



Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: I Will; Be Clean

Matthew 8:1-4

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Introduction: Jesus has just finished the most amazing sermon ever preached. He has sat on the hillside; his disciples, the scribes and the Pharisees, and various onlookers have stopped what they were doing and listened as He has described in detail the nature of the Kingdom of God. He spoke with clarity and power, with insight and wisdom, with brilliance and a depth and scope, with a directness and certainty, that was unparalleled about the most important issues of life -- heaven and hell, righteousness and sin, truth and error. Jesus had described the nature of true discipleship, the character of those that would follow him. Jesus had explained what true righteousness consists of, the choice that was before all who had heard him, the way of life and the way of destruction, the vital necessity to choose to listen to the true prophet and reject the false, the importance of discerning rightly one's spiritual condition, and the vital need to build one's life upon the only sure foundation of life founded on the rock of submission and obedience and trust in the chief cornerstone who is Christ.

With an authority unlike any ever seen before, Jesus overturned the entire religious system of the Pharisees. He exposed them as hypocrites and revealed Himself as THE teacher sent from God. He declared Himself to be the Christ, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. He declared Himself the Lord and the Judge before whom all would stand and as the one by whose words all things would be evaluated, all truth revealed, all reality declared. He put Himself forward as the Savior, as the gateway to eternal life. He put Himself forward as a King declaring the nature of His Kingdom. The common people were astonished and amazed by His teaching and but simply being amazed at Jesus is not the same as saving faith in Jesus.

Today, as Jesus encounters this leper as he comes off the hillside, we see illustrated for us what should have been the response of everyone who heard Christ's words that day. We will see a man who knows his dire and desperate need coming to the only One that can make him whole and begging for His mercy. It is how everyone who heard the Sermon on the Mount should

have responded – with a deep realization of their sinfulness and need, broken over it, coming in submission to Christ and hungering and thirsting for the righteousness that only Christ can give. This meeting with the leper is a divine appointment and it begins a series of acts of power, of miraculous deeds that will demonstrate the uniqueness of Christ, which will demonstrate that not only does Christ make great claims and teach with authority but He also has divine power to heal diseases, power over demons, and power to forgive sins. Over these next couple chapters, we will see Jesus do what only He can do. He will continue to give indisputable evidence that He is the Savior King who had been promised to the people of Israel and to the world. All of this begins today as we look at the story of:

1) A Leper and The Lord (v. 1-4) Jesus has finished His teaching on the hillside and Matthew tells us: “When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.” (Matthew 8:1, ESV) And why did they? Well it wasn’t because they adored Christ, or because they believed he was the Messiah, or because they worshipped Him. They followed Jesus because they were curious. They followed Him because they wanted to see what He would do next. They would not be disappointed. As they were coming down the hill, Matthew tells us: “And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”” (Matthew 8:2, ESV) Beloved, to understand this text fully, we need to understand the horrific nature of leprosy and the shocking, the outrageous, the disgraceful nature of a leper approaching anyone in that day.

The Horrific Nature of Leprosy. Of all of the diseases of Jesus’ day, the most feared, the most gruesome, the most horrific and repulsive was leprosy. There were many kinds of skin ailments in the ANE, but there were really only two strains of what would have been considered leprosy the way we understand it. The first would begin with little nodules, little bumps that would appear on the skin and then ulcerate and become open wounds that would fester and produce a foul discharge. The eyebrows would fall out and the eyes would take on a glassy appearance. The leper’s vocal chords would develop sores and ulcers and would damage the voice reducing it to a hoarse and painful-sounding raspiness. The lungs and throat would be affected causing the leper to labor and wheeze as he breathed. Slowly the entire body would become a mass of putrid, decaying ulcers and wounds, the face and hands and feet would become disfigured and horrifying to look upon. At the end stages of this form of leprosy, the mind would be affected and the leper would slip into a coma and die. This form of leprosy would take about nine years to run its course.

The other form of leprosy is known by modern physicians as Hansen's Disease. Numbness, loss of temperature sensation, and flat pale areas of skin are some of the first symptoms that patients experience. As the disease progresses, the sensations of touch, then pain, and eventually deep pressure are decreased or lost. The nerve trunks of the body are affected. Blood flow to the extremities is decreased causing a decreased ability to heal and hence the problem of non-healing wounds and the loss of fingers or toes. Tendons contract, causing the hands to take on a claw-like appearance. As with the other forms of leprosy, disfiguring ulcers and growths would develop on the skin and particularly in the facial area. The duration of this kind of leprosy is 20 to 30 years.

Dr. LS Huizenga in his book "Unclean, Unclean" describes leprosy in this way: The disease which we call leprosy today generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body, numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses original color, gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly. As the sickness progresses, the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch with deep furrows between the swelling, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble the face of a lion. Fingers drop off and are absorbed back into the body. Toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By this time, one can see the person in this pitiable condition is a leper. By the touch of the finger, you can feel it. You can even smell it, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease produces agents that attack the larynx, the leper's voice assumes a grating quality. His throat becomes hoarse, and you can not only see, feel, and smell the leper, you can even hear the leper; and if you stay with him for some time, you will find a particular taste in your mouth. All the human senses repulse at a leper.

Leprosy was a living death with sweeping implications. Someone suspected of having leprosy had to present themselves to the priests who would perform certain tests described in Leviticus 13. Once someone was declared to be a leper, that person was cut off from society. They were determined to be unclean. They had to leave their family. Leviticus proscribed certain behavior for the leper. (Leviticus 13:45–46, ESV) The leper could have no access to the temple or even the city of Jerusalem itself. He was treated as a dead man. By Jesus' time the Rabbinical teaching required the leper to remain at least six feet away from anyone if there was no wind and over 150 feet if the wind was blowing, and made it illegal in Israel to even greet a leper. No one dared to touch a leper either, for to do so would make a person ceremonially unclean. A leper was considered to be utterly wicked and guilty of some great personal sin – why else would they get the disease -- and under the curse of God. That was the state of this

man who made his way to Jesus, through the crowds around him. And you can imagine, then, the scene as this disfigured, repulsive, grotesque misshapen man made his way to Christ, the odor of his flesh in the air, the sound of his voice rasping “Unclean, Unclean.” No one would get in his way. All were offended; all were disgusted; all were repulsed except Christ. Consider with me the

The Leper’s Approach Just think about this. Matthew says it simply: And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” In the parallel passage in Mark 1, he tells us that the leper came “imploing him.” What would make this leper come to Christ? It could be that he had heard his teaching on the mountain apart from the rest of the crowd or that he had heard of the healings that Christ had done in Galilee. He comes to Christ, drawn by God, ignoring all the rules of the Rabbis, ignoring the crowd and he falls on his face before Him. Notice with me three things about his approach to Christ.

He came knowing the true nature of his condition. He knew he was unclean. He knew he was broken and deformed. He not only called himself “Unclean”, he knew he was unclean. If he ever forgot, one look at his hands or his feet or at the scowling of the people who looked at him would remind him of the gruesome reality of his situation. In fact, Luke tells us in his account in Luke 5 that the man was “full of leprosy.” That is, his leprosy was full blown and extreme. The sores, the disfigurement would have been extreme. He knew he was helpless. He knew that he had nothing to offer to Christ. He knew that he had no hope but Christ and so desperate he defied convention and the crowds that thronged Jesus and drew near to Christ.

He came in worshipful submission. He came and he knelt before Christ calling him “Lord”. While it is true that the word for lord is a word that can simply mean “sir”, there is more going on here than this. The evidence of that is seen in two things. First we see it in the word that is translated here as “knelt”. The word is a picturesque Greek word “proskuneo.” That word means to bend down before, to kiss the hand of, or to prostrate oneself before someone in reverence and fear and supplication and to worship someone -- that is what the leper is doing. He is worshipping Christ. The further clue is found in what he asks him to do, to make Him clean. Leprosy was considered to be incurable – only God could cleanse a leper. In the Old Testament, a leper, Naaman, was once sent by the king of Syria to King Jehoram of Israel for a miracle of healing. He was hoping that Jehoram would send him to the prophet Elisha. But Jehoram didn't understand; and he said: “And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to

cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.”” (2 Kings 5:7, ESV) He thought the King of Syria was picking a fight by asking him to do the impossible. Even Jehoram recognized that only God could heal a man of leprosy. In fact, he compares it to the power required to raise someone from the dead. Only God can do it. And yet, this leper comes to Jesus for healing; even falling before Him and calling Him "Lord". It is clear that this man knew Jesus to be more than a man, more than even a teacher, but by the grace of God, he had come to know him to be the Son of God. Think about it, no one ever came to the Pharisees to be cleansed of leprosy, but here was this man coming to Jesus for that very thing. Last we need to see that

He came in humble faith. I say that he came in humble faith for two reasons. He said “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” He does not make a demand of Jesus. He does not attempt to obligate Jesus. He defers to Jesus’ will. If it is your will. But make no mistake, beloved, he believes that Jesus can make him clean. He has heard of Jesus’ power to heal. He has come to believe that He is omnipotent. He has come to see Him as glorious, and powerful and good and he knows – “You can make me clean.” It is a cry of confidence in Christ. With a raspy and wheezing cry he cries out to Christ. The leper knows his utter desperation and hopelessness apart from Jesus willingness to have mercy on him and he is drawn to him despite knowing that he has no claim upon Jesus. With this we come to the climax of this encounter,

The Touch of Jesus Matthew tells us, “And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” (Matthew 8:3, ESV) Jesus stretched out His hand. In a magnificent display of mercy and grace, of compassion and pity, of power and kindness, Jesus stretched out His hand so that all could see what He was doing and He took hold of the leper kneeling there before Him. That is the idea of the word that is translated as “touched” here. It is not that Jesus just barely touched him with a finger but that He laid his hand upon this man who had not felt human contact in years, the embraces of his wife and his children or his family or his friends.

No one could have expected this, not even the leper. To the on looking crowd it would have been scandalous. They were appalled. The disciples were shocked. How could He do this? No could touch a leper and yet Jesus did. He didn’t have to. He could have spoken the word and the man would have been clean. He could have simply wiled that it would happen and the man would be clean, but Jesus purposefully reached out to touch this unclean and leprous man. It is unthinkable, but so is the love of God for sinners. And as Jesus touched him, He said to this

leper, “I will; be clean” and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. The voice that was raspy and weak is now clear and firm. The misshapen face, the sores, the hands and feet that were once rotting are now fully and completely restored. The face that was eaten away, the glassy eyes, the scaly skin – all instantly cleansed and restored. He stands before the Lord Jesus Christ whole and restored to life. By touching an unclean leper, Jesus should become ceremonially defiled himself and I suppose he would have of the man would have remained a leper. But at Jesus' touch nothing remains defiled. Far from becoming unclean, Jesus makes the unclean clean. When Jesus touches what is defiled, he is not defiled – the defilement is driven away. When Jesus touches that which is diseased, he does not become diseased – what is diseased is healed. When Jesus touches what is unclean, He is not made unclean – what is unclean is cleansed.

This laying hold of the leper and touching even him was a announcement of the kind of ministry that Jesus would perform. He came to save the lost no matter the extent of their corruption, no matter how repulsive, or repugnant their condition might be. His words are hard and strong words and his heart is soft and gracious, willing to embrace even the most despised and socially outcast. He has words of steel but a heart of gracious love.

What a mystery this King of glory is! He continues to show Himself as utterly righteous and yet gracious and merciful and powerful beyond anything that Israel had seen in any of its religious leaders before.

Last we need to see that

The Proof is in the Power. Matthew records the following: “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.”” (Matthew 8:4, ESV)

Why would Jesus instruct this man to go to the priest? Theologians talk about a variety of reasons, but the answer is right here in the text. Jesus tells him to go to the priest and to offer the gift to God that Moses commanded as a proof to them. A proof of what? That Jesus is the Messiah of God, the Son of David, the King of the Kingdom of God. Hidden away in the Old

Testament book of Leviticus was a chapter, chapter 14, that described the proper process by which a leper could be declared clean by the priest. For years this text had gone unused as we have no record of any Israelite that had been healed of leprosy and yet it was there, put there by God for just this day. Imagine being the priest that finally got to use this text, that finally got to declare a man to be cleansed of leprosy. Jesus sent him to the priest so that the reality of this miracle could be validated.

In the Old Testament, there were passages in Isaiah that spoke of what the Messiah would do. (Isaiah 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 61:1, ESV)

Even later in this very same gospel, when John the Baptist was battling doubt if Jesus was the Messiah we read: (Matthew 11:2–6, ESV) Jesus was identified as the Messiah not only by His words of life but by His miracles that he performed. The priests will confirm that this one that was once a leper is cleansed and they will discover that he was made clean by Jesus and by their own testimony, by their own declaration they will authenticate the power and authority of Christ.

Once again we see that Jesus is like no other. He stands alone, unique in His righteousness, in His glory, in His majesty, in His compassion, in His goodness and in His kindness.

2) We Are All Lepers. That is really the heart of this entire scene, beloved. Each one of us is that leper. Apart from the gracious and merciful touch of Christ, we are all lepers. If we see ourselves in the proper light – we are that leper. If for a moment we could see a picture of our souls apart from the cleansing work of Christ we would see ourselves as the walking dead, forms dead in their sins and trespasses, forms trying to cover themselves in filthy rags.

This disease of leprosy is such a graphic picture of our sin. Sin is grotesque. Sin is defiling and ugly and loathsome. Sin is a wretched thing. Apart from Christ, like this leper we are polluted. If we could We are defiled. It separates us from God. We are unclean and cast away from the presence of God, separated from Him by the sordidness of our sins and yet just as Christ was compassionate to this leper and stretched out His hand and took hold of his unclean flesh with

the grip of eternal and gracious love, so He has done the same for all who have trusted in Him as Savior and Lord.

He has laid hold of us by His grace, cleansing us from the defiling of sin from our souls. By the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb of God, by His atoning death on the cross, He has washed us of our iniquity and corruption and from the filthiness of our sin and has made us to be clean before the Lord, clothed in His righteousness and restored to fellowship with the Father.

Just as He willed to cleanse that poor leper, so He wills to cleanse all who believe. No sin is too great, no wickedness too deep to be cleansed by the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:20–21, ESV) He is willing to receive all who like this leper come to Him broken and humble, crying out for mercy, helpless and casting all hope for deliverance from sin upon Him. He promises: (John 6:37, ESV)

Just as that leper was made clean and restored to life, his misshapen body healed of the ravages of leprosy and made new, so does Jesus do a similar work in the heart and soul of all who believe in him. This account of the cleansing of this leper by Christ is a graphic picture of what Christ has done in saving all who will believe from the filth and the defiling destructiveness of sin. It is a picture of what Christ will do for all who see themselves as they are and who realize their utter desperation and who cast themselves upon Christ for mercy. Grace does not come to the self-sufficient, those who believe they have no need, but it is lavished upon those who know they are unclean and are in desperate need of the mercy of Jesus Christ.

3) How do we respond to such a wondrous story and wonderful Savior?

For those of us who know Christ by grace through faith as Savior and Lord, let this account serve to create in us:

A Deeper Love – Behold your Savior's love for the unlovable and then see that that man is you. It is you. You were not worthy of His love. That He loved you and gave His life for you says far less about you than it does about Him. His love and mercy has secured for you salvation from the power and the penalty of your sin and because you have experienced His life-giving love, you must love Him in return. You must learn and relearn and remind yourself of your Savior's

love for the unclean, for the depraved, for the rebellious, for the black-hearted – for you. And seeing Christ’s sacrificial love for you, you love Him and you love other “lepers” in His name.

A Greater Rejoicing and More Faithful Worship – Joy grows faint where the desperate need for grace is forgotten. It is so easy for the mercies of God to grow small in our hearts and for joy and worship to be reduced. A lack of joyful worship is directly tied to seeing yourself as greater than you are and Christ as less than He is. I fear that has happened with some of us. Has grace grown passé to you? We have reasons to rejoice and to worship faithfully. We are sinners who have been forgiven, slaves set free from bondage, blind men and women who have received sight and as we see pictured here -- lepers made clean.

A More Complete Wholeness Jesus not only cleansed this leper, He made Him whole. Perhaps today, there is a besetting sin in your life, a sin which you have tried to forsake but it seems to have a great hold on you and you think it’s such a deep sin that even Christ Himself can’t break you free from it. This leper stands as a testimony, “Think again.” If Christ can make a leper whole, He can make you whole as well. We must first, though, admit our spiritual leprosy before Him and our desperation for his touch. Last, let me say this:

Lepers Are Welcome For those of you who are still in the leprosy of your sin and you know it, I invite you to come to the Savior, to the One who can cleanse you from all your sin with the touch of His hand, by the power of His Spirit, by the cleansing flow of His blood. Coe as the leper came to Christ

...knowing the true nature of your condition.

...in worshipful submission.

...in humble faith. “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” Christ can make you clean. That is why He took on human flesh and came into this world as a man to deliver sinners and to make defiled men and women clean. Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God came into this world and lived a perfect life and died a perfect death. Jesus, God Himself, stepped out of heaven and took the form of man and came and lived a perfect, sinless life and perfectly obeyed the law of God and earned the perfect righteousness that is required to be in God’s presence. And for those who repent of their sins and turn from them and believe, submit and trust in Christ alone for their salvation from God’s wrath which we deserve for our sin, God takes our sin and places them on Christ and pours His wrath out on His own Son for our sins and He takes the perfect righteousness of Christ and puts it on us so that we can be in His presence forever. And this is

every person's greatest need---to be saved from the wrath of God for our sin. And this salvation can only be found in Christ Jesus. HE can and will cleanse all who come to him in repentance and faith. All you must do is turn to him in repentance and call upon Him to save you. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:9–10, ESV)

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