

The Law of God was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Scriptures tell us that when he came down from God's presence to join the people of Israel, his face shined with the glory of God. Moses had to wear a veil just to walk among the people because they could not bear to be in his presence.

Jesus had His own glory that was already veiled when He was born into this world (John 1:14). He didn't shine as He came down from the mountain after preaching His famous Sermon on the Mount but the truth He proclaimed was no less significant and earth shattering.

Large crowds attended the Sermon on the Mount because He was teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel, and healing every kind of disease imaginable, even demon possession (Matthew 4:23-25). These crowds continued to follow Jesus after His sermon (Matthew 8:1). Remember their response as He concluded the message; they were amazed because they never heard a man teach with such authority before (Matthew 7:28-29).

The Sermon on the Mount is followed by two chapters that largely focus on specific miracles performed by Jesus Christ. It is significant that such an important message is preceded and followed by displays of God's power. Why? Read Exodus 4:1-5, John 3:1-2, Acts 2:22 and 1 Corinthians 14:22.

These chapters will also deepen our appreciation for the power and love of Jesus Christ.

Touching a Leper (8:1-4)

The significance of this miracle may escape us unless we take the time to examine it closely. Jesus was approached by a leper who sought healing. Let's begin by understanding a bit more about leprosy.

The word, leper in Hebrew is derived from the word which means to scourge or whip. In Greek, the word refers to the scales of a fish. In Latin, leper is a term synonymous with being defiled.

LEPROSY

Generic term applied to a variety of skin disorders from psoriasis to true leprosy. Its symptoms ranged from white patches on the skin to running sores to the loss of digits on the fingers and toes.

Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

What was the common connection between leprosy and sin in the Old Testament? Read Numbers 12:10-15, and 2 Kings 5:25-27, and 2 Chronicles 26:19-23.

The very appearance of the leper before Christ was a scandal. Lepers were supposed to isolate themselves from the community, or be isolated by force. They were banned from society (Leviticus 13:45-46 and Numbers 5:2). This was a communicable disease that resulted in physical destruction and social devastation. Modern-day leprosy is transmitted by prolonged close contact and transmission by nasal mucus. No one wanted to be around a leper.¹ There was no known cure for leprosy save a miracle from God (2 Kings 5:7). What did this leper risk by coming to Christ?

When the leper approached Christ, he bowed down before Him (translated as worshipped Him in the King James Version) and simply said that if Jesus wanted to, He could make the man clean. Right now, he was anything but clean. His identity to all was, “Unclean”! Jesus’ response probably shocked everyone, especially the leper. He reached out and touched him. The word, “touch” in the Greek literally means to “attach oneself to”. ***This was more than a brush; it was a press or a grasp of His hand, probably upon the man’s skin.*** Did Jesus need to touch this man to heal Him?



We know what Jesus risked by touching him (at least in the eyes of men). Why did Jesus touch him? There are probably a few good answers to this question. The following two answers seem to strike my heart the most.

1. He _____ sin for us. (See Isaiah 53:4-6 and 2 Corinthians 5:21)
2. He _____ all sin for us. (See Romans 6:8-9 and Revelation 1:18)

The compassion and power of Christ was on full display in this miracle. As we read, the man was ***instantly*** made clean.

The man approached Jesus with an important condition, “if you will”. Is this an important part of making a request of God? Read Matthew 6:10 and Luke 22:42.

Is it always God’s will to heal? Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

¹ Picture taken from Rising Star Outreach, Leprosy in India.

It was Jesus' will to heal the man. In a sense, this is a picture of salvation, in which Jesus is unafraid to touch us in our sin, but when He comes He takes it away. He is not willing that any should die in sin but that all would have eternal life (2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus ordered the man not to tell anyone but to go directly to the priest and make the necessary sacrifice as a testimony to them. Why the secrecy? Read Mark 1:40-45 and Matthew 8:18.

The Old Testament law provided a test to determine if leprosy was healed. The thing was, it probably didn't happen very often, if ever. Remember, leprosy was generally only healed by a miracle. Consider what type of testimony this would be to the priests. It would certainly get their attention. This was not something they got to do very often. Surely a prophet was among them!

A Gentile with Faith (8:5-13)

Capernaum became Jesus' new home after he left Nazareth (Matthew 4:13). He performed many miracles there, but ultimately the people of Capernaum would reject Him too (Matthew 11:23-24). As Jesus entered Capernaum He was approached by a Roman centurion who had a sick servant at home. It is important for us to address a parallel account of this meeting found in Luke's gospel and deal with the differences up front in order to limit confusion. After reading Matthew 8:5-13, read Luke 7:1-10. What are the differences?

How do we reconcile the differences? Specifically, Matthew 8:5-13 tells of the centurion coming to Jesus and in Luke's gospel we learn that the centurion sent others to Jesus.

The centurion's servant was suffering from palsy and was grievously tormented, as translated in the King James. What does this mean?

Palsy –

Grievously tormented –

ROMAN CENTURIONS

The New English Translation First Edition Notes state, "A centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army or one of the auxiliary territorial armies, commanding a centuria of (nominally) 100 men. The responsibilities of centurions were broadly similar to modern junior officers, but there was a wide gap in social status between them and officers, and relatively few were promoted beyond the rank of senior centurion. The Roman troops stationed in Judea were auxiliaries, who would normally be rewarded with Roman citizenship after 25 years of service." The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary states, "In Mark 15:39 a centurion who witnessed the crucifixion identified Jesus as the Son of God. In Acts 10 the conversion of the centurion Cornelius marked the beginning of the church's outreach to the Gentile world. In Acts 27:3 the centurion Julius treated the Apostle Paul with courtesy. These passages illustrate the generally favorable impression made by the centurions who appear in the New Testament. They were usually career soldiers, and they formed the real backbone of the Roman military force." Despite the positive description of centurions in the New Testament, they were typically ostracized in Jewish society, just like the lepers. They were the face of an oppressive Roman government to the Jews.

Why did this Centurion oppose Jesus coming into his house? To provide some context, consider a similar situation in which the Apostle Peter was directed by God to go to the home of a centurion named Cornelius. Read Acts 10:1-33. What similarities do you find between these two events?

Back to the question, why did the centurion prevent Jesus from coming into his home?

Jesus uses this opportunity to compare the faith this man had with the faith the Jews were exercising. Jesus focused His ministry almost completely on the Jewish people (Matthew 15:24). What did this man recognize about Christ? What was exceptional about his faith?

What might have been the Jew's obstacle to their faith? Read John 4:46-54.

What expectations do you have that limit your faith?

As the centurion provided his example of authority, he was stating his faith in Jesus' complete authority over disease, without limitation. Jesus was amazed at the man's faith. It was a stronger faith than He had encountered in any Israelite. This included the fledgling apostles and disciples. Jesus then provides very important insight about the nature of His kingdom.

Jesus states that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. Given the context, it is clear that Jesus is not talking about physical Jews returning to the homeland. He is speaking about Gentiles (non-Jews) joining Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom.

The phrase "sit down" in the KJV actually means, "to recline" as the Jews would do at a table during a meal. Jesus was referring to a future feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. The concept of a coming feast was not new to the Jews; they expected such an event. Isaiah 25:6-9 describes a feast to be made by the Lord. Read this passage and consider the prophecy through Jewish eyes.

Now consider what Jesus said to them. What do you think their initial response would be?

First, let's talk about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Who are they and what is their significance?

Jesus speaks of Gentiles joining Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. Also read Luke 13:28-30, a situation in which Jesus uses similar language. What does this imply about the position of these Old Testament saints in the kingdom?

Jesus refers to the "children of the kingdom". Who are they? Read Matthew 3:9-10 and 21:42-43.

The Jews heard John preach that they needed to personally repent and not count on being a descendant of Abraham to save them from the wrath to come. Jesus takes this message one step further by casting a vision of the kingdom that included faithful Gentiles and excluded faithless Jews. How does the Apostle Paul describe the revelation that the gospel is also meant for Gentiles? Read Ephesians 3:1-6.

Jesus concludes by stating that the children of the kingdom would be cast into outer darkness, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. While you have likely heard this phrase before, this is the first time it was spoken by Jesus. What image is Jesus conveying of hell?

The Centurian's faith was not in vain. Jesus healed his servant that very moment. As we find in Luke 7:1-10, by the time the Centurian's messengers returned to his house, they found the servant to be well. Faith placed in Jesus is never wasted.

Prophecy Fulfilled (8:14-17)

Jesus has just touched a leper and began to go to a Gentile's house to heal his servant. Is there anything He won't do? The next miracle is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. To American eyes this seems pretty tame in comparison. To a Jewish audience (which most scholars tend to believe to be the initial audience of this gospel), this next healing puts an exclamation point upon Jesus' compassion.

JEWISH PRAYERS

"Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe who has created me a human and not beast, a man and not a woman, an Israelite and not a gentile, circumcised and not uncircumcised, free and not slave."

This is part of an old Jewish prayer dating back to about the time of the Apostle Paul that was discovered in the Cairo Genizah. Still today observant Jewish men recite a daily prayer thanking God for not making them a gentile, a slave or a woman.

This prayer reflected the prevalent mentality among Jewish men. They considered themselves superior to Gentiles, slaves, and women. Christ's ministry challenged this perception head on. Several years later, the Apostle Paul (a former Pharisee) was inspired to write, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:27-28).

Given this knowledge, what do you see in the progression of miracles: the leper, the Gentile's slave, and Peter's mother-in-law?

Peter's mother-in-law had a fever. She must have been very sick because the demands of daily life were typically very high on people in that day and they likely pressed on through most illnesses. We read that Jesus touched her hand and healed her. What was her response to His healing? What lesson can we take away from this?

The next passage mentions that when evening came, many demon-possessed individuals were brought to Him for healing. The townspeople may have waited until evening because it was the Jewish Sabbath and the Pharisees frowned on any being healed on the Sabbath day. Again, that didn't cause a problem for Jesus.

We read that the demons were cast out "with a word". What does this imply?

Finally, we read that He, "healed all that were sick". Based on what we've read so far in this chapter, what do these words mean?

We are now told that all we just read was recorded so that we would recognize the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, which says, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." This is a partial quotation of Isaiah 53:4. The actual quotation from Isaiah (KJV) is found below.



Prophecy

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." - Isaiah 53:4

What differences do you notice?

How can these differences be explained? There are two good explanations:

- 1) Words sometimes have more than _____ meaning. The Hebrew word for grief is alternatively translated as: malady, anxiety, calamity, disease, grief, or sickness. The Hebrew word for sorrow is alternatively translated as: anguish, affliction, grief, pain, or sorrow. Which word is chosen depends on the context. Sometimes it isn't totally clear.
- 2) Jesus and the New Testament writers quoted from the _____, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. When you go from Hebrew to Greek to Aramaic to English, different word choices sometimes occur. We best understand the correct meaning from the context.

Again, we find there are reasonable explanations for what first appears to be conflicts in the Scriptures.

Let's get to the bottom of the prophecy. All these miracles recorded pointed to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus. This was only one of a multitude of prophecies Jesus fulfilled. How did Jesus take our infirmities and bare our sickness?

- 1) He felt our pain _____ (Hebrews 4:15).
- 2) He personally took our _____ upon Him, the root cause of our sicknesses (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- 3) He has the _____ to take them from us permanently (Revelation 21:1-4).

As we close this section, read Isaiah 53:1-6 to get a sense of the full context of this prophecy. So far in His ministry, Jesus has demonstrated both His amazing wisdom and love. Remember what John 1:17 says? The law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. We already know the end of the story. Isaiah's prophecy came true; Jesus was ultimately rejected.

When we step back, we realize that Jesus is the complete expression of God's love toward us, yet men chose to kill Him. This was no accident; it was the rebellion of hearts turned against God. The crucifixion of Jesus reveals both His love and our wickedness. Surely, we are worthy of hell because we are no different. Surely God is merciful and loving because He died for us anyway that we might be forgiven. What a Savior!