

Christ's Power to Heal **Matthew 8:1-17**

Before the Sermon on the Mount Matthew told us Jesus was both a man of word and action. Having given us the Sermon on the Mount he now shows us Jesus in action.

Why should we believe these miracles actually happened? Because contemporary sources describe Jesus as having a reputation as a miracle worker – and something must have prompted that reputation; because Matthew was a man who had spent his life dealing in the hard and tangible, and so his evidence is worth listening to. The question is, why of all Jesus' healing miracles does Matthew give us these three in detail?

In Need of Cleansing

A leper, a gentile soldier and a woman represented people considered second-class, or excluded. Jesus has come for such people. The leper's problem was more than his skin: he was cut off from others and from God. That is why he asks Jesus to cleanse him. He knows Jesus has the power to do this – but does he want to?

Jesus touches him. He didn't need to – he could have healed him with a word. He was willing to become unclean, to make him clean. It is a picture of God's love for the unlovely. We are all like the leper: sin damages our lives and relationships and leaves us alienated from God. Like him we need cleansing.

The Way to Wholeness

The Roman centurion was alienated by his race. He deserved nothing from Jesus. He calls him *Lord* – he knows Jesus is his superior. He could have thought he deserved this favour from Jesus – but he doesn't. He knows he is unworthy. Often we think we deserve better from God – that is why we grumble. Religion says you can put God in your debt. But the Christian gospel, and this man's attitude is very different. He knows he's dependent on Jesus' undeserved grace.

He also sees something of who Jesus is: a man under God's authority. Jesus marvels at that faith. He says it is that faith that gains entry to the great feast at the end of time – a picture of the ultimate healing and wholeness we all long for. Jesus has come that we might receive it.

Willing to Serve

Once healed, Peter's mother-in-law starts serving Jesus. It's the grateful response to grace. It's knowing we're on the receiving end of Jesus' grace that can motivate us to acts of sacrificial service and carrying other's burdens. Only grace can help you do that. If we serve thinking God will reward us – we're doing it for selfish reasons. If we do it from obligation, we become resentful. But when we do it in response to grace we can serve selflessly and with joy.

The Burden Carrier

Matthew quotes from Isaiah and says that Jesus bore our illnesses and diseases. Ultimately, all suffering is caused by sin – by creation out of step with its creator. At the cross Jesus takes all that disorder upon himself, and dies that the new creation might begin. That's why we should go to him for cleansing, putting our trust in him, and serve him with gratitude and joy.