

JESUS" AUTHORITY--OVER DISEASE

March 05, 2017

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Matthew 8:1-17

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SERMON SERIES: MATTHEW: JESUS, THE SOVEREIGN KING

SERMON TITLE: "JUTHORITY - OVER DISEASE"

SCRIPTURE TEXT: MATTHEW 8:1-17 (P. 813)

TOPIC: MATTHEW

DATE: MARCH 5, 2017

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INTRO.

-- We are continuing our study of the first book in the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, and we are in chapter 8 at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. There are 2 primary aspects to that ministry - teaching about the Kingdom of God and performing miraculous healings.

Matthew starts Jesus' teaching ministry with the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' magnum opus on the Kingdom of God, in chapters 5-7. Matthew tells us how the people reacted to this magnificent sermon.

Cf., 7:28-29

Matthew tells us that the people were struck with the authority that characterized Jesus' teaching, a sense of authority that set Jesus apart from the other religious teachers, such as the rabbis and scribes.

-- Now, having shown us the authority in Jesus' teaching, Matthew is going to show us that same sense of authority in Jesus' acts. In the next two chapters Matthew is going to give us 9 stories of miracles performed by Jesus. Something we need to be aware of as we go through this Gospel is that Matthew doesn't arrange events chronologically but by theme. So the events that Matthew records in chapters 8-9 are ones that give different insights into Jesus' authority.

I. Authority Defined

-- When we use the term "authority," we're talking about a combination of right and power. Someone who possess authority has both the right to act and the power to act.

-- What we are going to see is that Jesus possesses sovereign authority. His right and power are supreme. Matthew is about to demonstrate the supreme nature of Jesus' authority with three back-to-back-to-back stories of miraculous healings, each of which displays an aspect of Jesus' sovereign authority.

II. Authority Demonstrated

A. The Impact of Jesus' Authority (vv. 1-4)

-- The first miracle demonstrates the impact of Jesus' authority - that it is able to make the unclean clean. This miracle takes place as Jesus is leaving the mountain north of the Sea of Galilee where the Sermon on the Mount had been delivered.

Cf., vv. 1-4

1. The Story

-- As Jesus is leaving the mountain a crowd is still surrounding Him. Suddenly, there's a loud commotion up ahead. As people scream, the crowd parts like the waters of the Red Sea, revealing a figure coming towards Jesus. The hobbling figure looks like a dead man walking. He is dressed not so much in clothes but soiled, decaying rags. He draws nearer, covering his face and repeating the words, "Unclean! Unclean!" The fingers on his hands have been reduced to stubs, and his skin is covered with scars and open sores. By the time the man reaches Jesus, everyone else has moved away, retreating to a safe distance.

-- The leper falls on his knees before Jesus and makes a desperate plea, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

-- Without hesitation, Jesus reaches out and touches the untouchable leper's diseased unclean body. A gasp erupts from the onlooking crowd - touching a leper is forbidden, something that no one would even think of doing. Anyone who touches a leper becomes unclean and is believed to risk contracting the same horrific disease. As He stands there touching this pathetic, diseased figure kneeling before Jesus replies with compassionate authority, "I will. Be clean!"

-- And then the most astounding sight that anyone in that crowd has ever witnessed

takes place - right before their eyes. As soon as Jesus speaks the words "Be clean" the leper is immediately cured. In an instant the skin that just a second earlier had been covered with scars and wounds is now smooth, without a blemish.

2. The Application

-- There are many profound parts to this story, but let's consider just one - why Jesus touched the leper. Jesus didn't need to touch him to heal him. As we will see in the next miracle, Jesus can heal with just a word. All that Jesus needed to do was to say, "Be clean." So why did Jesus touch the unclean man? For just that reason - he was unclean. According to the Mosaic Law, anyone who touched an unclean leper also became unclean, and that's exactly what Jesus had come to do - to take our uncleanness upon Himself.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. **⁵** But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. **⁶** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

-- Whatever it is that is making you unclean today Jesus has taken it upon Himself. As Jesus hung on the Cross, He was touching your uncleanness that He might heal you and make you whole.

B. The Extent of Jesus' Authority (vv. 5-13)

-- In the second miracle we see the extent of Jesus' authority.

vv. 5-13

1. The Story

-- As Jesus enters Capernaum, a town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, another unlikely encounter takes place, an encounter with a different kind of "unclean" person, a Gentile, a Roman centurion. This is a remarkable encounter for several reasons. Not only is this a man part of the Empire oppressing the Jews, he is a tough, self-sufficient military man; and he is seeking help from a Jewish rabbi, and he's not seeking that help for himself but for a servant, considered little more than a piece of property.

So Jesus could refuse this man's request for several reasons. But, just as He had touched the untouchable leper, Jesus now proceeds to accept the unacceptable Gentile centurion. Without hesitating Jesus replies, "I will come and heal him."

And that sets up the most remarkable aspect of this encounter - the centurion's reply.

vv. 8,9

-- This is stunning insight and faith. The centurion humbly says that he's not worthy for Jesus to go to his house. And the centurion knows that it isn't even necessary. The centurion knows what authority can do. He knows that if you possess authority, you can give a command, and it will be carried out, even if you're not there. The centurion amazingly believes that Jesus has real authority - supreme and sovereign authority. All that Jesus has to do is to speak the word, give the command, and the servant will be healed.

Matthew tells us that Jesus "marveled" at this man's faith. Isn't that great - how would you like to have so much faith that Jesus marvels at you! And just as the centurion has asserted, Jesus speaks the word, and the servant is healed instantly.

2. The Application

-- Something that Matthew wants us to be sure to learn from this encounter is that Jesus' authority extends throughout the entire world and embraces all people. Jesus is not just a Jewish Messiah; He is the Savior for the entire world. The Jews expected that at the end of the age they and their father Abraham would all sit down at a great banquet with the Messiah while the Gentiles were suffering God's judgment. But Jesus says something shocking: there will be many Gentiles at that heavenly banquet table, and many Jews will be banished to suffer God's judgment in the outer darkness of hell. Jesus is not a Savior just for Jews; He is the Savior for all who believe.

C. The Reach of Jesus' Authority (vv. 14-17)

-- Matthew concludes this section with a miracle that shows how Jesus' authority reaches out to all in need.

Vv. 14-17

1. The Story

-- Jesus makes His way through the streets of Capernaum to Peter's house, where Jesus finds that Peter's mother-in-law in bed, sick with a fever. And once again Jesus reaches out and touches her hand and heals her, and she is so completely restored to health and strength that she immediately gets up and begins to serve them, most likely preparing a meal for them.

2. The Application

-- Now here's what I think is most significant about this story - not that Jesus healed the woman but that Matthew records it. Peter's mother-in-law is an ordinary, elderly woman, not someone

looked upon as all that important in that society. We don't even know her name, and we never hear anything about her again. She's just an ordinary, common person, with an ordinary sickness. But Matthew tells us about her because he learned that no one is unimportant to Jesus, and no problem is too small for Him to reach out and touch.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' authority reached out and embraced an unclean leper, an unacceptable centurion and an unimportant woman. And it still does - through us. Jesus wants us to be a church where the unclean, the unacceptable and the unimportant can find the touch that brings them healing.