

Matthew's Gospel Chapter 8 - Power of Jesus

[Please note : English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

After three chapters of Matthew, 5, 6 and 7, filled with the detailed teachings of Christ personally, Matthew proceeds with the next two chapters, 8 and 9, in which he is occupied with the Lord's works of power. There are five main illustrations of that power in chapter 8, and another five in chapter 9, giving ten in all. We shall only have time to look today at those in chapter 8. If the Lord will, we shall have those in chapter 9 brought before our attention next week.

A number of miracles are grouped together. They deal with disease, the elements of nature and evil spirits, without any specific order to the normal mind. The Lord Jesus is clearly the Master of every situation. The diseases are very often symbolic of various aspects of sin. The miracles are not only, or even primarily for the relief of human misery. 1 Corinthians 1:22 shows that their main purpose is to impress the minds of Jews, who asked for signs such as those recorded in Isaiah 35:5 – 6. For our immediate interest, when the signs were given, as recorded in chapters 8 and 9, those who witnessed them refused to accept the evidence given.

Throughout scripture, the number and use of the number 'ten' is of very frequent occurrence and significance. In the Old Testament, therefore, it is not surprising that it is often used in various multiple forms in the God-given ordinances of Israel; for instance, in the ten pillars, ten curtains, and ten sockets, in the Tabernacle and in the Temple measurements.

Therefore, the number ten very often indicates full measure, the complete ground and basis of human responsibility to God. It signifies perfection of order. There you are! There's nothing like plunging straight into the deep end.

Let us consider now some details of the five miracles given in Matthew 8.

Number 1. Verses 1 – 4 Jesus cleanses a leper

“When [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 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.””

The purpose of this miracle was to bring before the official leadership of the nation of Israel a testimony to Christ. The cleansed man was told to obey the injunctions of Leviticus 14. Had he obeyed, the astonished priests might well have looked for the source of the miracle and recognised that the prophetic Messiah had at last come to them, and for them. Sadly, the cleansed leper did not obey the long awaited injunction of scripture.

Messiah's first act of power is the immediate cure of a leper, something unique in the long history of Israel. This was indeed a unique miracle and identified the Lord Jesus as the incarnate God. No Israelite could touch a leper without contracting defilement. Our blessed Lord was unique, and clearly stands apart from all others.

No defilement could touch Him, but the references to His touching and being touched have major significance. There can be no doubt that The God of Creation witnessed the origin and witness of the corrupting effect of sin. The example recorded in verses 2 – 4 was of one who came personally into touch with the Lord Jesus. By the way, note the significant examples recorded in Matthew of the result of the personal touch of the Lord Jesus and the effect in each case.

Number 2. Verses 5 – 13. The great, personal faith of a centurion

“When [Jesus] had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralysed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marvelled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.”

The centurion showed great faith in the Lord. Not only did he say, “I am not worthy of myself”, but on the positive side he had the personal faith to say to the Lord, “Speak the word only.” The massive disparity between his opinion of himself and that of the Lord cannot be mistaken, and is very commendable.

The word of Christ acknowledged the faith of the Gentile centurion, which was even beyond anything that He had found amongst the people of Israel. The centurion already knew the power of an authoritative word as exemplified in the Roman military system. The rank of a centurion was not a particularly high one, yet those who were under him obeyed at once his instructions, and his personal faith discovered in Jesus Christ the One whose word could accomplish the miraculous.

This Roman centurion had received a heathen upbringing. Yet, his faith had laid hold of the Messiah of Israel to such an extent that he believed His word alone could bring about complete restoration for his servant. He was a soldier and thus under orders. In his experience and understanding of order, he had subordinates under him who promptly obeyed his orders. As his verbal commands were obeyed, so he himself believed that even paralysis must obey the command of Christ. The Lord was astonished and commented that He had not seen such faith even in the nation of Israel, who nominally expressed their dependence upon God in their prayers. The story concludes with the healing of the afflicted servant, not because of his personal faith, but because of the unwavering confidence of this believing Gentile centurion.

Number 3. Verses 14 – 17. Jesus heals many

“And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and

she rose and began to serve him. 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. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.””

This third case is that of Peter’s mother-in-law. The touch of the Lord Jesus (of which this is the first of several occurrences given) instantly healed her, even though there is no record of His having spoken a word or committed an action. Whether effected by His spoken word or by His touch only, the result was the same – instantaneous deliverance. There was no convalescence needed from the results of the fever that she had suffered. She arose at once and served others. This illustrates that the fever could perhaps be a sin-induced state, but that the touch of Christ is able and ready to dispel it.

Notice the vital sequence. She was lying sick. He touched her hand. The sickness left her. She rose and began to serve Him. Verses 16 – 17 show that once He had begun to bless, many other examples followed. They brought to Him many others who were oppressed by demons. What happened? He cast out the spirits. How? With a word! And He healed all who needed it. All these are examples of what the prophet Isaiah had foretold.

Interlude. Verses 18 – 22. The cost of discipleship, following Jesus

“Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.””

After the healing episode, we are shown that we need not only deliverance, but also our individual, personal, devoted discipleship to Christ. We must be at the call of the authoritative word of our Lord and Master. A certain unnamed scribe among the disciples certainly was, but interested enough in what had happened to arouse his interest, without having received a specific call or command from the One Who had provided the healing. The Lord Jesus immediately showed him what kind of a test would be involved in following Him. The scribe would have to learn that what was involved for the Deliverer was what he would have to learn as a disciple; that the Master was also what He called a homeless Son of Man. There were, of course, already those following the Christ who owned up to His Lordship and who followed him, even though there were, among them, some whose dependence upon Him soon led them into trouble for themselves.

Number 4. Verses 23 – 27. The Power of Jesus over creation

“And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marvelled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?””

Sadly, the disciples showed little personal faith that the storm would be under the control of their Master, even when they were in the personal presence of the One Who created all things. Their cry was, “Save us, Lord, we perish!” Because of this, and despite their appeal, they were

astonished when Jesus calmed the storm. “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” was their automatic reaction. Their evident surprise only showed that they were not yet convinced of His personal power. Just as importantly, they still had too high an impression of themselves as His disciples. Evidently, also, they could not see that the Creator of the universe could maintain control over the universe that He had brought into being, even when He was enjoying a spell of comfort and sleep.

More deeply, they did not seem to realise that, when He chose, it was within His personal power to keep control of the self-same universe, even when He had so entered manhood that He could choose to sleep at any time. Perhaps, also, it was a great test to them that the One, Who had performed such great acts of strength and wisdom, had entered into a condition in which He could identify Himself with those for whom He had come to save.

Number 5. Verses 28 – 34. Jesus heals two men possessed by demons

“And when [Jesus] came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.”

So far, and quite rightly, we have concentrated on the personal work of the Lord Jesus Himself. When Christ is seen to be at work, whether by word or by action, it is always worthwhile to see the result and reaction in those who are present. This occasion was no different. However, and interestingly enough, most of these healing incidents were individual, to separate persons. But not always! In this incident, two demon-possessed men met Him. Predictably, they cried out to the Lord, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” They recognised that they could not survive such an attitude and such a life for ever, without giving due answer to the God Who had created them.

Notice that there is an extra additive from the demons, which is very significant. Unlike many, even most, they did not persist in their personal activities without the realisation of the future that all must ultimately give due answer to God for every responsible action they had performed.

Now, for the moment, let me say, “Thank you very much indeed for your patience and interest in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1285, entitled ‘Matthew chapter 8’.”

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