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January 18, 2026

EVERY LIFE VALUED: MATT 8:1-4, 15-17; 9:1-8

Introductory Activity

Ask: Distribute some copies of the handout “How Much Would You Pay” (use the one *without* the prices listed). Ask the group to name what they would pay for those pieces of art, and then guess what they sold for at auction. After the discussion, reveal the prices.

Ask: Why do you think some people value these pieces of art to that extent?

Explain: Some people value art for art’s sake. Some value art as an investment. The company Masterworks will even sell you a “share” of a masterpiece so that you and many other people will own a “portion” of the piece. When it goes up for sale, you get a portion of the proceeds. The value of an art piece is determined using several factors, including “comps.” How have comparable pieces been valued? They also consider the artist’s reputation. Leonardo da Vinci might be more respected than Lorenzo di Credi. They also consider factors like the piece’s condition, size, and subject matter.

This might be appropriate for a piece of art, but sometimes we determine the value of a person in a similar manner. How they compare to others, how respected they are, and how they look and present themselves are all factors we might use when determining a person’s value. In our lesson today, we are going to see that Jesus uses a different lens when determining a person’s value. We are going to see that “Jesus values every person” (ETB PSG, 67) and He values all persons greatly.

Summarize Transition: Our lesson today will pick up in Matthew 8. But we need to back up a little and understand the context. When writing his gospel, Matthew does not always place events in their chronological order. Instead, he groups events thematically to help the reader understand Jesus and His ministry. In Matthew chapter 4, Matthew details Jesus’ ministry. Verse 23 reads, “Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the good news of the kingdom, and **healing** every disease and sickness among the people.” (emphasis added) Mathew highlights Jesus’ teaching and preaching ministry in chapters 5-7 by giving us the Sermon on the Mount. We just spent three weeks studying that. In chapters 8-9, he focuses on Jesus’ healing ministry. We are going to look at a few of those healing accounts today and focus on what they reveal about Jesus’ valuation of other people.

1. LEPROSY (MATT. 8:1-4)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 8:1-4.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

TEACHERS’ NOTE: We could come at these passages from several angles. For example, we could examine healing or prayer. However, we are going to examine them through the lens of the “Sanctity of Life Sunday” and discuss the extent to which God values individuals and how we should imitate him.

Explain: For those who have read or heard sermons related to this passage, the shocking events that take place might not stand out. Nevertheless, there are three shocking aspects to this account. Let's look at those and glean some application points for our lives.

A Shocking Approach: Verses 1 and 2 tell us that as Jesus came down the mountain after delivering the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds continued to follow Him. Then suddenly ("right away" is also translated "behold"), a man approached Him. However, this was no ordinary man. Matthew tells us this man was a leper. We do not know if this man had what we today call Hanson's Dieses, but we do know that he, everyone around him, and the religious system understood him to be a leper. That is important because that designation makes his approach to Jesus very shocking indeed. Lepers were outcasts in Jesus' day. The skin disease from which they suffered would mar their physical appearance and cause them to lose fingers or other appendages. But more than their physical appearance, the cultural rules of the day cast them aside. Lepers were required to dress in torn clothing, let their hair hang loose, cover their mouths, and cry out "unclean" whenever they approached another person. Moreover, they were forced to live alone (or in groups of other lepers) outside of the town and villages. (see Leviticus 13:45-46)

Discuss: Who in our society might be cultural outcasts or who might be viewed as outcasts in religious circles? (Allow time for discussion. Group members might name those who are unhoused, struggle with substance abuse, or mental illness. Similarly, in the church, we might reject those who have lived worldly lives, hurt us, or caused problems because of their sinful beliefs. Group leaders should be ready to gently guide the conversation because group members might begin demeaning people and arguing why some people should "act differently" or "do better.")

Explain: Despite the crowds, the cultural regulations, and the ceremonial law, this man came to Jesus. This is truly shocking, but his approach can reveal a very important reality to us. It appears that this man was **desperate for help**. This man needed someone to help him. He was not seeking money or food. He was not seeking to curry favor with someone to loosen the regulation on lepers. Instead, this man was looking for a cure, and he came to the only person who could help. In our lives, we are going to encounter those cast out by society. When they approach us, we might draw back, as I am sure some in the crowd did, and might assume we know their intentions. Let us instead slow down, notice them for who they are, and listen to them.

A Shocking Revelation: Verse 2 also provides a shocking revelation related to this man's clear understanding of Jesus. After kneeling before Jesus, he says, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." It appears that this man was **decidedly sure of Jesus' ability and discerned the reality of Jesus' sovereignty**. He knew Jesus *could* heal him. That was not up for debate.

Leviticus 13:45-46

⁴⁵ "The person who has a case of serious skin disease is to have his clothes torn and his hair hanging loose, and he must cover his mouth and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!'

⁴⁶ He will remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He must live alone in a place outside the camp.

The question was: *would* Jesus heal him? We could discuss here applications related to prayer, God's will in healing, or Christ's divinity. However, let's stick to our theme related to the sanctity of life and discuss this man's place in society. It is possible that some would have seen him as unworthy of Jesus' attention or even Jesus' care. But if we consider what took place just prior to this event, we will understand that this is exactly the kind of man Jesus would pay attention to and care about. While the Sermon on the Mount doesn't explicitly tell us to care for the outcast, the spirit of the sermon would cause a person to know they should care for someone like the leper. While everyone probably stood there shocked by the man's presence and his request, Jesus affirms not just his words but his value. We see that in verse 3.

A Shocking Touch: Not only does Jesus agree to heal the man, but He also **demonstrates His care** by touching him. Under Jewish law, "even to touch a leper would be to make yourself unclean (Lev 13:45; 22:4-6)." (Exalting, 105) But Jesus is more concerned with the man than He is concerned with Himself. "Jesus' gesture made clear that he was not concerned with others' taboos and dramatically demonstrated that God's love extends to even the most outcast of society. (NAC, 139)

Discuss: What are some ways we can reach out and touch those cast out by society or those cast aside by the church?

Summarize Transition: Meeting people's physical and practical needs is one way we can care for people. Another way is to simply acknowledge to ourselves that God cares for those cast aside by others. If they come to church, engage with them and sit with them and invite them to small groups. If you encounter people in your community who have been cast aside by others, speak nicely to them and acknowledge their humanity. Jesus Accepts the Outcast. So should we.

(See the Notes Box for information on why Jesus instructs the man to tell no one. I place it there because it does not apply to the aim of the lesson, but you might get questions.)

In the next passage, Jesus is going to heal another person undervalued by His culture.

2. FEVER AND DEMON-POSSESSION (MATT. 8:14-17)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 8:14-17.

Explain: As Matthew tells it, as Jesus entered the city, He was approached by a Roman military officer who asked Him to heal his sick servant. Jesus does so with only a word and without being in the presence of the servant. Here again, we see that Jesus' healing ministry is not denied to those viewed as less than by the Jews. The centurion was a gentile, yet Jesus says of him, "I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith." (8:10) Moreover, it was a servant who was healed, not a wealthy aristocrat.

"To touch a leper is to take his uncleanness upon yourself, and yet we know from the healing of the centurion's servant in [verses 5-13] that it was not all necessary for Jesus to touch this leper in order to heal him." (Exalting, 106)

"Jesus identifies with the uncleanness of the leper in order to make the leper clean." (Exalting, 106)

Notes on why Jesus instructs the man to tell no one:

After healing the man, Jesus instructs him to tell no one and present himself to the religious authorities. There could be two reasons for this. The most common reason we hear is that Jesus did not yet want this ministry to grow through word of mouth related to healing. In this instance, though, it appears that Jesus does not want the man to be distracted by celebrating and finding family or friends. Instead, He wants the man to stay focused and fulfill the requirements of the law.

"Here perhaps nothing more is implied by Jesus' words than that the newly cleansed leper should not be distracted from his responsibility to follow the procedures of the law (as set forth in Lev 14:1-32)." (NAC, 139)

"Jesus moved directly from the healing of the leper to what the man would need to do to reenter normal society." (ETBC, 75)

Verse 15 tells us that when Jesus finally gets to Peter's house, where He is probably staying, Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed. Before we discuss applications gleaned from her healing, we need to see how she fits the pattern of Jesus caring for those overlooked by society. First, it is possible that she was a widow and therefore dependent on Peter. Moreover, in Jesus' day, women were viewed as second-class citizens. They were segregated from men at the synagogue and placed behind screens. To touch a woman, even her hand, would make a person unclean. Some Jewish men even recited one of the Eighteen Benedictions that included the words, "Lord, I thank Thee that I was not born a slave, a Gentile, or a woman." (c.f. Preaching, 209) So it is clear that Jesus' care for Peter's mother-in-law was not the norm. However, what I find more interesting is the situation surrounding her healing. If we examine the passage closely, we will notice that no one asked Jesus to heal her. It is possible that someone *did* request it, but we have no record of such a request. So, it appears that Jesus simply decided that He wanted to heal her. **Jesus valued her while society undervalued her.** Like the leper, Jesus made a point of touching her hand as part of the healing process. Like the leper, Jesus breaks with the norm and touches someone others would not.

Discuss: We spoke earlier of the outcasts in society. Sometimes a person is not cast aside in our society, but they are undervalued. Who in our society is undervalued, and how can we treat them with value?

Explain: Sometimes our society undervalues the undereducated or the disabled because our society often values only those who can contribute to the economy. We should see people for more than their money-making abilities. Sometimes our society undervalues the elderly or children. Both are valuable to the Lord, not simply because they can offer wisdom (the elderly) or because they are vulnerable, but because they are created in the image of God. We need to remember that the reason we value anyone is not because of what they can offer us or society. Instead, we value them for who they are as image bearers of God.

Summarize and Transition: The word had gotten out about Jesus' healing abilities, and after the sun set (ending the Sabbath) many brought their loved ones to Him for healing. Matthew then turns his readers' attention to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. He quotes from Isaiah 53:4, "He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases." Matthew here is referencing the prophecies related to the Suffering Servant, and he is pointing us to the far greater healing that Jesus provides on the cross. Jesus did not just bear the physical sickness of those He healed. He bears the weight of that which underlies all sickness and death: sin. In the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, we see that **Jesus values the Undervalued.** We should do likewise because they are valuable, and Jesus values all sinners and died for us.

3. PARALYSIS (MATT. 9:1-8)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 9:1-8.

"Jesus' compassion for yet a third category of people who were viewed as second-class citizens within Judaism, namely, women." (NAC, 143)

"As with the leper, he heals with a touch, and touching women in this fashion was banned by at least some Jewish traditions." (NAC, 143)

"The Pharisees both looked down upon a man touching a woman and touching anyone who was suffering from a fever." (ETBC, 77)

"By connecting Jesus' healing authority to Isaiah's prophecy, Matthew is showing that He has the power to overcome all our suffering. In light of the larger context of Isaiah, Matthew attributes this power and authority to Jesus because He paid the price to overcome all our sins." (Exalting, 110)

Chrysostom: "Not that Isaiah did not say that he merely did away with our infirmities but that he himself bore them." (ACC, 164)

Apollinaris: "This was to show that it was not in his activity alone but in his passion, his willingness to suffer, that Christ became the source of healing to humanity." (ACC, 164)

Explain: After the night of healing detailed in chapter 8 verse 17, Matthew tells us that Jesus had a conversation about discipleship (vv. 18-22; in which we are challenged to count the cost), crossed the seas again (vv. 23-27; where we encounter His power over creation), cleansed two men of demon possession (vv. 28-34; in which we see His power over the spiritual world). Then Matthew brings us back to Capernaum, and we find Jesus in a home teaching a standing-room-only crowd. His teaching is interrupted by a group of men who bring their paralyzed friend to Him for healing. This is the same event recorded in Mark 2 and Luke 5, in which the men dig a hole in the roof and lower their friend down. Jesus takes this opportunity to merge His teaching and healing ministries. We can take note that often our care and service to others presents us the opportunity to teach them or others about the gospel. In this instance, we will see Jesus do just that. But first, He bestows an Unbidden Miracle.

Reread verse 2. (See Notes Box.)

A Miracle Unbidden: Jesus isn't oblivious to what the man and his friends desire. It is clear that this man was brought to Jesus to have his paralysis healed. However, Jesus performs another kind of miracle. He forgives the man of sin. Now, this is a little unexpected to us, but the people in the room might have been nodding. In first-century Jewish culture, sickness was often equated with a person's sinful action. We do not know why this man was paralyzed or if his sin actually led to the ailment. But we do know that sin is the underlying cause of all sickness. He was meeting the man's underlying need before his presenting problem. O'Donnell writes, "by treating this man's greatest need first. Jesus stops the spiritual bleeding of the soul caused by sin. He does this because he knows that to cure this man's body would have been an immediate but impermanent solution." (Preaching, 233) Platt reminds us that, "Jesus' approach to the paralytic teaches us that our ultimate goal is never physical; it's always spiritual." (Exalting, 119) We too should remember that. The church can, does, and *should* address physical needs (The minor prophets of the OT remind us of this repeatedly). However, the church's primary focus is the eternal welfare of men and women. But there is more going on here. I think Jesus knew that He was sitting in a room of believers, curious learners, or skeptical leaders. He used the opportunity to reveal His divinity and His ultimate mission.

Reread Verse 3-4 (See Notes Box.)

A Comment Unbiblical: Jesus' words elicit an unbiblical comment (or thought) from the religious leaders sitting in the room. Before we get too judgmental of the group, let's consider the context. First, this is early in Jesus' ministry. These men, it seems, had come to listen to the new rabbi. The hatred and persecution by such men had not yet begun in earnest. Second, we should note that what "this rabbi" just said was truly shocking. Everyone in the room knew that only God could forgive sins. Therefore, if

Matthew 9:2

Just then some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven."

Matthew 9:3-4

³ At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "He's blaspheming!" ⁴ Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?

this man pronounced a person forgiven of sin, He was equating Himself with God. Furthermore, the religious leaders knew that if this man claimed to be God but was not God, then He had truly just committed the sin of blasphemy. What they do not know is that Jesus is God and therefore had not sinned. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach them who He truly is.

Reread verses 5-7 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: Jesus addresses the comment (or thought) that the men were expressing. He does so by presenting them with a question and himself with a challenge. His question for them moves from the lesser thing to the greater thing. Note that He does *not* ask if it is more difficult to forgive sin or heal a man. Instead, He asks if it's more difficult to say, "your sins are forgiven," than to say "get up and walk." His verbal statement that the man's sins are forgiven is not something He could "prove" to the people. Nor is it something that they could see and verify with their eyes. So, to help them understand that He has the power to forgive sins, He presents them with visual proof that He has the power to do something only God could do. He heals the man.

Discuss: What are some actions that your group can take to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of those in your community?

Summarize and Transition: Matthew shows us that not only does Jesus accept the outcast and value the undervalued, but He **also Redeems the Unredeemed**. When we care for people's physical needs, we should never lose sight of the real issue. We must also couple the forgiveness of sins available through the work of Christ with the physical ministry we provide our neighbors.

CONCLUDE

We began our time talking about the valuation of prized art pieces. We saw that art is valued highly because of some criteria, like the reputation of the artist and the quality of the piece. When we determine the value of people, we should only have one thing in mind—the reputation of the Creator. Everyone is created in God's image. They might be cast aside by the world, undervalued by society, or unredeemed. Regardless of how people appear or how the world values them, we should value them greatly because they are created in God's image and need to experience His salvation.

Challenge:

Direct the group to page 76 of their Personal Study Guide. Draw their attention to the second question on the page.

- Consider your attitude toward people who are often ignored. Consider how your attitude clashes with the attitude Jesus had toward those who were deemed second-class in His day. What needs to change in your attitude?
- (If you want to challenge your group more, draw their attention to the first question on the page.) As a group, create a list of those in your community who might be considered outcasts or of lesser value than others in your area. Plan a group project to minister to them in a tangible way.

Notes:

Matthew 9:5-7

⁵ For which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then he told the paralytic, "Get up, take your stretcher, and go home." ⁷ So he got up and went home.