

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.

God surrounded new revelation with signs of His power demonstrated through the messenger. Jesus came not only with powerful words but with signs and miracles that attested to His identity as a messenger from God. It is as if God is saying, "Listen to Him; He is My Anointed"!

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 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. Leprosy was a judgment from God against Miriam because of her rebellion, against Gehazi because of his greed and lies, and against King Uzziah because of his pride and lack of regard for God's laws. Because of this pattern, many assumed that those with leprosy had more than a physical ailment, but also a sin being judged by God.

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?

His leprosy was likely contagious and no one wanted him around. Joining himself to a large multitude of people, such as thronged around Jesus, was extremely risky. Those who recognized who and what he was might have incited a mob to stone him or thrust him away.

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 was probably a shock to 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?



No, there is no indication this was necessary at all. In the next few verses we read about Jesus healing a Centurion's servant from miles away. The touch was not necessary.

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 **became** sin for us. (See Isaiah 53:4-6 and 2 Corinthians 5:21)
2. He **overcame** 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. **Yes, prayer should always be made according to God's will.**

Is it always God's will to heal? Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. **No, it is not always God's will to heal us. He sometimes has greater purposes for our trials than healing.**

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. **Such publication of miracles would drive everyone out to see Him. It would inhibit His ministry, which was more than miracles; it was teaching and preaching the good news of the kingdom.**

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? **Luke tells us that the servant was about to die and that rather than coming to Jesus, the centurion sent some Jewish elders to Jesus on his behalf. Luke also tells us the Jewish elders spoke highly of the centurion and his kindness toward the Jewish people by building them a synagogue. It was after Jesus started going to the centurion's home that Luke tells us that the centurion sent word through friends stating that he was unworthy to be in Jesus' presence. Matthew provides additional emphasis on the significance of Gentile faith.**

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. **There is no conflict here. For example, a judicial summons delivered by registered mail is no less official than a judge coming to your door. The US Ambassador speaks to other world leaders on behalf of our president. Matthew recounts the substance of what happened: the centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant. Luke recounts the specifics: the centurion requested Jesus' assistance by way of his friends. The concept of authority, spoken of in both passages, is operative here. The centurion, like Christ, was a man of authority.**

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

Palsy – a shortened form of the word, "paralysis"

Grievously tormented – is suffering terribly. In Luke we learn that he was almost dead.

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?

In both cases, the centurions were moral men who were respected by the Jews. Both centurions also dispatched others to go to Jesus and Peter. This did not lessen their sincerity.

Back to the question, why did the centurion prevent Jesus from coming into his home? As Peter explained to Cornelius, a Gentile centurion would know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to visit him in his home (Acts 10:28). The centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 did not want to do anything to bring reproach upon Christ in the eyes of others. He knew he was unworthy of Jesus' presence in 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? His faith was unencumbered by limitations upon Jesus' power or expectations of how He had to answer. At a minimum, he truly believed Jesus had authority over all disease and by His will alone, He could abolish them.

What might have been the Jew's obstacle to their faith? Read John 4:46-54. This nobleman knew that Jesus could heal his son, but expected it to be done a certain way. He thought Jesus would have to be physically present. Jesus wrought this miracle despite the man's lack of total faith. Sometimes our expectations and "knowledge" work against us. The Gentiles were free of a lot of the Jewish baggage built up over centuries of twisting God's revelation.

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. **The Jews envisioned a feast in the coming kingdom, a feast in which the Messiah would be present and they would have unlimited food and drink and all of the evil oppressive Gentiles would be destroyed.**

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

There had to be shock, disgust at the thought of Gentiles in the kingdom, and perhaps some degree of Holy Spirit wrought fear. If their station as physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not enough to secure their entrance into the kingdom, what would be?

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

They are the patriarchs of the Jewish family and religion. Abraham is known as the father of the faithful, even to this day. They were known saints and the forefathers of Jesus' Jewish audience.

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? **It seems to imply that they have a part in the kingdom and are not excluded from it by virtue of being Old Testament saints.**

Jesus refers to the "children of the kingdom". Who are they? Read Matthew 3:9-10 and 21:42-43. **The children of the kingdom are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had the first shot at the gospel of the kingdom by virtue of their Jewish descent, but that did not guarantee their position within the kingdom. Similarly, our children have an initial opportunity to hear the gospel, but being a child of the kingdom is not the same as being a part of the kingdom.**

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. **He describes it as a mystery, meaning that it was something largely unknown or understood by the Jewish people in previous ages, but was now brought to light by the revelation of Christ.**

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? **Outer darkness refers to separation (outer) and the absence of God (no light). Weeping is synonymous with mourning and gnashing of teeth is to grind your teeth because of great pain. Hell is a place of separation, mourning, and pain.**

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? **Jesus is breaking down the stereotypes and showing that His healing is for all men. There are no barriers. His salvation will cross all barriers.**

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? **Her response was to rise and serve Jesus and the other disciples. This is a very appropriate response to Jesus' touch. It should be our response as well. All who are saved were touched by Christ and healed of our sin-sickness. The proper response is to rise and serve Jesus and our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is what church is for.**

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?

It shows us the complete power of Christ. Like His Father, what He says is sure, steadfast, and sufficient. When God says, "let there be light", there is light. When He tells a demon to be gone, it is gone. This phrase also implies that Jesus performed a mass miracle, meaning that with one word, all the demons from all the individuals gathered there were cast out.

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? All means all, without discrimination based on disease, social status, gender, or even ethnicity. All means that He had sufficient power to heal every situation brought to Him; none were outside His reach. Jesus' power and compassion were complete.

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?

The actual quotation of Isaiah 53:4 states that He bore our griefs and sorrows. The quotation of this passage in Matthew states that He took our infirmities and sicknesses.

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

- 1) Words sometimes have more than **one** 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 **Septuagint**, 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 **vicariously** (Hebrews 4:15).
- 2) He personally took our **sin** upon Him, the root cause of our sicknesses (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- 3) He has the **power** 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!