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Pursuing the Kingdom: The King Who Restores Our Brokenness

Matthew 8:1-17

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As we come to chapter 8, we arrive at a major turning point in the Gospel according to Matthew. For the last three chapters, Jesus has been teaching and preaching on a hillside along the Sea of Galilee. And during this “Sermon on the Mount,” He has described what the values, character and righteousness of the kingdom of God look like. And the crowds have listened in amazement as Jesus taught, as Matthew tells us at the end of chapter 7, the people were “astonished because Jesus taught as one who had authority.”

And now, Matthew begins showing us what that authority looks like in action. You see, Jesus did not come simply to preach about the kingdom, He came to embody it. The authority He displayed in what He said is now going to be revealed through what He does. And what is striking is the kind of people He moves toward. We'll see in our passage today, and as we go along in our study of the Book of Matthew, that He touches lepers, He heals Gentiles and He enters homes filled with sickness. He moves toward the broken, the overlooked, the unclean and the desperate.

And the fact that God moves toward us matters because in many ways, this section in chapter 8 reveals the very heart of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not simply about instructions for good, moral living or outward religious performance. It is about the arrival of the King who restores what sin has broken.

And Matthew intentionally places these miracles immediately after the Sermon on the Mount because he wants us to see something clearly. The King who demands righteousness is also the King who provides mercy. The One who calls people to follow Him is also the One who has authority to heal, restore, cleanse and to save.

What we're going to see in the miracles in our passage today is that the people who encounter Jesus respond with humble faith because He alone has the authority and compassion to restore broken lives. So, if you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God from the Book of Matthew 8:1-17 [Read Passage]

Now, the first truth Matthew shows us is that the Kingdom of God welcomes the unclean through the compassion of Jesus (vs. 1-4). Matthew writes, “When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. “When he came down...” One of the beautiful themes that runs throughout Scripture is the movement of God toward broken people. From the very beginning, after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and hid themselves, it was God who came searching for them. Do you remember? It was God who asked, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9) And throughout the Old Testament, God continually moved toward His wandering, weak and rebellious people with covenant mercy.

And ultimately, in Jesus, we see the clearest picture of this truth. You see, the gospel is not primarily the story of humanity fighting and climbing its way back to God, but of God graciously moving toward us in mercy and redemption. As Paul writes in Romans 5:8, “while we were still sinners...,” while we were more than happy going our own way in our

rebellion against a Holy God, while we were still His enemies “...Christ died for us.” The kingdom of God is built on the reality that the King has come near to rescue the broken.

And so, if you feel broken, or overlooked or even unclean this morning, I have good news for you, Jesus has not abandoned you, but is constantly pursuing you to bring restoration to what the enemy has stolen.

Matthew continues that as Jesus came down from the mountain, “...behold, a leper came to him.” That word “behold” is important as it is there to draw the readers attention to something shocking. A leper has approached Jesus. In the ancient world, leprosy was a devastating skin disease that lead to severe pain and deformity and ultimately death. In actuality, “leprosy” was a catch-all term that referred to a variety of severe skin diseases.

But beyond the physical suffering, the social and spiritual consequences were crushing. According to Old Testament law, lepers were considered ceremonially unclean. They were isolated from society, separated from worship and often forced to live outside the community in leper colonies. This wasn't to be harsh or cruel, but it was practical, and not only that, it was commanded by God (Lev. 13&14).

Many of these diseases were contagious and, for the survival of the community, it was necessary for those infected to be put out of the camp. But like everything else, this “excommunication” was taken too far so that these people were thought to be under the judgement of God, cast aside and quite literally left for dead.

Imagine the loneliness of that kind of life. Not able to hug your family and friends. Not able to have normal relationships. You couldn't go to the synagogue to worship. No closeness with anyone. Everywhere these people went, they carried shame and separation from the greater community.

And in many ways, leprosy became a living picture of what sin does to us as humans. Sin isolates. It corrupts. It separates us from others, and more importantly, from God. And yet this man comes to Jesus. And notice his posture, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” That is remarkable faith. He does not question Jesus' ability. He questions whether Jesus is willing.

And honestly, we still wrestle with that same fear today. We may believe Jesus has the power, but we wonder if He would truly receive someone like me. We carry shame from past failures, addictions, wounds, hidden sins, broken relationships or years of wandering from God. And deep inside, we wonder, “Would Jesus really move toward me?”

Well, we get our answer in one of the most beautiful moments in the gospels in vs. 3, “And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...” That sentence would have stunned Matthew's readers and certainly would have stunned anyone who was part of the “great crowd following Jesus” that day and saw it happen. You see, people avoided touching lepers.

First, as mentioned earlier, many of diseases that fell under the category of leprosy were contagious so there was a practical reason. But also, the law stated that touching something, or someone, that was unclean made a person who touched them ceremonially unclean as well. But when Jesus touches the leper, the opposite happens. By choosing to reach out and touch this leper, Jesus demonstrated that his grace and holiness were stronger than the ritual “impurity” of the disease.

And that is the power of the kingdom. Jesus is not contaminated by brokenness.

He overcomes it. Jesus has already stated that He came to “fulfill” the Law, not to destroy it in Matt. 5:17. His healings demonstrated that the ultimate purpose of God's law is restoration and bringing life out of death.

And don’t miss the significance of the touch itself. Jesus could have healed him with only a word, as we'll see later in the text. But before healing his disease, Jesus restores this man’s dignity.

For years, this man may have lived without human touch. And Jesus reaches out His hand and touches him, for that is the heart of Christ, and says, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy disappears. Notice how effortless the miracle is for Jesus. There is no struggle. No ritual. No uncertainty. He simply speaks and the cleansing comes. The word “immediately” demonstrated that His power goes beyond ordinary human or natural means and bore witness to who Jesus was, God incarnate.

Jesus then instructs the man to tell no one and to go present himself to the priest according to the Law of Moses. Now, Jesus often, especially early in His ministry, commanded people to be quiet about what He had done for them. And He did this because He wanted to temper the excitement of the crowds until the proper time for Him to be fully revealed to the people as He says in other places, “for my time has not yet come.” And he tells the man to show himself to the priests because the priest would have been the only ones that would have been able to pronounce this man clean and give him permission to enter back into the community.

But this was not simply about legal a procedure according to the law, it was a testimony. The priests would have to acknowledge that something extraordinary had happened. But we don’t get to see the rest of his story as Matthew moves on from the Jewish leper to a Roman centurion, a Gentile, showing us that that the kingdom of God extends far beyond our expectations (vs. 5-13).

Matthew tells us that a centurion approaches Jesus in Capernaum. Now, we saw back in Matthew 4:13 that this is where Jesus “dwelt” and becomes the “home base” of His ministry. It is also the hometown of five of the twelve disciples: Peter (which we read about in this text), Andrew (his brother), James and John the sons of Zebedee, and Matthew the tax collector and the author of this book.

Now, it's important to realize that a centurion was a Roman officer who was in charge of 100 soldiers, but He was also a Gentile and part of the army that was occupying Israel. To the Jewish people, he would have been an enemy and an outsider. Yet once again, Jesus responds to someone we might not expect.

And the centurion says, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And right away we see something compassionate about this man. Roman servants were often treated as expendable property, yet this centurion deeply cares about his servant’s suffering.

Now, we don't know from the text how this centurion knew about Jesus or even about how he came to believe that Jesus could heal his servant. The TV series “The Chosen” presents a scenario...but that's just a guess and what we call “cinematic license.” The truth is we don't know how he heard of Jesus, but the point is that he did and he trusts that Jesus can do what he is asking. And Jesus responds, “I will come and heal him.”

But then comes one of the most remarkable statements of faith in all of the Gospels. The centurion says in vs. 8, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

What humility. What faith. This man understands authority because he lives under authority himself. He explains that soldiers obey his commands because of the authority of Rome behind him. And he recognizes something extraordinary about Jesus, that He possesses authority over sickness itself. He believes Jesus does not even need to be physically present, but that a word from Jesus is enough.

And we're told that Jesus marvels at the centurion's answer and that alone is astonishing. The eternal Son of God marvels at this man's faith. Vs. 10, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.” Some translations even use the phrase “great faith.”

As we have seen, and will continue to see in the Book of Matthew, Jesus surprisingly labels His closest disciples as having "little faith" because they repeatedly allowed immediate storms, anxieties and distractions to choke out their trust in His presence. We've already seen this in ch. 6:30 when Jesus speaks about our worry over our lives and what we will eat and what we will wear and not trusting Jesus with our daily needs.

On the other hand, Jesus typically reserves the praise of "great faith" for outsiders, like this Roman centurion, who possesses no scriptural background but fully recognized the absolute authority of Jesus. And this contrast reminds us that we can have a front-row seat to the things of God and still sink in fear if we focus on our circumstances. Ultimately, great faith does not require a flawless life. It simply requires taking our eyes off our circumstances and placing our total trust in Jesus alone.

Well, then Jesus gives a sobering warning with a glorious promise in vs. 11-12, that many will come from the east and west to sit at the feast in the kingdom of heaven, while some who assumed they belonged will be cast out. Remember Jesus' warning back in 7:21, “Many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord’ and I will say to them, ‘Depart from me; I never knew you.’” Matthew is showing us something crucial about the kingdom of God. Entrance into the kingdom is not based on ethnicity, heritage or outward religion. It is based on faith in Jesus, the Son, and promised Messiah, of God.

And this would have shocked many Jewish listeners. Gentiles were not expected to be central participants in God's kingdom promises. Yet Jesus says people from every nation, from the east to the west, will gather together in the kingdom through faith.

And so, the centurion reminds us that pursuing the kingdom begins with humble dependence upon Jesus. And notice again the authority of Jesus. He simply says, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed” in vs. 13. And at that very moment, once again, “immediately” the servant is healed. No distance limits the authority of Jesus. No barrier restrains His power. He simply speaks and the servant is healed even though he was several miles away.

But Matthew is not finished showing us the compassion of Jesus. He now brings us into a home filled with sickness and ordinary suffering reminding us that the Kingdom of God brings restoration to the broken. (vs. 14-17)

Matthew writes in vs. 14, “And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.” Again, notice the progression here. He comes down

from the mountain, into Capernaum and then into Peter's house. Also, notice that it says Peter had a "mother-in-law" which means Peter was married. Another example of how the disciples were just ordinary men with ordinary jobs and families whom Jesus called to do extraordinary things.

Now, this scene feels quieter and more personal than the previous miracles. There are no crowds mentioned. No dramatic requests. Just a home touched by sickness. And that matters because not all suffering is public or dramatic. Some pain exists quietly behind closed doors and no one else, or maybe just a few, even know about it. The struggles that are too private to share, the worries that you are too embarrassed to let anyone know about, the quiet desires of your heart that, up to this point, have gone unmet.

But Jesus enters the house, and in this instance, he touches Peter's mother-in-law's hand and the fever immediately leaves her. Jesus healed this woman with a gentle touch of His hand. Her sickness was much less severe than the leper, yet Jesus still cared for her reminding us that Jesus cares for even our, seemingly, smaller problems as well.

And then Matthew adds something beautiful, "and she rose and began to serve him." Her response to His restoration is service. And that is to be the pattern of the kingdom. Grace leads to grateful devotion. Jesus has healed her and her first response is to serve him and she serves as an example for us. For God has done so much for us how can we do anything else but serve him. Lord, help us.

Then Matthew broadens the picture again in vs. 16 "That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick." Notice the repeated emphasis on authority. With a word. With a touch. With complete power.

What is being demonstrated here is that the kingdom of God is invading the brokenness of this fallen world. Sickness, oppression, uncleanness and suffering all begin retreating in the presence of the all powerful King of creation itself. And Matthew tells us this fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4 which is a portion of the Scripture which was read for us earlier, "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Matthew is pointing beyond the physical healing to the deeper mission of Christ. These miracles are signs of something greater.

Jesus did not ultimately come simply to remove temporary sickness. For every person healed in Matthew 8 would eventually die just like everybody else. But the miracles point toward the greater reality that Jesus came to bear the consequences of sin itself.

At the cross, Jesus would carry our ultimate uncleanness. He would bear our guilt, our shame and the judgment that we deserved. The One who touched lepers would eventually be treated like the outcast Himself, so sinners could be brought near to God.

No, Jesus did not [remain distant] from human suffering. He willingly left the realms of glory and stepped into the brokenness of humanity. As the late Tim Keller, theologian and former Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, once wrote, "Jesus [left] all His glory so that we could be clothed in it." And that is the heart of the gospel.

So how do we apply this passage? What does it mean for us? First, we need to bring our brokenness to Jesus. The leper came with his uncleanness. The centurion came with his helplessness. Peter's household faced sickness. And Jesus welcomed them all. No matter what burden you carry today, whether its sin, shame, fear, grief, addiction,

disappointment or exhaustion, whatever it is, you do not need to hide it from Jesus. Bring your brokenness to Him and let Him heal and restore your soul.

Second, we need to pursue a humble faith. The centurion recognized his unworthiness yet trusted fully in Christ's authority. True faith is not self-confidence, it is confidence in Jesus. We need to come to the end of ourselves and fall on Jesus in total surrender because He is the only one we can ultimately trust in.

Third, we need to remember that Jesus cares about both our spiritual and physical brokenness. The kingdom of God is not detached from suffering. Jesus moves toward hurting people with compassion. Lots of people were brought to Him that night and He had compassion and healed them all. Nothing is outside of His power to heal. Bring it all to Him.

Fourth, we need to respond to God's grace in our lives with service. Peter's mother-in-law rose and served Jesus. When we truly encounter Jesus, He transforms the direction of our lives and we owe Him our allegiance and our service. As the familiar hymn goes, "Jesus paid all, all to Him I owe."

As we close, these verses give us a beautiful picture of what the kingdom of God looks like. The King comes down from the mountain. And where does He go? Toward the leper. Toward the outsider. Toward the suffering. Toward the broken. Toward the oppressed. And that is the heart of Jesus.

And the miracles in this chapter are not random displays of power. They are demonstrations of who Jesus is. The King who has authority over uncleanness. Authority over sickness. Authority over distance. Authority over demons. Authority over brokenness itself. But most importantly, He has authority to save.

And Matthew wants us to see that pursuing the kingdom of God is not simply about admiring the teachings of Jesus. It is about trusting the King Himself. The leper trusted His willingness. The centurion trusted His authority. Peter's household trusted and experienced His restoring touch.

And today, the invitation remains the same. Come to the King. Bring your brokenness. Trust His authority. Receive His mercy. Because the kingdom of God is not built on our own strength. It is built on the compassion and power of Jesus.

The same King who stretched out His hand and touched the leper would eventually stretch out His hands on a cross for lost sinners. And through His death and resurrection, He now offers cleansing, restoration, forgiveness and eternal life to all who come to Him by faith. So pursue the kingdom by pursuing the King. For in Christ, the broken are welcomed, the unclean are cleansed and the hopeless are restored. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the compassion and authority of Jesus. Thank You that He is not distant from our suffering, our weakness, or our sin, but that He moves toward broken people with mercy and grace.

Lord, we confess that like the leper, we often come carrying uncleanness and shame. Like the centurion, we recognize our unworthiness. And like those gathered in Peter's home, we bring before You our burdens, sicknesses, fear and needs.

Teach us to trust fully in Christ's authority and goodness. Strengthen our faith so that we would pursue Your kingdom with humility, dependence and obedience. Help us to rest in the truth that no brokenness is beyond Your power to redeem.

And for those of us who are weary, suffering, discouraged or burdened today, we pray that we would experience the compassionate touch of Christ in a fresh and new way.

May our lives reflect grateful devotion to the King who has cleansed us, restored us, and welcomed us into His kingdom. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, our Savior, Healer and King. Amen.

Benediction: May you go in the grace and compassion of Jesus, the King who welcomes the broken, cleanses the unclean and restores the weary. May your faith rest confidently in His authority and your heart remain steadfast in pursuing the kingdom of God. And may the mercy of the Lord strengthen you to walk in hope, humility and joyful service. Amen.