

Strong to Save and Heal

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, these Sundays in August, we are going to be looking at Matthew chapter 8 to 10, under the general heading, The Kingdom Advances.
- Some time ago in the lunchtimes, we looked at the previous chapters, the Sermon on the Mount, so it's really continuing in that vein. And our passage today is Matthew chapter 8, verses 1 to 17, which you'll find on page 813.
- And we'll begin by reading that. When Jesus 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.
- When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.
- [1 : 1 8] And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him. But the centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.
- For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes. And to another, come, and he comes.
- And to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.
- I tell you, many will come from 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 outer darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- And to the centurion, Jesus said, Go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment. And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.
- [2 : 2 9] He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. At evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.
- This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Amen. That is the word of the Lord.
- Now let's have a moment of prayer. Lord God, we thank you for this further opportunity to meet under your word. We thank you for that word spoken so long ago, which still speaks to us, and still speaks into every situation, and indeed will continue to be when heaven and earth have passed away.
- And so help us to listen carefully. Help us to hear what you are saying to us through this word, and bless us abundantly, and give to us, give to us a new love for the Lord Jesus Christ, a new desire to read his word, a new desire to follow in his ways.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Now if you talk to the average person about miracles, you'll probably encounter two extreme views.

[3 : 48] One view is they're rationalized and explained away. Said that in those unscientific times, in those pre-modern times, people were gullible and naive, and didn't understand many of the things that we understand.

Jesus did not turn water into wine, we are told. What he did was he made everyone feel so happy that when they drank water, they thought they were drinking wine.

In other words, Jesus is a kind of magician, and a kind of sentimental Jesus who makes us feel good so that we can go make other people feel good. That's the kind of thing that's said.

And the resurrection, the great miracle on which the whole of the gospel depends, is said sometimes to be a spiritual resurrection. Jesus reabsorbed into the Godhead.

If you have any idea what that meaningless jumble of words is about, please let me know, reabsorbed into the Godhead, it's total nonsense. On the other hand, you'll get people who sensationalize miracles and say that's what we need today.

[4 : 55] If we saw people being healed, if we saw the lame walking and the blind seeing, then people would believe in the gospel. Now that's naive, because so often it happened, it happened in biblical times, that people did not believe.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, his enemies didn't say, we'll have to take him seriously now. John says they went away and plotted to kill him.

You see, if you won't believe what the scripture says, you're not going to be convinced by miracles. There's always ways of explaining them away. There's always ways of giving another version of them.

Why we have such a cluster of miracles in the gospels is because the kingdom has come in Jesus. The kingdom of heaven has arrived, and the kingdom of darkness is opposing it.

And we've got to remember that because Jesus has come, miracles still happen. And the greatest miracle of all, people are still converted.

[6 : 04] People change from darkness to light. The Holy Spirit comes into people's lives and transforms them. But, this will not finally happen until he comes again.

There is still illness. There is still depression. There is still suffering. And there is still death. And therefore, we're living, and therefore we're living in a time when the final victory has yet to be declared.

Now, Jesus has spoken with a great authority, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. And now, in this section we're looking at, it's mainly what he does. Not, of course, that you can divorce these.

They belong together. Indeed, Luke, at the beginning of Acts, says that in the gospel, Gospel of Luke, he had given an account of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.

They belong together, the words and the actions, the parables, the miracles. They belong together. But in this particular section, the emphasis is on his actions. And, one of the reasons Matthew is so much longer than Mark is because Matthew includes so much more of Jesus' teaching.

[7 : 16] Many of the stories, some of the stories we'll look at, are told in much greater detail in Mark. But anyway, we're going to look at this passage today. I've given the title, Strong to Heal and Save.

It's from an old hymn, Thine Arm, O Lord, in days of old, was strong to heal and save. Some of you will know it. And, there are three scenes here. And, first of all, in verses one to four, Jesus brings healing.

Now, that's true of the whole passage. But, particularly this incident of the leper, leprosy was a dreadful disease. Now, we know, of course, that the biblical term, leprosy, covers a variety of skin diseases, as well as the more virulent disease.

But, there is no doubt here that this leper was suffering from the virulent form of the disease. It didn't cause too much physical pain, indeed. So, I'm told that, in later stages, the nerve cells are deadened.

And, therefore, there's not a great deal of pain. And, thus, people can injure themselves without realizing it. Now, leprosy is rare in the West.

[8 : 27] Not, not totally unknown, but it's rare. If you want to get the, the atmosphere of this passage, think in terms of AIDS, for example. That was how, that was how the ancient world would view leprosy.

Rather like, rather like an AIDS victim. Lepers lived outside the town. They weren't allowed to come into it. And, just imagine the indignation of the crowd as this leper throws himself at Jesus' feet.

And, Jesus does two things, and these are typical of Jesus' healing miracles. First of all, he touches him. Jesus stretched out his hand, verse 3, and touched him. Now, we may think that's just a little detail.

It's not. This is the teacher, the rabbi, the one who claims to come from God, and he's breaking, he's breaking the law, by touching the leper.

No one for years would have touched this man. And, the Pharisees and scribes were already beginning to, beginning to be at least nervous and uneasy about Jesus, must have felt that this was just, he just put himself beyond the pill.

[9 : 42] Because, far worse than the disease, was the ostracism. And, Jesus touches him. Jesus puts his arm around him. Jesus identifies with him.

Now, we must, we must think for a moment, how startling this is. Sometimes in some artists, of these incidents, for example, like El Greco, has Jesus standing at a great height, and touching out, touching out the leper, with the tip of his finger.

That's not the, that's not what's happening here at all. Jesus puts his arm, around this leper, identifying with him. And so often this happens, in the healing miracles of Jesus.

He touches him. Now, we all know, in ordinary life, that if you're in trouble, if you're suffering, if you're bereaved, sometimes what you need is someone to put their arm around you, to hold your hand.

That's, that doesn't in itself bring healing, but it does bring human contact. But the second thing Jesus does, is Jesus speaks. The touch of Jesus, showed his care, and compassion, but, his voice, it was his voice, that healed the man.

[11 : 00] It wasn't the touch, that healed, it was the command, be clean. Just as, later on, he was going to stand, at the grave of Lazarus, and say, Lazarus, come out.

See, this is not just a kind man, befriending an outcast. This is not just somebody, and there are many people, do this nowadays, they go into disadvantaged areas, war-torn areas, and they really pour out, themselves, for victims.

But this, is not, this is more than that. This is the voice, of the creator. This is the voice, which brought life, into being, in the first place. He speaks, and listening to his voice, new life, the dead receive, Wesley says.

So, at the heart, of the healing miracles, there are two things, Jesus touches, Jesus comes alongside, and then Jesus speaks. Now, there's an interesting thing, verse 4, Jesus said to him, see you say nothing, to anyone, but go show yourself, to the priest.

This is odd, isn't it? Jesus said, don't go and tell anybody. First of all, go to the priest. Now, in Leviticus 14, there's a whole complex, set of details, about the cleansing, of the leper, and, Jesus is saying, although you're healed, you've still got, to go through that ritual.

- [12 : 22] The law, had not been set aside, and you're still, to do that. You see, I think Jesus, didn't want people, simply to come to him, as a miracle worker. He wanted them, to come, in repentance, and faith.

Remember, at the trial scene, Luke tells us, Herod was desperate, to see Jesus, so it could, perform a miracle. And, if we simply see Jesus, as a kind of magician, a kind of, miracle worker, we're going to get it wrong.

You see, Jesus, has come, to give himself, for the sin, of the world. So, that's the first thing. Jesus, Jesus heals.

Now, in the second story, the story of the centurion, verses 5 to 13, we develop, the second of these, the speaking, of Jesus. And, Jesus speaks, as God himself.

Now, Capernaum, was an important, garrison town, and a centurion, from there, comes to him, because he is a servant, suffering, from some illness.

- [13 : 29] We don't know, what illness it is, but presumably, it was life-threatening. Presumably, it was something, that couldn't be cured, by normal means. Now, Jesus had said, in the Sermon on the Mount, blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor, in spirit, the kingdom of heaven, is theirs.

Both that leper, and the centurion, were showing themselves, to be these kind of people. The leper, didn't doubt, Jesus' ability, to heal. He doubted his willingness.

And this centurion, I mean, after all, this is a representative, of the occupying power. Jesus is probably, beginning to be seen already, as a kind of rebel rouser, because remember, that is the political reason, why, why the Jewish leaders, hated him.

Because they were terrified, it would bring the might, of the Romans, down on them. But he's showing, that he certainly, does not regard Jesus, simply as a, as a magician.

Lord, I am not worthy, verse 8, that you come under my roof, but only, say the word, and my servant, will be healed. And he realizes, in Turin, he says, I'm a man under authority.

- [14 : 42] In other words, he says, when I speak, to the people, under my authority, it's Rome speaking. I speak with the authority, of the emperor. It's not, you know, it's, it's more than just, an individual speaking.

And of course, this happens, in human society. I mean, people, people, they often speak, with a bigger authority, behind them. So, when the centurion speaks, Rome speaks.

And when Jesus speaks, God speaks. And the centurion, shows astonishing insight. He doesn't, the centurion says, you don't even need to come.

If you speak the word, my servant, will be, will be healed. In other words, Jesus doesn't have to be, physically present, to perform a miracle.

And that's surely, a wider application. That's surely, what lies behind prayer, is it not? That when we pray, when we pray for, those we love, or those we care for, thousands of miles away.

- [15 : 43] When we pray for, when we pray about, situations, national, international, or personal, Jesus hears. He doesn't always respond, immediately like this, but he hears, he listens, he cares.

And when Jesus, the other thing though, is when Jesus speaks, he divides his hearers, into two, depending on how they respond to him. When Jesus heard this, he marveled, and said to those, who followed him, truly, I have found, no one in Israel, with such faith.

I tell, and then, the beginning of these, kind of statements, that were going to, increasingly, offend the establishment, and lead to his death, I tell you, many will come, from the east, and the west, and recline at the table.

Well, this gospel begins, who are the first people, who worship the Jewish king, the wise men, from the east, who will sit down, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the king of heaven, and the sons, of the kingdom, by here, he means, of course, the genetic sons, of the kingdom.

Simply, because, you are born, into this particular nation, does not mean, that you, that you belong to it, truly. And, the, the, the metaphor here, of the feast, Isaiah uses this, the party, and the, and Jesus uses this, in many of his, many of his parables, as well.

[17 : 13] What Jesus is saying, is it doesn't matter, where you come from, it doesn't matter, your background, it's will you believe, that is the point, that's whether we're Jew, or Gentile, whatever, whatever our background is, wherever we come from, whatever our advantages, or disadvantages, and this incident, reveals very clearly, who Jesus is.

He is God, come down, and thus his word, can heal, and save, and judge. But notice, verse 10, when Jesus heard this, he marveled, he was astonished.

He is truly human. And we must realize, that Jesus, as a human being, was, was filled with amazement, filled with wonder, that this Gentile centurion, this agent of the oppressive power, had such insight.

And we've no idea, how the centurion came to this kind of faith. It may well be, he had talked to others, and so on, and any more than we know, why the wise men came.

Although probably, where they came from, whether it was, whether it was Babylon, Persia, or somewhere like that, there were Jewish communities, who would have things like, the prophecy of Daniel, and so on, talking about, the coming Messiah.

[18 : 36] That's why, that's why, these stories, God has come on earth, but he's come, as a real human being. God's good faith, in human flesh, if you like.

So, Jesus heals, and he heals, by word, but he also touches, and identifies. Jesus speaks, as God speaks, and calls the whole world, to him.

The end of the gospel, he is to say, go and make disciples, of all nations. Now, it's already beginning, even before that, the wise men, the centurion, and others.

But thirdly, this little incident, in 14 to 17, all that Jesus does, depends on his work, on the cross. Now, I'll explain that, in a moment.

This little incident, he heals, Peter's mother-in-law, and he casts out, demons, and evil spirits. And I think, and I think this is the beginning, of this kind of ministry, where the kingdom of light, is defeating the kingdom, of darkness.

[19 : 46] Notice, he touched her hand, once again, he touched her hand, doesn't say, he said anything, but undoubtedly, he would. And the fever left her, and she rose, and began to serve him.

Notice these two important, things about the healing, miracles of Jesus. They were instant. There's no question, there's no doubt, or delay. It happened instantly.

And it was complete. Didn't say, come back in six months, for a checkup. He healed instantly, and he healed completely.

Now, I don't doubt, that that kind of thing, happens still today. There are examples, that many of us, will know examples, of people, who are spared off, by the doctors, and were prayed for, and they, and they recovered.

Normally today, God expects us, to make use of doctors, and surgeons, and so on. Just as, interesting, for detail, beginning of the book of Joshua, when the people, reached the promised land, the manna from heaven, stopped.

[20 : 52] If you live, around the corner, from a baker's shop, you don't expect, manna from heaven. So, Jesus uses, normal means, and the large crowds, experience, both his touch, and his word.

And, this fulfills, says Matthew, this passage, from Isaiah 53. Now, some Christians, say, there is healing, in the atonement, and argue, that just as people, are converted, by, that so people, ought to be being healed.

And, it's further argued, if you're not healed, that's because of your lack, of faith. And people, have healing services. I'm not doubting, the sincerity of these people, at all.

People have healing services, say, come and be healed. How do you know, you're going to be healed? That's like having, an evangelistic outreach, and saying, come and be converted.

Well, we hope we will be, but there's no guarantee, that it will happen. And, I think the important thing, to realize, is that, Jesus came, to save his people, from their sin.

[22 : 02] And, that ultimately, includes, the complete healing, of the body. It's ultimately, pointing, to the new, creation, the restoring, of the whole person.

In eternity, we might be disembodied souls, we'll be new people, new creation, with new bodies. But, that belongs, to the not yet.

What belongs, to the now, is that we are, even if people, even if people, are healed, from illness, eventually, death comes. and, we know that.

But, in when the kingdom, comes, there will be no sickness, there will be, no death. And you see, these miracles, are pointing forward, to what, C.S. Lewis called, miracles, of the new creation.

Miracles, that show, the creator, is present, therefore, people, are healed. Few hundred, healings, some exorcisms, three people, raised from the dead.

[23 : 02] But, the cemeteries, didn't empty. I mean, the point is, these are miracles, pointing forward. And, we must realize that. And, we shall have bodies, says, Paul, in Philippians, like his glorious body.

But, that won't happen, until the resurrection. In this world, the inexorable march, of time. Look at photographs, of yourself, 30 years ago, most of you here, are old enough, to look, at least as far back, as that, and perhaps further.

It's not a happy experience. It's an embarrassing, experience sometimes. But, the point is, in, when, when Christ returns, when, people are raised, from the dead, this process, will no longer, happen.

We will, we will be like him, or we'll see him, as he is. But, what these, incidents here, in Matthew, are showing, is that, he has come, he has defeated, the devil, he has defeated, sin, he has defeated, illness, and he has defeated, death.

And, one day, the whole world, will know that. Let's pray. Father, we realize, that in this world, there is suffering, there is illness, there is death, and that that will continue, until the kingdom comes.

[24 : 28] But how we praise you, for these anticipations, of the new creation, and look forward, to the time, when the earth, will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory of the Lord, as the waters, cover the sea.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.