

St. Matthew

Chapter 8

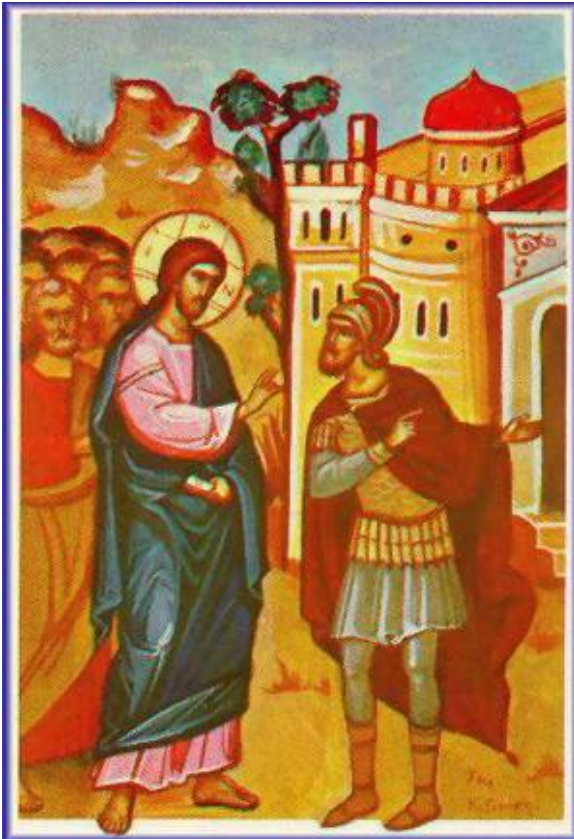
In Many and Various Ways Jesus Heals the People

Matthew (in 4:23) gives us a summary of Jesus' work, "Now Jesus went about Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people." The Sermon on the Mount was this teaching and preaching the kingdom, and now, in chapter 8, Matthew tells of Jesus healing sicknesses and all kinds of disease. As Jesus comes down off the mountain He fills His Messianic office by healing people and performing many miracles. Chapter 8 has five unique miracles and a summary of Jesus' miraculous. In the middle of these miracles are perched two brief conversations between Jesus and two of His disciples. By these miracles Jesus is "filling up" the Old Testament, with His words and His deeds.

Three Healings (8:1-17)

When Jesus finishes His sermon He comes down from the mountain. Matthew then reports three healings, each one prefaced by Jesus' travel. ("When He had come down from the mountain" [8:1]; "When He had entered Capernaum" [8:5]; "When Jesus had come into Peter's house" [8:14].)

The Cleansing of a Leper. The first miracle is the cleansing of a leper. Leprosy is a skin disease that was so prevalent and contagious in ancient times that it had its own set of detailed laws in the Levitical code. [See *Leviticus 13 and 14*] The leper was to keep distance from the camp and the people and, when approached, cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" [Leviticus 13:45] If someone came into contact The Leper is considered (ritually) unclean, unfit to approach the holy things of God. Here uncleanness is not a moral quality (there is nothing criminal about leprosy), but a matter of declared fitness to be in the presence of the Name of God which resided at the temple. One moves from unclean to clean by certain sacrifices, prescribed in Leviticus 14, and cleanliness, finally, is something declared by the priest.



Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant

The leper in our text comes to Jesus and (just like the wise men, 2:11) falls down to worship Him, and confesses his need for Jesus and His faith in Him. Jesus first reaches out His hand and touches the leper (A stunning picture of Jesus drawing near to us, even in our sin. This is the gracious beauty of Jesus' incarnation for us, that He takes hold of our sinfulness and gives us His holiness.) answers him, "I am willing." Many times Jesus' miracles are attributed to the will of the Father or the Spirit, but this miracle is done of Jesus' own will, for He is true God.

Jesus then sends the leper silently to the temple and to the priest to fulfill the Mosaic requirements [Leviticus 14]. The cleansed leper is to be a "testimony" to them, that this Jesus has not come to destroy the law, but that He is the fulfillment of it.

The Healing of the Centurion's Servant. As Jesus enters Capernaum He is approached by a Gentile soldier, a centurion who commanded one hundred men, who has need that his servant would be healed. Jesus responds, indicating that He

would come to the centurion's house, but the centurion responds in faith, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof..." Jesus commends the greatness of the centurion's faith, and his faith is seen in this:

1. He is humble, acutely aware of his own unworthiness.
2. He trusts in Jesus, knowing that His word has "authority", even to heal all diseases.

It is then, with the authority which astonished the crowds, that Jesus heals the man's servant. "From that very hour."

This expression of humility and faith, "I am not worthy that You should come under my roof," has been taken into the church's piety as part of a prayer before receiving the Lord's Supper.

The centurion's faith is occasion of a prophesy. Jesus sees this Gentile and says, "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." [8:11,12] The faith of the centurion is the picture of the faithful Gentiles who will be gathered into the true people of God. Those who are far off (in the east and the west) will be brought near and those who think they are near will be sent away destitute, into judgment.

St Augustine comments on this prophesy,



St Augustine

But the Lord (and mark this especially, Beloved, as need there is you should), though He was among the Jewish people only, even now announced beforehand that the Church should be in the whole world, for the establishment of which He would send Apostles; Himself not seen, yet believed on by the Gentiles: by the Jews seen, and put to death. For as the Lord did not in body enter into this man's house, and still, though in body absent, yet present in majesty, healed his faith, and his house; so the same Lord also was in body among the Jewish people only: among the other nations He was neither born of a Virgin, nor suffered, nor walked, nor endured His human sufferings, nor wrought His divine miracles. None of all this took place in the rest of the nations, and yet was that fulfilled which was spoken of Him, "A people whom I have not known, hath served Me." And how if it did not know Him? "Hath obeyed Me by the hearing of the ear." The Jewish nation knew, and crucified Him; the whole world besides heard and believed.

Note that Jesus binds the faith of the centurion to the healing of his servant. "Go your way; as you have believed, so let it be done for you." [8:13] How are we to understand this? Do Jesus give His gifts only in accord with the size of our faith? Does faith empower Jesus or effect His miracles? "We should not generalize this word of Jesus so as to make it mean: whatever we believe he will grant us he will grant, or that the degree of our faith insures the gift we desire. A wrong faith may be ever so strong in expecting a wrong gift; Jesus will not meet that faith and expectation, he will first correct it. And often he will do wondrous things where there is no faith present in order to produce faith." [Lenski, 333] To use Luther's words about baptism, our faith does not constitute a miracle, it receives it.

Jesus speaks and it is so. From the very instant He speaks the servant is healed.

Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed. After teaching and performing many miracles, Jesus and His disciples retire to Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, Jesus heals her, and she begins to serve them. From this text we learn about Peter's domestic situation, more than we know about his home than we do about any of the other disciples. Peter was married, and his wife's mother lived with them. From 1 Corinthians 9:5 we learn that Peter's wife accompanied him on many of his apostolic journeys.

Jesus' Miracles Summarized. From St Mark 1:21,29 we learn that all of the previous events occurred on a Sabbath. This helps us understand why the people waited until after dark to bring their sick to Him, the Sabbath would have ended at sundown. Jesus then heals them, casting out demons with a word.

Jesus' miracles and healing are a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy; this is something that Matthew wants to show. He does so by quoting Isaiah 53, "He himself took our infirmities and bore our sickness." With this quotation Matthew gives us some theological insight into Jesus' miracles. Jesus' healing are not

detached acts of omnipotence; He does not cast our sins and diseases far away. He takes them and bears them. The Greek word for “bear” is βαστάζω, “to carry (like a child in the womb), endure, bear, tolerate, pick up, etc.” When Jesus is healing He is taking the sin and sicknesses upon Himself; wrapping Himself in our infirmity and death. This is not to be understood as if Jesus is sick, gets leprosy, has a fever, etc. But just as Jesus is the sin-bearer, so He bears our sickness and death. Isaiah continues, “By His stripes we are healed.” [Isaiah 53:5] Notice that it doesn't say, “By His power we are healed,” or “By His divinity we are healed,” but “By His stripes we are healed.” It is Jesus' suffering and death that brings healing and deliverance and salvation; this is true of all of Jesus' miracles and healings, they are all brought about and accomplished by His death on the cross.

The Trip Across the Sea (8:18-34)



Storm on the Sea of Galilee, Rembrandt

Unlike most preachers today, Jesus always seems to be avoiding the crowds. So He announces a trip across the sea. This voyage is the occasion of a discussion with two of His disciples about following Him. The voyage itself is an opportunity for Jesus to rebuke the disciples little faith as well as the wind and the waves. Their arrival on the other side provides opportunity for Jesus to deliver two men from the grasp of the devil.

Following Jesus. When Jesus announces plans to travel across the sea, one of His disciples who was also a scribe(!) says, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever You go.” [8:19] This seems like a laudable confession, there are no “if’s” or “but’s”, but Jesus, who knows man’s heart, knows something of this disciple that we don’t. This disciple “is like the seed on stony ground which grew but lacked root to withstand the hot sun. He is an idealist, enthusiastic, of sanguine temperament. He is superficial and does not count the cost. He sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms and the glittering arms, and is easier to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked. It is less cruel to disillusion such a man than to let him rush in and go down to disappointment.” [Lenski, 339] To such exuberant and reckless willingness Jesus speaks a word of warning, “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” [8:20]

This is the first time that we see the title “Son of Man” in the Gospel of Matthew. It is Jesus’ favorite self-title, and He is the only one to use it (except for Stephen in his great confession before his martyrdom in Acts 7:56). The old dogmaticians used this title to express Jesus’ humanity, his human nature. But there is more to the name than this. The title derives from Daniel 7:13,14:

I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.

So the Son of Man is a title that is universal and escatological, but not, of course, to the exclusion of Jesus humility. The Son ascends into heaven because He is risen from the dead, and He is risen from the dead because He died for the sins of all people.

The second disciple comes to Jesus with an excuse, he cannot go across the sea because he is needed at his father’s funeral. There are no excuses for the disciple, none. The call of discipleship is all-embracing. To the disciple who hesitates the Lord has words of strict command, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” [8:22] The disciple is to be concerned with the words of life which come from the mouth of the Lord.

Did these two disciples remain with Jesus? The text doesn’t answer the question, perhaps leaving the question to us: are we too willing to follow Jesus not having counted the cost, or do we put any earthly affections before the call of the kingdom?

The Trip Across the Sea. Many commentaries on the Gospels have noted that the geography of the Sea of Galilee (and especially its shallowness and the deep valleys leading down to it) accounts for sudden and violent storms. Such is the case on this night. “A great tempest arose... the boat was covered in waves.” [8:24] Σεισμὸς μέγας, seismos megas is the Greek here, a deadly storm. Jesus (who



Jesus Calms the Sea

has no where to lay His head) is sleeping through it, explained by His exhaustion and His perfect faith in His heavenly Father. The disciples are not asleep. They are afraid, but their fear is mixed with a little faith. This is seen in that they forget that they are the professional fishermen, the ones who have spent countless nights battling the sea. This they forget, and look to Jesus, a carpenter who has no knowledge of sailing, for help in time of need. And yet they are afraid, as if they forgot Jesus words just spoken hours ago, “Therefore do not worry.” [6:31]

Jesus wakes, rebukes the disciples and then the waves, and then there is complete calm. Perhaps the Psalm would have come to mind, “Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.” [Psalms 65:7] We know how this miracle made impress on their mind, “They marveled.” [8:27] Who could this Man be but God?

Two Demon-Possessed Men Healed. The arrival of the boat on the other side of the Sea, the “land of the Gergesenes,” is the occasion of Jesus rescuing two men from the grasp of demons. They are described as “exceedingly fierce so that no one could pass that way.” [8:28] But those who cause others to fear are themselves afraid of Jesus, and tremble, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of Go? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” [8:29] News of Jesus' arrival had spread faster among the demons than among the people. Jesus' arrival is good news for us, which means bad news for the demons. Indeed Jesus came for the express purpose of crushing the devil's head. [Genesis 3:15] “For this reason the Son of God was manifest, to destroy the works of the devil.” [1 John 3:8]

The multitude of demons who tormented these two men request of Jesus that He would send them into the herd of 2,000 swine instead of into the abyss. Pigs were unclean according to the Torah [*i.e. Leviticus 11:7*], and thus raising pigs was illegal. The demons take care of this black-market bacon, for when Jesus casts them out of the two men He gives them permission to enter the pigs, who then rush headlong into the sea, destroying the herd. It is the nature of demons to bring such violent death. The people of the area whose livelihood was bound to the pigs are afraid. They care nothing for the miracle and the deliverance of the two men, but simply want Jesus out of town.