

I Want To Be Well

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to go back to the reading that we had today in church from Matthew chapter 8, and we're going to look at this passage, Matthew chapter 8 to verse 17.

And it's a follow-on, it's a new section, I'll mention that in a moment, but we've finished the section that was the sermon on the Mount. And at this point, I'd just also like to welcome the folk from our church plant in Harrington, Harrington Community Church, I think they're joining us for the sermon today.

Allie Soll, the minister out in Harrington, as had there's been a family bereavement, it's actually Julie's aunt and grandad passed away in the last week.

And so I think they rightly wanted a bit of time to just reflect and not be terribly busy distracted by sermon preparation.

So we're very glad to be able to give Allie that little bit of time, Allie and Julie together. And we pray for them and pray for Julie's wider family. This really sad time for them.

[1 : 17] Now, we're looking at Jesus and the ongoing story that we have of Him here in Matthew. Now, reputation is very, very important, isn't it?

And it's tremendously important when you're asked to trust someone. If you're going to trust someone, that person's reputation is important.

Now I happen to think that in the political arena over the last maybe 10 or 20 years, last couple of decades, there's been a move away from linking a politician or a leader's private life and private character with their public service and their ability to do the job.

Now, there is a certain reality that is fair enough in that someone can do their job very well, they may have very good leadership gifts.

But to divorce someone's character from their ability to lead publicly for a politician, I think it was a great mistake because politician required to be trusted by their constituents and by the public.

[2 : 30] And I think by and large that trust has gone because character has been marginalized in these positions.

You know, I don't know what you would think if you were waiting to receive heart surgery and the heart surgeon comes to the consultation with you 15 minutes late and he explains that he's been at a tribunal or a medical council for incompetence allegations.

Now, I'm not sure whether you would feel terribly confident going on into the operating theatre with that knowledge or would you be someone who trusts your car keys to another person who has 12 points on their license?

Maybe not. Sometimes reputation is very important if we are asked to trust someone. Billy Graham, not our Billy Graham but the American evangelist, once I think I've maybe mentioned this before in St. Columbus, a great quote who said, a Christian is a person who can give his pet parrot to the town gossip.

Think about that. Because the reputation of that person, what they are in private and what they are in public is the same and they are not going to gossip or badmouth or speak about someone in private which the parrot might hear and then pass on to the town gossip.

[4 : 15] And in Matthew, what Matthew is doing here in the Gospel is building the reputation of Jesus. The reputation of Jesus matters, it matters then and it matters now.

He's making very big and significant and important claims. He asks us to entrust our lives to him, somebody we can't even see.

Huge claims he is making in our lives. And therefore, his reputation and the character of Jesus is hugely significant and important and who he claims to be.

So when we come to say like the Gospel of Matthew, it's not a random collection of events. It's not just something that's cobbled together. It's very ordered and it's divinely inspired.

Now if you have Bibles with you, you can turn back to Matthew chapter 4 and verse 23. Matthew chapter 4 and verse 23.

[5 : 16] And there we have these words, and he went throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

And that is what he has gone on following that verse, he's gone on to unpack. So verse 5 to 7 is the Sermon on the Mount, that is his teaching and his preaching.

And now in this chapter, from chapter 8 through to the end of chapter 9, we have the healing ministry of Jesus being spoken about.

And he's building a reputation. Matthew is building Jesus' reputation. He's saying here are his words, now here are his deeds to back up who he is.

On the Baptist, when he was imprisoned, he had people following him disciples and he asked them to go and speak to Jesus and Jesus' disciples and ask him, are you the Messiah?

[6 : 18] Are you the one who is to come? And we have that recorded in Luke chapter 7 verse 22. And Jesus answered them and said, go and tell John what you have seen and heard.

The blind received the sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them. And so we see that the miracles, the healings that he did, backed up his message and explained who Jesus was.

We find that again in John's Gospel in chapter 2 at the end of his first miracle, John says, this is the first of his signs, it's a sign that Jesus did in Canaan of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

Or even if we're moving forward and I'm laboring this point because it's important, in Acts chapter 2 where we have the first sermon that Peter preaches after the resurrection and ascension, and he said, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourself know.

So we have there that great truth that Jesus' character was attested by the great miracles he did.

[7 : 42] So the miracles really point to his character. They point to who he is, their public signposts, particularly among a people who were, evidence to among a people who were cynical, who were unbelieving.

He's setting forth his credentials by these amazing miracles. And there aren't any other miracles like this.

The people that he healed had, for the most part, incurable diseases, it wasn't the common cold he had. It was instantaneous, it was successful, it was unparalleled.

And to the point of just his mere word was powerful enough to heal his touch. He healed people, he calmed storms, he raised the dead.

He is sealing his teaching, not only as having authority, but being divine. He's showing himself to have authority over disease and sickness and creation, and his words reveal truth.

[8 : 56] So it points, these miracles that we read about in chapter 8 point to his character, but they also point to his mission. So when Jesus did these miracles of healing, it wasn't because he was a magician, he wasn't a faith healer, he wasn't a guru.

It's because these healing miracles were pointing to a deeper sickness that he came to deal with, a deeper brokenness, a deeper need.

He is reminding us, and reminding his people that we are all sinners before a holy God, and he has come on a healing mission.

He has come to deal with our sickness, spiritual sickness, and with our pain, and with our guilt, and with our death. And in his life, and in his death, he is bearing up as our Savior and our Lord.

If you look at chapter 8 that we've read, and also verse 17, we've got that fantastic quote from Isaiah chapter 53. This was to fulfill, written hundreds of years before, which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

[10 : 09] He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Jesus is our great shepherd. He's the one who loves us, who lays down his life for us.

And his healing, even though it was hugely significant and a physical point of view for these people in the stories, is pointing to a much deeper healing.

It's not just the healing of a broken leg or a cold. It's that healing of our soul, of our very being, of our whole person, of the whole direction, the whole trajectory of where we're going, rather than being away from God towards him.

So I want to just address a question and then look at briefly the two of the stories here. But I ask you, what does it mean today? What's the significance of this passage in Jesus' healing today? Well, the reason God gives us this record and what we believe is his own inspired word, that is self-evident and that is one that he claims for himself, is to give us the evidence of who Jesus is, is to build our understanding of his reputation and of his character.

[11 : 37] It is to enable us to present Jesus as the one and present his healing miracles and all his miracles as evidence to begin to persuade cynical unbelievers about Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior.

That this is not just a great hero from the past, not just a wonderful leader, not just a good thinker and teacher, but God in the flesh.

We have this recorded for us as history to us, as his story to us with the same aim, the same aim. There's no healing ever that has been paralleled to Jesus' healing here. And the gospel message that he has spoken in the Sermon on the Mount and he goes on to speak through his life and particularly by his death and resurrection, it's authenticated by what he does.

His words and his deeds go together and that is hugely significant. His words, his work and the teaching and preaching of the apostles are the foundation of our faith.

[12 : 50] And it is his truth that brings peace and restoration to us and healing. And we know and understand that the gospel, the ultimate reality of what Jesus has done will be the healing of the creation, the healing of the universe which groans to be liberated from the curse that it's under and for the healing of a redeemed humanity within that world.

And he alone has the power and the authority to bring that to pass. So that's what it means for today.

It's authenticating, it's building the reputation of Jesus for us to consider because he asks us to put our trust in him. But do we need these signs and wonders now?

You know, where is that power today? You know, the power that was so remarkable in these stories, you know, many, maybe you're listening in today and saying, well, I would believe in Jesus if I could see these things now.

You know, why doesn't he do it? Well, can I say that I believe that God is sovereign and he is all-powerful and he will do what he will do and can do what he will do.

[14 : 04] But I just want to say a few things about these signs and wonders in its broader context. Because the reality is that though some people might say, if I saw these things today, I would believe.

The Bible argues differently. The Bible says that it's not a question of evidence, it's a question of trust. It's not needing more evidence of Jesus.

It's needing to understand our will and our heart, which is in rebellion against God. It's dealing with the truth as it's been revealed, which is plenty evidence because the issue is not one of evidence, it's one of trust.

There's a great story that Jesus tells in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel chapter 16, about a rich man in Lazarus, so the Lazarus, the poor beggar, dies and he goes to heaven because he trusted in God for his salvation.

And Lazarus, the rich man, dies and he goes to hell and lots happens in the story, but it ends up with the rich man in hell pleading to God and saying, well, Luke, will you send Lazarus back from heaven to earth to warn my brothers about the afterlife and about the need to repent and come to faith?

[15 : 28] And Jesus says, listen, even if someone goes back to them from the dead, who's raised from the dead and goes back to them, they will not be persuaded because they have the law and the prophets.

That is, they had the Bible as they had it in the Old Testament then and they won't believe. It's not a matter of evidence, it's a matter of our wills being changed and the need to trust and submit to the living God.

So we have the Word of God, you know, and that speaks into our lives, as God breathed. You know, what more could we want than to have God's living Word that He's given us where He can,

as we read His Word in our lives, we know He talks to us one to one through His living Word. It's not a question of evidence. But we realize that the death and the resurrection of Jesus that all the Gospels are pointing towards is the greatest miracle. It's the greatest sign in wonder. Nothing tops it. We don't need anything beyond that to explain and express and reveal the rescue plan of God and the depth of His love.

[16:49] Everyone who has come to faith in Jesus has been converted to Christ who's put their faith in Jesus and become a Christian. That is an amazing miracle. They've come from spiritual death to life because God has gifted them the hope of salvation and has forgiven their sins and given them life and His presence with them.

So every Christian in St. Columba, every Christian who calls in the name of Jesus is a walking miracle to His power and His glory.

And also, I think the unappreciated gift or power of grace in our lives as Christians is an amazing sign in wonder.

You know, Jesus says in John's Gospel chapter 13 verse 35, this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

He doesn't say if you're able to do signs and wonders or if I will do signs and wonders some way. If we love one another, if we love God and love one another, that is a powerful testimony to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

[18:06] We have all we need to be changed and to see others changed. We are far from ordinary. And I think probably that the last thing is with respect to signs and wonders today that I want to say is that there's always a danger of, I think, with signs and wonders of sensationalism.

Thomas last week read from Matthew chapter 7 in verse 22, he says, Jesus says, on that day many, the last day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, do many mighty works in Your name?

And then I will declare to you, I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. It's an astonishing verse where these amazing, seemingly supernatural works are done, but they didn't know Jesus.

Their motives for doing these miracles was completely wrong. And there is always that danger of sensationalism because it's physical healing is only a sign to deeper healing that's needed.

The sign can't become the end in itself. It's not the root problem. Even if I had the ability, the power, through God to miraculously heal people, presumably they would still die at the end of their lives, and they wouldn't necessarily submit their hearts to Jesus Christ.

[19:38] Often such power among people can be sought for the wrong reasons, both the healer and maybe even the healed. The healing of the gospel is body, mind and soul.

And when we come to Jesus, He is doing, has done and is doing and will do a continued healing of body, mind and soul.

And it's a lifelong work that He does in us, requiring patience and grace and perseverance.

Absolutely, we've moved from death to life. We've moved from being estranged from God to being friends with God and we are in His family, but He works in us and it roots out remaining sin.

And the paradox often is that suffering is often the means of that deeper healing that He's working in our lives.

Pain, not being healed physically or dealing with a slow, gradual mental healing in our lives, spiritual healing through often difficult times is how He reveals His love and grace in our lives.

[21:01] So can I just briefly look at two of the healings here and take one or two lessons from them? The first is the healing of the leper in verses one to four where Jesus comes down from the mountain and the leper runs up to him and says, if you're willing, make me clean.

Jesus does the unthinkable. We stretched out His hand to touch the leper. The lepers in Jesus' society were untouchable. They were isolated.

They were ostracized and left out of company. Jesus touched them and says, I will be clean. And immediately the leper was cleansed and Jesus told him to go to the temple, to the priest and offer the gift of Moses for proof to them that he was healed.

So just a couple of things here. We see deep need in the leper and also great faith. You know, He was really in need. You know, we've glimpsed, we've tasted a little bit about social isolation in these days.

And it's not a pleasant thing. His was far worse. He was separated absolutely and entirely from his community and from his family and from all that he knew.

[22 : 24] And he was pushed out of town completely. It was dreadful because he was literally dying of this incurable disease called leprosy.

Inside and out, just dying. Yet, he has great faith. He knows who to trust. He has heard about Jesus and he is putting his trust in this authoritative teacher and as we will go on to see this divine healer. And the great thing about it is that Jesus is willing. You know, He is willing to be cleaned. Lord, if you will, and Jesus said, I will, I will be clean.

And He commands him to be clean. But he doesn't want adulation and He, you know, He doesn't want anyone to know about it because of that danger of maybe people wanting healing or wanting to witness healing for maybe all the wrong reasons.

And He wants the leper to fulfil the Mosaic law, the Old Testament law, to go to the priest and to be testified to as being made clean.

[23 : 39] And in a sense, what's He doing there? He's, in a sense, He's saying, look, go to the priests. Let them know they're someone greater than Moses here.

But yet, still, I want you to fulfil that law and I want you to do so as a testimony that I am willing to fulfil the laws of the Old Testament and also as proof from those who are opposing Him, because the priests were opposing Him at this time, proof that whatever they say about Him, there is a healed man in their midst, healed physically and as He trusted in God, healed spiritually.

So any parallels for today with that story? Well, we may not be lepers, but we're in deep need.

The isolation that we're going through at the moment can exacerbate some of the feelings and the experiences or the characteristics that we're battling with.

It can be highlighting them and it can be making them worse, sometimes our anxiety or our financial problems or our lack of ability to plan for the future.

[25 : 02] It may be giving us a time to reflect on other needs that we have in our lives. In the sense that aloneness, you fear being unwell, you're afraid of dying and you're aware of difficulties and issues and problems in your life and heart.

You need to think about Jesus' reputation. You need to think about His words and His deeds which backed up His words, His claims on your life and His claims to expose your need for deeper healing, spiritual healing from the disease of sin, which is common to every single person in this universe, that sin leaves us dead spiritually, dying physically, under God's wrath and desolate.

Great need, great need, but also the tremendous heart of Jesus, the wonderful heart of Jesus who we're told hasn't come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

So as you call out to Jesus, He's a rescuing Savior and there's a great immediacy in His response to us.

As we come to Him and cry out to Him, there's no lengthy waiting period before He responds. He is willing, He is longing for us to come and ask for forgiveness and for healing from our sins and to know His cleansing, the cleansing that only He can give.

[26 : 52] And as Christians, we are to be people who recognize His constant willingness to hear us, to hear our prayers, to hear our cries, to be in relationship with Him because that's the kind of God He is, this magnificent verse, verse 17, which says that Jesus in His willingness took up our illnesses and bore our diseases.

That great sense in which even the physical healing that He did speaks of what He came to do, came to take up our case, to bear the weight of our burdens, our sickness, and to take it Himself.

You know, if someone takes up your case and is interested in your life, then especially if they're important, that's a great thing. But it's as if He takes the weight of all our lives and deals with it.

An illustration, a little bit helpful, maybe from a great film, one of my favorite films, called The Green Mile, which is a fictional story about death row, a character on death row in the southern states of America.

And his name is John Coffey, and he is a big, big man, and he's been wrongly accused of murdering two young girls.

[28 : 26] But he has this amazing gift of healing, it's fictional. But when he does heal, it's in the story in the film, he touches or he's involved in the person, and it's as if the illness, he takes it in himself, and it slowly destroys him because he takes the pain and he takes the cost and the suffering.

And it's just a very minor picture of the fact that Jesus in his life, but particularly in his death on the cross, he's taking up our sin and our diseases, and he dies, not a victim, but dies in all his willingness to take the cost of our sins in order to redeem us and heal us and make us well.

So you've got the leper, and you've also then got the centurion, the story of the centurion in verses 5 to 13. And it's a slightly different story, isn't it, because he has great faith himself, the centurion, and that faith enables him to see the need in someone else.

His servant is really sick and is probably going to die. And yet he goes to Jesus, for Jesus to be the one to help his servant, he recognizes him as Lord, he already, obviously somehow trusts in Jesus, he knows about Jesus, he has belief in Jesus, he recognizes Jesus' authority, amazing faith given his lack of knowledge, so much so that he says, look Jesus, just say the word, from here, and he'll be healed.

It's a tremendous picture of faith and a lovely picture of someone's deep concern for another person and recognizing the only answer for that person was Jesus.

[30 : 27] And Jesus, in his response, he sees the moment, but he also sees way beyond the moment. He sees the amazing faith of the centurion, he responds to that faith by saying, yep, go, your servant's well.

But he also declares the surprising occupants of heaven. He looks forward from the story and sees that it's, he, in the centurion is seeing someone who is already been cleansed and there's recipient of faith and who will be with him in heaven.

And he is basically saying those who had great religious knowledge around him but who rejected Jesus, they wouldn't be in heaven.

Let those who put their trust in Jesus from wherever they come from, they will be in heaven. They will come from the east and the west and they will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the kingdom of heaven.

While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into outer darkness, in that place they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. What is Jesus saying to us in this healing story?

[31 : 39] Well, I think he's reminding us that true faith is selfless, just as it was in the centurion's case. As believers, we are to see Jesus as the only answer to our healing, our cleansing, our sins being forgiven, but also the only answer to other peoples.

And we plead for others in prayer. And that's what we've been doing in these last few days or seven days of prayer. We tell our friends about who Jesus is, we understand the awesome authority of Jesus that He is the only one that can heal anyone and everyone.

We take risks and we're not afraid to declare our allegiance to Him at whatever the cost. So there's a selfless element that we can learn from this centurion.

But also we learn that Jesus sees the world or sees a world that we only see by faith. Jesus here and in many other places in the gospel reaches into another real but unseen world into the unseen spiritual realm, heaven and hell, into the future.

And He just declares here the consequences for accepting or rejecting Jesus both now and in the future. He says there is life after death.

[33 : 01] He says He refers to it so often. He says there is a heaven and a hell, there is a God and there is a devil. He says there will be a feast and there will be a famine.

There is light and there's darkness, there is life and there's physical death and then there's spiritual, eternal, second death, there's joy or there's despair.

And He says that accepting Jesus to heal our sinful hearts and to cleanse us is the only way to know Him both now and forever.

That's why His claims are so important and are backed up by these remarkable evidences of His miraculous power, not just over sickness and creation but over death and over sin.

So I think heaven will be full of surprises. I'll be there. That's a surprise. And it's a surprise that grace makes us realize that we are unworthy but we are not worthless because of what Jesus has done for us.

[34 : 08] Those who are religiously self-righteous or who are moralists and who reject the message and the authority of Jesus and who don't come to Jesus to be cleansed, there is no place for them at that great feast, at that great place called heaven.

Who doesn't want to be well? The title of the sermon is I want to be well. Physically we all want to be well but there's a deeper healing, a deeper health, a spiritual health that Jesus alone can offer.

And I would love you if you're not a Christian to seriously consider the authority and the claims of Jesus Christ for today. He's transformed and changed the lives of every Christian in St. Columbus and beyond.

And as Christians, even in this lockdown and you may be battling and struggling with many things, praise him because you are a miracle, you are a sign and a wonder of the great, miraculous power and strength of the living God.

Amen, let's pray. Father, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand who you are. We pray that you would bless all who have listened to the reading and what we have sought to bring out from the reading.

[35 : 38] We pray that you would speak into people's hearts and lives in consciences. All of us preachers, hearers alike, believer or unbeliever and that Lord we would deal with you and talk to you and ask for your help, your healing and your grace.

Amen.