate, that he does not care about the crowd. He has to get to Jesus. Jesus had already performed some miracles (4.23-25), so it is likely that this man had already heard about Christ. And yet, he still had to go. And being a leper? Being a leper and confronting a crowd would have been an enormous risk. Lepers had to wear torn clothes, unkempt hair and had to yell “unclean” whenever people came near them. They were used to people running away. They experienced mothers shielding the eyes of their children from them. They heard the shrieks and gasps of people shocked by their appearance and fearful of their presence. They knew rejection. They lived – rejected. They were the untouchables, the diseased, and the unwanted. So, to go to Christ in front of others, was risking a lot.

Not only that, but Jesus was tempted in all ways, just like we are, yet without sin. Did he feel the temptation to overlook this guy and not disappoint the crowd? But there was another confrontation:

B. A damning disease vs. the pure Savior.

Leprosy was a general word that referred to a number of skin conditions, some of which were temporary (eczema) while others were more serious, contagious and even full-blown leprosy (Hansen’s disease). Therefore, God had given to the Israelites (Leviticus) specific laws of hygiene and quarantining in regards to diseases of the skin. A person who was determined to have a skin disease from which there was no cure was labeled a leper. He could not live in the camp of the Israelites as they traveled, and could not live in a city with others. He had to live outside of the city, presumably with other lepers, living off of the generosity and charity of others. Separated from family, it was a miserable existence.

In fact, the text just calls him “a leper.” That was what it was like. It was almost as if he was not a person, he was a disease. He was polluted. Now, the physical disease that he was afflicted with was an illustration of the spiritual disease that all have. But, then, like today, most people are way more concerned about matters of physical health than they are about spiritual health. This

man was marked. This man was a threat because anyone who touched him would risk contamination. This man was isolated from others and this man had no hope, that he would ever be healed, until Jesus came.

That is the point. Here is a man who is polluted and who is sentenced to death by his disease and he comes to Jesus. Now, in spite of just telling us about the great crowds, the next three verses focus only on 2 people; Jesus and the leper.

Have you ever been with someone who was so broken, so disfigured, so needy, so sick, so dying, so struggling, and in pain that you found yourself wanting to get away. You did not want to be there. You did not want to look. You were afraid. You did not know what to say, what to do, even what to feel. Why? Why do we want to pull away from people who need us? Why do we want to avoid people who are broken or disfigured? Why do we pretend not to notice; is so that we don't have to admit that we really do not want to care? Jesus accepts worship from this man. Jesus pays attention to this leper. Jesus listens to him. Jesus talks with him. Jesus even touches him. I am tempted to say that if Jesus will touch him, he will touch you. But, the truth is, if Jesus will touch us, then Jesus will touch him. It is possible that this is the first human touch this man has had in a very long time. This is a pattern that takes us to 9.36 (explain).

There are many aspects of life that are raw. You will, most likely, be called upon to care for someone in a very raw moment. They may need CPR. They may need mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. They may need you to hold tight on a major blood vessel that has been ruptured. You may need to clean up the vomit of someone, or clean other messes. There are many situations where the person in need is not in need because they want to be in need. But they are. You get to reflect Christ. You will not do it perfectly, but you can give them a taste of the One who did and still does.

C. A powerful confession vs. a popular movement.

The third contrast is seen in this man's statement. The crowds are impressed, even astonished at what Jesus said. This man flat out believes him and kneels before him and makes a public confession of his faith in the power of Jesus. He calls him Lord and says, "If you will, you can make me clean." It is not a matter of Christ's power. The leper knows that Christ has the power. It is a matter of whether or not Christ will choose to exercise that power on behalf of the leper. The leper believes! He knows.

3. The miracle (3)

The text raises a question that Matthew does not answer and that is this. Since Jesus touched the leper, wouldn't Jesus be ceremonially unclean? Now, we know that Jesus himself could not be unclean in the sense that you can make him impure. But, since he touched the leper and would have been ceremonially unclean, I wonder if Jesus did not go to the temple, like others for ritualistic purification. The text does not say. So, my view is conjecture. But, I am guessing (and it is a guess) that Jesus did go to the temple from time to time, just like everyone else for ritual purification. 1) He was never accused of being impure nor was he accused of not going. 2) This miracle was a preview of his taking our sin and our pollution upon him, as we already noted. The

time would come when he would actually be unclean. He was willing to be unclean so that we could become clean. That is what happened in his death. He took our sin upon himself and was treated as if he was guilty of everything that we have ever done. He felt the loneliness of our sin, the isolation that comes as a result of our brokenness. He took it all and he paid for it all. He chose to do that. No one could take his life, he chose to give it freely and here, as a preview to that, he chose to touch this man and chose to heal him. And he did, instantly! Notice that Jesus exercised both his will and his authority. He said, “I will” and “be clean.”

Now, here is the difference between us and Jesus. We may have the will to fix someone, but we do not have the authority unless God gives it to us. Jesus has the authority. That is why you had better point people to Jesus and not yourself.

4. The admonition (4)

What did the leper call Jesus? He called him Lord. What does that imply? It implies that the leper is his servant. How did the leper approach Jesus? He knelt before him. What does that imply? It implies that he is in submission to him and will do whatever his Lord asks. Well, Jesus does ask, in fact, he commands. If you are going to go to Jesus in order to get your life made whole, you need to recognize that he will take you up on you calling him Lord.

Jesus commands him to go to the priest. Jesus is fulfilling the law, but he has not yet fulfilled the law. The Old Testament sacrificial system is still in place. It will be in place until the death of Christ and the curtain is ripped in two. But at this point in the story, the Mosaic Law and its requirements about purification from skin diseases were still in force. Jesus sends him, in keeping with the law to go to the priest. It is a subtle but powerful point. Jesus is using the law to demonstrate that he is fulfilling the law. The law, the Old Testament all points to him. The "proof to them" has the idea of evidence for them. That is, this man is going to the priest as evidence to the health inspectors that One has come that you need to pay attention to. That is the easy part of the command for us to understand. But why the command to keep quiet?

Obviously, the Jews had such a difficult time grasping the fact that the Messiah came to suffer and die instead of coming to conquer their enemies. The truth is he came to conquer their enemies. He came to conquer their biggest enemy – themselves. They were not ready to hear that, though they desperately needed to. Things have not changed. There are three responses (audiences) to Christ that are referenced in this text. 1) Needy people who are simply attracted by the message and the miracles; 2) Needy people (person) who knows he is needy and throws himself at the mercy and power of Christ and 3) Needy people, who refuse to acknowledge their need (priests).

Your biggest need is not the people around you, the weakness of your body, nor the circumstances of your life. It is your own heart. This leprosy was a gift to this leper that he might realize what his only hope really is. Perhaps the very weakness and circumstance you desperately want to be rid of, is God's gift of grace to make you aware of how needy you really are.

The only sin that Jesus cannot fix is the sin of self-righteousness, since the self-righteousness is so diseased; he has no “need.” It is always someone who has the problem.