

Touched by God (Matthew 8:1-17)

Summary statement of Jesus' ministry

- Matthew 4:23, NASB
Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing** every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.
- **Teaching** and **proclaiming** (word) // **Healing disease** and sickness (deed)
- Sermon on the Mount gave us some of the **words** of Jesus
- **Matthew 8-9** gives us some of the **works** of Jesus (9 miracle stories containing 10 miracles)

Are you surprised that Jesus healed the leper, the centurion's slave, and the mother-in-law?

- We are not surprised by Jesus' authority over sickness
 - Part of what was accomplished on the Cross
 - **Matthew 8:17**, NASB
 - Part of the fullness of our redemption
 - **Revelation 21:1-5**, NASB
- **Are you ever surprised when Jesus does not heal?**
 - Cf. Paul (**grace is sufficient**)

Everyone (in context) would have been surprised that Jesus did heal the leper and the centurion's slave

- Cf. The unexpected nature of The Kingdom (Cf. **Matthew 5:3**)
 - God's blessing has come to the unexpected and undeserving

The Centurion's Slave

- The centurion Himself had great faith (**v. 10**)
- Even though He himself would have been unexpected (**v. 11-12**)
 - The expected comers to the kingdom were often those who missed it (Israel)
 - They would have been offended by Jesus' kindness to the Roman Centurion (Gentile Oppressor)
 - But especially **his slave**...
 - Slaves as tools
 - Unexpected

The Leper

- Physical horror (could not feel your own self)
- Social horror (could not experience others)
- Religious horror (could not connect with God)
- **Leviticus 13:45-46**, NASB
 - The OT laws were given to protect God's people from disease (good)
 - But the implications were horrific (one of those bummers of a fallen world)
 - **... he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.**
 - Those are heartbreaking words
 - **Isolation**
 - It was made illegal to greet a leper (how wrong is that!)
 - Rabbinical law = leper was upwind from people he/she had to remain at **least 150 feet** away¹
 - **and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'**
 - Imagine how this would make you feel when you walked into a crowd
 - **Humiliation**
 - One ancient Rabbi said, "**When I see lepers I throw stones at them lest they cone near to me**"
 - **The sense of worthlessness and despair**
 - Jewish historian Josephus summarizes the situation by saying that lepers were treated "**as if they were dead**"²

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark Volume 1* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1989), 55.

And historically, the diagnosis of Leprosy was a death sentence (physically, socially, religiously)

- In all the OT we only have a couple of instances of **lepers being cleansed**
- More **powerful collective memory** was people becoming lepers **when cursed by God**
 - Miriam (**Numbers 12**)
 - King Uzziah (**2 Chronicles 26**)
 - **Both were the sin of pride**
- So, the collective expectation of the observer was that the **leper** was cursed, unclean and out
 - Healing was rare and unexpected
 - Naaman's (captain of the army of the King of Aram) healing was a sort of **cold affair** (**2 Kings 5**)

What Jesus does here in this story is what no one expected—He **TOUCHED** the leper and healed Him

- The NT uses different language for normal healings and the curing of leprosy
 - **Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons...** (Matthew 10:8)
 - To be **unclean** was to be separated from the experience of God (and God's people)
 - The word "**cleanse**" is used instead of "**healing**" to denote **restoration to God**
 - **Unexpected and undeserving (the Kingdom had come to them)**
 - **The enslaved and the unclean**

This is a **signpost** that reminds us of something important

- **We are the slave and the leper**
 - Figuratively because of our sin (**enslaved** and **unclean**)
- The mystery of **verse 17**
 - Matthew applies this to **physical healing**
 - That is part of it, and now we experience it in part (the fullness)
 - Peter also applies it to our **spiritual healing** (**1 Peter 2:24-25**, NASB)
 - We have been **cleansed** (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, NLT)
 - We have been **set free** (**Romans 6:14 & 17-18**, NLT)
 - **Because Jesus became sin and a slave for us!**
 - **Philippians 2:6-8**, NLT and **2 Corinthians 5:21**, NIV

Imagine the life of the **leper** and the **slave**

- Having been touched and cleansed and healed by Jesus—**how would they now live?**
 - Not as a **mere** slave
 - Not as an **unclean** leper
 - They had been **touched** by God—elevated to a new sort of life

We are the **unexpected** and **undeserving** to whom the blessing of God has come

- We have been **touched** but Jesus, **healed** and made whole—set free
- So, like we would expect of the leper and the slave—life differently
 - **Romans 6:11-13**, NLT
 - **Ephesians 4:1, 22-24; 5:1-2**, NASB
 - **Colossians 3:1-5**, NLT

Maybe you:

- Feel like a leper...
- Feel enslaved...
- Need healing...
- Need a touch from God...
 - Come to Jesus and say, "**If you are willing...**"

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Volume 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 301.