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**I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 8.** We have now made our way down the Mountain, if you will, where Jesus preached His magnificent "Sermon on the Mount." And it's from this point forward, through the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, that the Apostle Matthew is going to record a series of 10 miracles performed by Jesus, which will be His credentials and the proof that He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. They will be the signs, which convincingly show His deity, for only God can do the things that Jesus will do in the next two chapters. The sad thing is: the Jews will conclude in chapter 12 that Jesus is not of God but of the devil. They will witness the miracles and still refuse to believe.

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Jesus will do everything possible to prove His deity to the Jews, but they will reject Him. You, too, have that choice today. You have it every time you walk into this room. You can accept Jesus and His offer to save you, or you can be like the Jews and reject Him. Remember, Matthew's Gospel is to a Jewish audience, and he's giving evidence to them that Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised One, the Savior of the World that they've been praying for and looking for His coming for centuries.

So, Jesus preached a sermon...and now He's going to prove what He's been talking about. Why must He prove it? Because a first century Jew is going to say: "Prove it! Prove that we should trust you to be THE WAY to God and NOT what we've been taught which is WRONG! Prove it!"

And so chapters 8 and 9 are the answer to that challenge. Jesus came off that mountain outside of Capernaum and He showed beyond a shadow of doubt that He was God in the flesh. And how do we know He was God in the flesh? Because only God could do what we're going to see over the next two chapters.

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Church family, in a way, this message this morning, is an introductory message for where we're headed through the rest of the summer. Over the next 2½ months we're going to see the power of Jesus. Let me show you where we're headed:

**"The Power of Jesus"**

1. Jesus' Power to Cleanse
  2. Jesus' Power to Heal
  3. Jesus' Power to Call Us
  4. Jesus' Power Over Nature
  5. Jesus' Power Over the Supernatural
  6. Jesus' Power Over Sin
  7. The Power of the Call of Jesus
  8. Jesus' Power to Change from Old to New
  9. Jesus' Power Over Death
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And so begin today with a miracle. A miracle of the healing of a leper... Now understand, the first three miracles we're going to look at have to do with the physical healing. Jesus is going to heal a leper, a paralyzed person and a lady with a fever. Jesus comes straight off that mountainside outside of Capernaum and He goes from preaching to healing. He once again begins at the lowest level of human need: the physical. You see, Jesus cares about our physical needs. Jesus is so kind and so good and so loving and so sympathetic to our plight in these fragile jars of clay.

And so in the first three miracles we're going to see Jesus go to the lowest of the low of that day: a leper, a Gentile and a woman. And that fact that Jesus would offer healing to a leper, a Gentile and a lady absolutely crushed the pride of the Pharisees, because they wouldn't be caught dead acknowledging any of those three classes of people. Yet, Jesus placed His love, His care and His emphasis in proving that He was indeed the Son of God, by committing Himself to the humble, and to the meek, and to the outcast of that first-century culture.

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Look at it with me...

#### **Matthew 8:1-4**

**1** When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. **2** And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." **3** And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** 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."

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Once again, we see here that Jesus has become very popular. Matthew records in verse 1 that "great crowds followed him." Why? Was it because they loved Him? Was it because they adored Him? Was it because they believed He was the Messiah? Was it because they were curious? Well, the answer is probably "all of the above."

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And I want you to remember, if you go back and look at the end of Matthew chapter 4, which is right before Jesus preached The Sermon on the Mount, you'll see that He was already healing people. Look back with me at Matthew 4.

#### **Matthew 4:23-25**

**23** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

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Take a look at this map so that you can see where Jesus went. He was teaching in Galilee, but his fame spread throughout Decapolis and all the way down to Judea.

## First Century Israel



So, Jesus has huge crowds following Him...now look back at verse 2 and we'll see a single, solitary man comes to Jesus:

### **Matthew 8:2**

**2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."**

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Now, as we've read this verse twice already, it might seem ordinary to you and to me. But, what just happened, as recorded by Matthew, was anything but ordinary to those first century crowds of people who were following Jesus.

Imagine this with me...a leper is now making his way through the crowds and let me tell you something...they are scattering like roaches when the light's turned on in a nasty kitchen. Why? Because a leper is coming through those crowds. But, you might say, "So what. What's the big deal about a leper." Folks, let me tell you something if you had leprosy in the first-century, you were absolutely the most ostracized person imaginable. Let me take a few minutes to describe leprosy to you, because it's not something we are familiar with today.

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In fact, if you have footnotes in your Bible, you'll see that there's a small letter beside the word, "leprosy." There's a "1" in my Bible, and so, I look down to the bottom of the page and it says: "a term for several skin diseases." In Scripture, leprosy was a horrible, devastating disease. Most Bible Scholars trace back the disease to the Egyptians. It's a disease of the skin caused by a bacillus or bacteria called "*mycobacterium leprae*." It appears the nation of Israel contracted the disease while they were in exile in the land of Egypt in slavery. When they were finally freed by God through Moses, they brought it with them back to the Promised Land.

So, God had to give Moses clear direction on how to deal with this devastating disease. I want to show this to you from the Old Testament via the Law of Moses. **Turn in your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 13.** (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus).

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Prescribed in the laws given by God to Moses were laws on how to deal with leprosy. And you will see as you arrive to Leviticus 13, it's a very, very detailed account that encompasses chapters 13

and chapter 14. Look at 13:1...

### Leviticus 13:1-3

**1** The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, **2** "When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, **3** and the priest shall examine the diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean.

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Now skip down to verse 45...

### Leviticus 13:45-46

**45** "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' **46** He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

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Church family, let me tell you some other things that we know about leprosy and it's still a very mysterious disease. I want to share some information about leprosy that comes from the "American Leprosy Mission," which is an American-based mission organization that helps le pers throughout the world. Many Americans today, believe leprosy no longer exists. But, in 2014, 121 countries reported new cases of leprosy. Even in America, approximately 150 people are diagnosed with leprosy each year.

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Here's a map of where the greatest concentration of leprosy is in the world today:



It's right along the equator in very poor countries, by and large, yet I was surprised to see that it's fairly prevalent in the Philippines (where Pastor Dale and I travel and will travel this October). It's only found in the very, very poor sections of the islands...and it's very isolated on the main island where we go.

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Did you know every two minutes someone is diagnosed with leprosy in the world? Leprosy is today called "Hansen's Disease." This comes from a Norwegian doctor, Armauer Hansen (this man)...



He was the first doctor to view the bacillus under a microscope in 1873. He chronicled the fact that the disease causes nerve damage and muscle weakness that can lead to

deformities, crippling, blindness and social isolation. Many people wrongly believe that leprosy causes your fingers and toes to fall off on their own...along with the nose and ears. That's not true. But, here's what is true: The bacteria attack nerve endings and destroy the body's ability to feel pain and without that feeling of pain, people often injure themselves and those injuries can become infected and that's what causes the resulting loss of tissue. Therefore, fingers and toes can become shortened and deformed as the cartilage is absorbed back into the body. This happens with the nose and ears most easily because they are mostly made of cartilage.

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Here are some pictures of what I've described (as taken from American Leprosy Mission website):



The skin first becomes red and splotchy. The leprosy attacks the nerves under the skin, which often leads to infection. A person infected on the face usually loses the blinking reflex of the eyes, which can eventually lead to dryness, ulceration and blindness...

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That's what will likely happen to this girl...



The bacterium often enters the mucous lining of the nose and leads to internal damage and scarring which in time causes the nose to collapse and the cartilage to fall off...

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This woman in Nepal...



...is blind and her nose and fingers have been shortened because of the leprosy. This lady in the Congo has lost her fingers...



This woman, her feet...



This boy, his left leg and half of the ends of his fingers... . Leprosy is gruesome!

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Thankfully, the American Leprosy Mission provides prosthetics for many of these afflicted people...



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We know today that leprosy is transmitted primarily through coughing and sneezing. Scientists still don't fully understand how leprosy is spread. But, in most cases, it's spread through long-term contact with a person who has the disease but has not been treated. Interestingly, most people will never develop the disease even if they are exposed to the bacteria because approximately 95% of the world's population has a natural immunity to leprosy. Again, there is no explanation for this and the problem is, you don't really know if you are part of the 5% who aren't immune to it, unless you are exposed to the bacterium.

Leprosy can be treated and most cases, cured with what is called: "Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT)," which is a combination of three antibiotics (rifampin, clofazimine and dapsone) and the treatment can take from six months to a year to complete. People who do the MDT treatment are no longer contagious after about one week.

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Now why do I talk all of this time to tell you this? Because I want you to understand the magnitude of what Jesus did when that man came running through those crowds that were parting like the Red Sea as he shouted: "Unclean, unclean, unclean."

In my mind, I imagine this is perhaps how that man might have had to live on the outskirts of Capernaum...



Alone and isolated...

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Imagine with me. Perhaps he's out plowing one day and he notices some red places on his hand. He shows his wife and she wraps them with cloth and he thinks nothing more of it. Until the next day the red places have expanded beyond the bandages and are now on his legs and feet. Panic grips the man. He knows what it is. He's seen it. He's heard about it and he knows what he's got to do.

He runs from the field to the edge of the clearing at his home and he shouts for his wife. (The Talmud said you can't get any closer than six feet to a leper, and, if there's a wind blowing, 150 feet.) Out of the little house run his children, "**Papa, Papa!**" as they speed toward him. And the father shouts with all of his might, "**No, No!! Don't come any closer...unclean...unclean...I'm unclean!!**" And his wife would know what that meant!!

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**The man would say, "Darling...please toss me some clothes...and later tonight, leave me some food right here on this spot. I'll come get it. Don't come near me! I'm unclean!!"** And for the rest of that man's life he would live in isolation and exile from everyone! Little did he know when he went to the fields that morning, that he'd never hug or touch his children or his wife again.

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So, what did he have to lose when he heard about Jesus? Perhaps he had heard Jesus as He taught on the mountainside. He had heard Jesus say, "I am the Way!" And the man believed!! And so he came running to Jesus and knelt down before Him. See it again...

**Matthew 8:2**

**2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."**

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He had lost all shame. He didn't even think about it. He missed his family and here (in his mind) was his only hope! Jewish Historian, Josephus tells us that lepers were treated like dead men. This man was dead to society...dead to his family...dead to himself and nothing was going to stop him. He may have been dead in everybody's eyes, but there was something that happened deep within this man when He heard Jesus speak that caused a stirring in his soul that he knew life could once come back to him if he could only get to Jesus.

Listen...listen...leprosy in the Bible was considered a curse. It was used to describe sin. And can you see and understand the parallel...in order to truly come to Jesus, you've got to come like a leper. Desperate. Desperate to be cleansed. Desperate to be made whole!

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Did you see how respectful he was to Jesus, He called him Lord, "Kyrios."

**Matthew 8:2**

**2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."**

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That's the word for Sovereign, Master, Ruler of All. The Hebrew word is Jehovah. This man recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God was standing in front of him and he fell to his knees and called Him: God!

And church family...that's the picture of THE submission and reverence required to truly come to Jesus. You see, the man submitted to Jesus' authority. In fact, in the Greek when the man said, "You can make me clean," the word for the verb: "can" is the word "**dunami**"...from which we get our English word dynamite. The man knew there was dynamite power in Jesus!

**2 "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."**

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Did you notice how polite and respectful the man was?

Listen, there is a line of teaching today that says you and I can demand things from God because of our position as His children, but I'm here to tell you that you'll never find that kind of demanding, selfish spirit in the New Testament. You and I don't demand things from God. We come and ask, we seek, and we knock...and we do so with a reverent respect for who He is. My kids don't demand things from me. They ask kindly and respectfully (most of the time 😊).

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What did Jesus do? Oh, this is beautiful...

**Matthew 8:3**

**3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.**

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Whoa...whoa...wait a minute...Jesus did what? He touched him!!! He touched the man!!! Doesn't Jesus know He could be infected?

**Don't you know all the people circled around them gasped!! Maybe it looked like this:**



Jesus touched him and the man was IMMEDIATELY CLEANSED. Listen, do you know what that meant? It meant that the cartilage grew back new on his nose and his ears and his fingers and toes were suddenly new again. The man was clean!!! Not only was he healed of the leprosy...he was now no longer considered unclean. In fact, Jesus would send him on a mission. He told him not to tell anyone but the priest because Jesus didn't want to stir the crowds too soon. That's why Jesus said...

**Matthew 8:4**

**4 "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."**

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You see, according to the Law of Moses, the man had to go to Jerusalem to the Temple and show himself to the priest... and let me tell you something...that would have been a show. Why? Because the priests in Jerusalem knew about Jesus and they were beginning to despise Him because He was drawing people away from following their false teachings. And here this guy will show up and he'll tell them that Jesus of Nazareth touched him and healed him! Wow and what a scene that would make! What could they do about this? There was no denying that the man had been healed! Because this mad would have been on record with the Temple as unclean. They would have to confirm the power of Jesus!!

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And so, the man shows up to the Temple and according to the Mosaic Law, he's got two birds with him and watch what happens...

**Leviticus 14:1-7**

**1** The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **2** "This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, **3** and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, **4** the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop. **5** And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. **6** He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. **7** And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field.

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This is a picture of salvation!!! The bird that was killed represented Jesus' death on the cross and the bird that was released represented his resurrection.



Oh church family, do you see the picture painted before you? Leprosy is a picture of what? Sin. Leprosy made a person ceremonially unclean and sin, just like leprosy is pervasive and ugly and loathsome. Sin, like leprosy is communicable in that bad company corrupts good character (1 Corinthians 15:33). You run around with the wrong crowd, and you are going to get infected.

Listen, and what is worse, sin without Christ, will ultimately, make you an outcast from the kingdom of God. Listen church, sin is incurable and apart from a touch from Jesus you will be cast into eternal isolation in Hell forever. But, if you come to Jesus...salvation can occur.

How does conversion happen? You become desperate. That's how conversion happens. People don't get saved unless they get desperate over the loathsome canker of their sin. Jesus was this man's only hope! And so the man came and he dropped to his knees and he said, "I know you can do this...if you will. I'm ready."

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Are you ready today? Would you be willing to come like a man with leprosy and be healed? Jesus is here with open arms...I pray you'll run to Him for His cleansing touch right now!

Let us pray!

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