

# **“FROM MATTHEW’S POINT OF VIEW”**

## **A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

### **SESSION 8 – JESUS THE HEALER**

#### **The Galilean Ministry Years**

Beginning with the imprisonment of John the Baptist, Matthew sets up the Galilean ministry of Jesus – based in Capernaum, calling disciples, teaching, preaching, healing throughout the area, and attracting crowds from afar.

#### **John is Out, Jesus is In - Matthew 4:12-17**

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum... From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

#### **Jesus is Introduced as a Healer - Matthew 4:23-25**

*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.*

#### **The Sermon on the Mount - Matthew chapters 5,6,7**

The next three chapters comprise the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew’s collection and summary of the teaching and preaching of Jesus, introduced in Chapter 4.

#### **The Healing Ministry of Jesus – Matthew chapters 8,9**

Chapter 8 and 9 are where Matthew collects the healing accounts of Jesus. While the other Gospels spread both the teaching and healing accounts throughout their Gospels, Matthew collects them in this section. Astonishingly, only one additional healing account is contained in Matthew – the healing of the blind men **in Matthew 20:29-34**. As this healing occurs en route to Jericho, it is geographically fixed, and impossible for Matthew to group with the other healings.

#### **The First Healing**

The first healing Matthew records in any detail is of a man with Leprosy. A catch-all term in the ancient world for any number of skin diseases, leprosy was particularly difficult, as it led to a form of public quarantine, cutting the victims off from the community. The Old Testament provided specific guidelines for the examination and

treatment of those with skin diseases (see Leviticus 13–14), since many of the disorders were considered highly contagious.

### **Healing as a Sign – But don't tell anyone – yet! Matthew 8:1-4**

*When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."*

*Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

All those with leprosy were required to be examined by the priest, who after examination could pronounce a person clean or unclean. If found leprous, the diseased individual was to be isolated from the rest of the community, required to wear torn clothes, cover the lower part of his or her face, and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" If the condition passed, or the person was healed, lepers had to be reexamined by the priest and declared "clean," and then had to offer a sacrifice.

### **Same Story in Mark, but a Different Tone - Mark 1:40-45**

*A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."*

*Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.*

*Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.*

### **Jesus – indignant?**

Why was Jesus indignant – literally, "moved to anger?" It is not how we are used to seeing Jesus, and many later manuscripts do not have the word Greek word "moved to anger," but instead have "moved to pity" or compassion. However, the words in Mark 1:44 are also very strong, supporting the "indignant" or "anger" choice of both the original word and the translation. But why would Jesus be angry?

There are a couple of possible explanations. It could be that the man approached Jesus by saying, in effect, "You could heal me, if you really wanted to." This phrase, questioning Jesus' power and motivation, could well prompt an indignant response. Or it could be that Jesus knew this man would not heed Jesus' strong warning, and instead

cause the rush of crowds which prevented Jesus from moving freely. Matthew, in his simplified telling, raises neither of these issues.

### **Healing through the Faith of Another - Matthew 8:5-13**

*When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.*

*“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”*

*Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”*

*The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”*

*When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

*Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.*

### **One Healing, Many Issues**

As a border town, Capernaum had a Roman military detachment, headed by a Centurion. This man would have been deeply resented by the local population, as a symbol of oppressive Roman power. It would have been scandalous to the citizens of Capernaum for Jesus to have anything to do with this man.

But on the contrary, Jesus commends the Roman for his faith – as greater than anyone in Israel! Jesus further inflames opinion, by implying that many outside of the Jewish faith will be in the Kingdom of Heaven, while some of the Jewish faith will be “thrown outside.” Does this lead to Jesus’ eventual rejection in Capernaum – and Nazareth, his home town, when he implies that the Kingdom is for all, and not just the select few?

Another issue raised is that the servant is healed not on the basis of his own response to Jesus, but on the basis of the faith of another – in this case, the Centurion. We often regard healing as a product of our faith in Christ – but this story demonstrates the wider power of spiritual healing.

### **Healing as a sign of the Messiah - Matthew 8:14-17**

*When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. She got up and began to wait on him.*

*When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”*

## **The Messiah as “Suffering Servant”**

Matthew follows his pattern of linking Jesus with Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. The Isaiah passage is significant, as it is part of Isaiah’s picture of the Messiah not as conquering hero, but as “suffering servant (Isaiah 53),” who is sacrificed for the sins of the people.

## **Healing through the faith of others – Part 2 - Matthew 9:1-8**

*Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”*

*Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.*

This is the same story as found in Mark and Luke, both of which include the detail of the man being lowered through the roof by his friends. But even in the Matthew account, Jesus indicates it is the faith of the friends which lead to the man’s healing (as in the story of the Centurion’s servant).

What gets the Pharisees angry is Jesus’ forgiveness of the man’s sins, which is solely the province of God – which is why they are accusing Jesus of blasphemy. Here, as in other places, Jesus places the priority upon the forgiveness of sins – spiritual healing – than upon physical healing, which is used only as a confirmation of Jesus’ authority.

## **“Your faith has healed you” - Matthew 9:20-22**

*Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”*

*Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.*

In this instance, also recorded by Mark and Luke, a woman is healed simply by touching Jesus’ cloak. Mark adds the detail that the woman had “suffered the treatment of many doctors” who failed to cure the woman “despite taking all her money!” Luke, a doctor, does not mention this detail! Both Mark and Luke record Jesus sensing that “*power had gone out from him*” when the woman touched his cloak – an insight, perhaps, that healing takes a toll upon Jesus? The woman’s faith is identified as the basis of her healing.

### **“Do you believe?” - Matthew 9:27-31**

*As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”*

*When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”*

*“Yes, Lord,” they replied.*

*Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you” and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.*

As with the woman in the previous miracle, the belief in Jesus’ ability – and apparently in who Jesus is (Son of David) – provide the healing impetus. Again, Jesus warns them to keep the healing quiet – again, these ones do not, further impeding Jesus’ freedom.

### **Healing Power Given to the Disciples - Matthew 10:1**

*Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.*

The disciples are invested with healing power. Not much of this is spoken about in the Gospels again; no specific instances are recorded until the Book of Acts, chapter 3, where a man “lame from birth” is healed by Peter and John. Peter declares, *“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see”* (as in Acts 9:34 – *“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you”*).

Many other undetailed healings are attributed to the Apostles (Acts 5:15-16 *“...people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed”*). The power to heal is later possessed by Paul as well (Acts 4:8-18). Even objects which had come into contact with Paul were said to convey healing power! (Acts 19:11-12 *“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them”*).

### **Healing as a Messianic Sign - Matthew 11:1-6**

*After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.*

*When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”*

*Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."*

### **John the Baptist and the Prison Years**

It is interesting to note that Matthew Chapters 4 through 11 begin and end with John the Baptist's imprisonment. John's imprisonment sets up the Galilee ministry of Jesus; his inquiry from prison as to whether Jesus is, or is not the Messiah (11:1-6), is the beginning of the end of Jesus' Galilee ministry. Following Jesus' reflections on the importance of John the Baptist (11:7-19), he proclaims his frustration that the Galilee towns did not entirely repent, despite the many miracles of healing performed by Jesus:

### **The Unrepentant Galilee Cities - Matthew 11:20-24**

*Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."*

### **The Dangers of Fame**

There are interesting lessons to be drawn from this: for one, miraculous events do not necessarily lead to long-term discipleship. Those whose faith is based upon "signs and wonders" often have trouble maintaining their faith when those same signs and wonders do not continue. While Jesus gained great fame through his miracles, that fame did not translate into a long-term massive following.

This may be one reason why Jesus regularly asks those he has healed to not spread this news: a fame which develops too quickly may lead to shallow commitments, and prevents Jesus from making the long-term personal impact he desires.

Nevertheless, Jesus becomes known (and remains known) as a healer and worker of wonders. This reputation is not only in the New Testament, but is mentioned by 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish / Roman historian Josephus, and also is mentioned in near-contemporary Rabbinical rejections of Jesus, where his healing powers are not denied, but are instead attributed to sorcery and evil powers, rather than God.