

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

JESUS IS KING



Cleansing of a Leper

Text: Matthew 8:1-4

1. The Leper's Request - Matthew 8:1-2

The miracles of Jesus attracted a lot of attention; but so did His teaching. Matthew demonstrated this by his mention of the **great multitudes** that followed Him after coming down from the Mount of Beatitudes.

When we compare the events of this chapter with the record of Mark or Luke, we find different order and chronology. Theologians tell us that Matthew arranged his material according to topics and themes, not according to chronology.

There is important foundational verse for Matthew's Gospel:

See Matthew 4:23

Matthew tells us about the teaching ministry of Jesus (Matthew 5-7); now he tells us more about the healing ministry of Jesus, and how His works confirmed His words.

behold, there came a leper and worshipped him: In the ancient world, leprosy was a terrible, destructive disease – and still is in some parts of the world. The ancient leper had no hope of improvement, so this **leper came** to Jesus with a great sense of need and desperation.

According to Jewish law and customs, you had to keep 6 feet (2 meters) from a leper. If the wind was blowing toward a person from a leper, they had to keep 150 feet (45 meters) away. The only thing *more* defiling than contact with a leper was contact with a dead body.

It is very easy to see that the condition of leprosy is a type of sin and its effects. It is a contagious, debilitating disease that corrupts its victim and makes him essentially dead while alive; and an additional consequence that we don't often think about is society and religious people scorned lepers.

leprosy was looked upon, among the Jews, as a judgement of God: Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah were all smitten with leprosy as a judgment for sin.

In Jesus' time, rabbis sometimes boasted about how badly they treated lepers. One bragged that he refused to buy even an egg on a street where he saw a leper; another boasted that he threw rocks at lepers upon seeing them.

In spite of all of that this leper still came to Jesus! Think about that.

The leper didn't go to the religious leaders because they would despise him and maybe even throw rocks at him. But He went to Jesus. He went to Jesus because he knew Jesus could help him, and He went to Jesus because he knew Jesus wouldn't despise and ridicule him. Jesus doesn't throw stones.

There came a leper and worshipped him: Despite his desperate condition, this man not only begged Jesus – he also **worshipped Him**.

How did the leper worship Jesus?

- He **worshipped** Jesus by coming to Him, honoring Him as the One who could meet His otherwise impossible need.
- He **worshipped** Jesus with the word “**Lord**,” honoring Him as master and God.
- He **worshipped** Jesus with his humility, by not demanding but leaving the request up to the will of Jesus.
- He **worshipped** Jesus with his respect of the power of Jesus, saying that all that was necessary was the will of Jesus, and he would be healed.
- He **worshipped** Jesus with his confidence that Jesus could make him more than healthy; Jesus could make him **clean**.

Lord, if thou wilt: the word wilt simply means willing. So **Lord, if You are willing:** The leper had no doubt whatsoever about the *ability* of Jesus to heal. His only question was if Jesus was **willing** to heal.

He believed in the *power* of Jesus.

When a Syrian commander named Naaman was afflicted with leprosy, he came to Jehoram, the king of Israel because he heard there was a prophet in Israel whom God used to do miraculous things.

When Naaman came to Jehoram, Jehoram knew that *he* had no power to help him, See **2 Kings 5:7**

Leprosy was so hopeless in the ancient world that healing a leper was like raising the dead; yet this leper knew that all Jesus needed was to be **willing**.

This is the first place in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus is called **Lord**. This title that was particularly meaningful in light of the fact that the word **Lord** was used to translate the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, and Matthew wrote his gospel to those who would be familiar with the Jewish context of that word.

2. Jesus Cleanses Him - Mathew 8:3

This was a bold and compassionate touch from Jesus. The idea is that the leper kept his distance from Jesus, but He **put out His hand and touched him**. It was against the ceremonial law to touch a leper, which made the touch all the more meaningful to the afflicted man. Of course, as soon as Jesus touched him, he was no longer a leper!

Why touch? Jesus did not have to touch the leper in order to heal him. He could have healed him with a word or even a thought. Yet He healed the leper with a touch because that is what the leper needed.

Immediately his leprosy was cleansed: The former leper's life was changed forever. He was not only healed, but as he requested he **was cleansed**. Jesus had recently said, *ask and it will be given to you* (Matthew 7:7). This was certainly true for the now **cleansed** former leper.

3. Go Your Way and Give An Offering - Matthew 8:4

Jesus often commanded people to be quiet about their healing or some miraculous work that He had done for them. He did this because He wanted to keep down the excitement of the crowds

until the proper time for His formal revelation to Israel, which was an exact date as prophesied in Daniel 9.

Mark tells us that the leper did not obey Jesus and instead *he went out, and began to publish it much* (Mark 1:44-45).

Show yourself to the priest: Jesus commanded the man to give **a testimony** to the priests, and what a testimony it was! The Mosaic Law prescribed specific sacrifices to be conducted upon the healing of a leper, and when the man reported it to the priests, they no doubt had to perform ceremonies that were rarely (if ever) done (Leviticus 14).

Going to the priest would also bring the former leper back into society. Jesus wanted the healing of the man's disease to have as much benefit as possible.



GROWTH GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the purpose of this miracle right after the account of the Sermon on the Mount?
2. What are the similarities between leprosy and sin? What are some differences?
3. Why did the Jews despise lepers?
4. Why did the Rabbis think that lepers deserved no mercy or pity?
5. Why did the leper come to Jesus?

6. Is there any significance to the touch of Jesus? What did this mean to the leper?
7. What is the significance of the title LORD used by the leper?
8. Do you view yourself as a spiritual leper? Do you distance yourself from that term? Why?
9. Why do some Christians distance themselves from sinners? What should we do instead?
10. How can we have compassion on sinners even while they are trapped in their sin?