

Matthew 8:1-4

- Jesus touched the untouched and restored their lives -

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Introduction

- ❖ “Many human beings in all societies have bodily defects that cause them to suffer exclusion, isolation and sometimes worse. In Buddhist cultures and some African cultures, disability of any kind is seen as a punishment for evil deeds or misdemeanors in a previous life and as a reason for rejection. Orphanages are full of disabled children who have been abandoned. The millions of people in Africa who suffer from HIV/AIDS are often treated as outcasts.”¹
- ❖ Matthew 8:1-4 “shows that Jesus has the power to deal with apparently incurable diseases and the compassion to restore desperate human beings struggling with social stigma, isolation, and loneliness.”²
- ❖ It is a sign of the Kingdom of God when Christians visit the sick, touch them, pray over them in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and submit them and themselves by faith to the will of the Lord.

- ❖ The context, form, and structure as well as the theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap somewhat with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this outline as a “stand alone” or as part of a series.

¹ Adeyemo, T. (2006, p. 1151).

² Adeyemo, T. (2006, p. 1152).

Context

Theme	Summary
<i>Teaching and Healing</i> (Mt 4:23)	Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.
<i>Healing and Following</i> (Mt 4:24, 25)	News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.
<i>Teaching</i> (Mt 5:1-7:29)	<i>Sermon on the Mount</i>
<i>Following and Healing</i> (Mt 8:1-9:34)	When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. <i>the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.</i>
<i>Teaching and Healing</i> (Mt 9:35)	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

- ❖ It seems that Matthew 8:1-9:34 is an elaboration of Matthew 4:24, 25.
 - Nolland Remarks: “The dramatic importance of the materials in chaps. 8–9 for Matthew is marked by an unusually high concentration of uses of ἰδοῦ (literally ‘behold’ - Mt. 8:24, 29, 32, 34; 9:3, 10, 18, 20, 32, compare the ESV -, but not translated above). The chapters have also concentrated into them most of the language of coming (προσέρχεσθαι) to Jesus to be found in the Gospel. In the healing accounts concentrated here those healed are often provided with no identity beyond the affliction (the leper, the demoniacs, the women with the hemorrhages, the blind). The afflicted are on occasion linked with anonymous friends or helpers (those healed one evening, the paralytic, the mute person). The sick lad is identified by his connection to a certain centurion; Peter’s mother-in-law is identified by that relationship; and the daughter of the ruler is also identified by her family relationship.³

³ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 348, 349).

Form and structure

Verse 1 (<i>transition</i>)	When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.
Verse 2	A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."
Verse 3	Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.
Verse 4	Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

- ❖ Parallel stories: Mark 1:40–45 and Luke 5:12–16

Technical and hermeneutical notes

Leprosy

- ❖ We do not exactly know which disease is designated. It is a skin disease, which cannot be equated with Hansen's Disease (leprosy).⁴ The Biblical description of the symptoms is found in Leviticus 13:
 - "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an **infectious skin disease**, he must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest. The priest is to examine the sore on his skin, and if the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be more than skin deep, it is an infectious skin disease. When the priest examines him, he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. If the spot on his skin is white but does not appear to be more than skin deep and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest is to put the infected person in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest is to examine him, and if he sees that the sore is unchanged and has not spread in the skin, he is to keep him in isolation another seven days. On the seventh day the priest is to examine him again, and if the sore has faded and has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a rash. The man must wash his clothes, and he will be clean. But if the rash does spread in his skin after he has shown himself to the priest to be pronounced clean, he must appear before the priest again. The priest is to

⁴ Leprosy. (2018, August 24). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy>

examine him, and if the rash has spread in the skin, he shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infectious disease” (Lev 13:1-8; See also Lev 13:9-44).

- “Scholars have reached some agreement about the probable diagnosis of *ṣāra’at* (“infectious skin disease”) in humans. The most certain conclusion is that it is not leprosy and does not include it. The main argument for this is that the symptoms Leviticus describes do not suggest leprosy.”⁵ Wright and Jones list seven arguments, two will suffice here:
 - (1) “The symptoms of leprosy progress very slowly over a period of several years. The swift development of *ṣāra’at* required by quarantine periods of seven days (Lev 13:4, 5, 21, 26, 31, 33) does not fit leprosy.
 - (2) Leprosy is not curable without drug therapy; but Leviticus 13–14 indicate that a person may recover from *ṣāra’at*.”⁶

❖ The consequences are described in Leviticus 13:45, 46):

- “The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.”
 - He must wear torn clothes.
 - He must let his hair unkempt.
 - He must cover the lower part of his face.
 - He must cry out ‘Unclean!’ Unclean!’ as long as he has the infection.
 - He must live alone, outside the camp (or the village). (2 Kings 7:3-10).
 - Numbers 5:1-5: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them.’ The Israelites did this; they sent them outside the camp. They did just as the Lord had instructed Moses.”
 - He was excluded from the ceremonies.
- “Lepers were not completely isolated from the rest of society. So if there were leper colonies or ‘hospitals’ they were not prisons; that is, their inhabitants were evidently free to come and go as they pleased.

⁵ Wright, D. P., & Jones, R. N. (1992). *Leprosy*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed., Vol. 4, p. 278).

⁶ Wright, D. P., & Jones, R. N. (1992). *Leprosy*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed., Vol. 4, p. 278).

The notion that lepers were the living dead is reflected in several texts (Num 12:12; 2 Kgs 5:7; Job 18:13).⁷

- ❖ After the healing of the diseased person, he needed to see the priest.
 - “The Lord said to Moses, ‘These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing when he is brought to the priest: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn, and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields’” (Lev 14:1-7; See also Lev 14:8-32).

Clean and Unclean

- ❖ An overview.
 - In the Old Testament clean, unclean, purity and impurity are related to the holiness of God and his purity.
 - Clean, pure = “טָהוֹר” (unclean = “טִמְאָה”):
 - 1. **pure**: gold (Ex 25:11-39); made of pure gold: candlestick Ex 31:8, table Lev 24:6;
 - 2. **ceremonially clean** (Lev 10:10; Dt 12:15 Job 14:4). Examples: meat (Lev 7:19), animals (Gen 7:2), birds (Lev 14:4; Gen 8:20; Dt 14:11), offering (Mal 11:1), water Ezek (36:25), well (Lev 11:36), seed (11:37), vessel (Is 66:20), turban (Zech 3:5), place (Lev 4:12); everyone who is not clean (2 Chron 30:17).
 - 3. **ethically clean**: eyes (Hab 1:13), hands (Job 17:9), words (Ps 12:7 Prov 15:26), heart (Ps 51:12), fear of the Lord (Ps 19:10).⁸
 - Unclean = “טִמְאָה”:
 - 1. **unclean** (Lev 10:10, 11:47; Dt 12:15-22; 15:22 Ezek 22:26; 44:23; Job 14:4; a woman defiled in name Ezek 22:5;
 - 2. **ceremonially unclean**: animals (Lev 5:2a; 7:21; 11:29; 27:11, 27; Nu 18:15; Dt 14:7-10, 19); (...) unclean by contact with a dead person (Lev

⁷ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 11).

⁸ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 369).

22:4 (...) an unclean thing (Isa 52:11; Ezek 4:13) unclean of lips (Isa 6:5); things (Lev 15:17; Nu 19:22);

- 3. further: **due to leprosy** (Lev 13:11, 55 and 14:40f); sexual emission (Lev 15:2, 25f, 33); other examples: Lev 11:4-38; 14:44f; 15:25f, 33; 20:25; Nu 19; Dt 26:14; Jos 22:19 and Am 7:17.⁹
- ❖ **Uncleanness was in most cases a temporal condition**, which could vary from a few days, a week, or a prolonged period, as was the case with leprosy, and also with the woman, who suffered of bleeding for twelve years.
- ❖ Touching the unclean:
 - “Or if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean—whether the carcasses of unclean wild animals or of unclean livestock or of unclean creatures that move along the ground—even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean and is guilty. **Or if he touches human uncleanness—anything that would make him unclean—even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it he will be guilty.**” (Lev 5;2, 3)

Exposition

Verse 1

- ❖ **“When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.”**
 - Jesus has finished his teaching on the mount about the Kingdom of God. The crowds were impressed:
 - “because he taught as one who had authority” (Mt 7:29). This authority will be underscored in the healing of the leper.
 - These words are almost similar to Exodus 34:29 (Greek Translation).
 - The crowds were not present when Jesus cleansed the leper because he told him: “See that you don’t tell anyone.” Otherwise, this command would have been unnecessary.

Verse 2

- ❖ **“A man with leprosy”**
 - For further information about “leprosy” and “clean” and “unclean” see above.
- ❖ **“Came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”**
 - M. Nolland comments: “For the first time since the Magi, someone is now said to ‘do obeisance’ (προσκυνεῖν) to Jesus. As discussed at 2:2, in his uses of this verb Matthew deliberately blurs the distinction between deferential respect and religious worship: **all**

⁹ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 376)..

such responses to Jesus are on the way towards the Christian recognition of Jesus as worthy of divine worship. With the leper, we begin to be nudged in the direction of religious worship. The address, 'Lord,' is not significant by itself, but in light of what follows we perhaps hear echoes of the use of 'Lord' in the worship of God as exalted Lord. What is striking is the leper's recognition of the supreme significance of the will of Jesus."¹⁰

- U. Luz is somewhat stronger in his assessment when he writes: "Then a leper comes to Jesus, falls at his feet, and addresses him with the majestic title "Lord" (κύριε). In Matthew 7:21–22 Matthew applied this title for the first time to Jesus as the lord of judgment. He is consistent in his use of the title. The disciples address Jesus this way (8:25; 14:28, 30; 16:22; 17:4; 18:21) as do the sick who come to the Lord for help (8:2, 6, 8; 9:28; 15:22, 25, 27; 17:15; 20:30–31, 33). The title does not appear on the lips of outsiders and is not simply polite speech. From the perspective of this Christological dimension the expression 'if you will' becomes understandable. Everything depends on the sovereign will of Jesus who himself appears as the Lord who has his authority from God."¹¹
- "The sovereign authority and divine power of Jesus are presupposed by the leper, a man obviously full of faith. When he remarks that what Jesus wills he is able to do (See also Job 42:2; Isa 55:11), the outcast knows that everything depends solely upon Jesus' gracious will. This is why, instead of asking, 'If you are able, will you?', he says, 'If you will you are able'"¹²
- The leper came "with much earnestness, and at His knees, he beseeches Him, as another evangelist saith, and with the genuine faith and right opinion about him. For neither did he say, "If Thou request it of God," nor, "If Thou pray," but, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Nor did he say, "Lord, cleanse me," but leaves all to Him, and makes His recovery depend on Him, and testifies that all the authority is His"¹³
- Cleansing the leper implied curing him of his disease.

Verse 3

❖ "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man."

- According to the Law of Moses, Jesus became ceremonially unclean. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (Isa 53:4).

¹⁰ Nolland, J. (2005, p. 349).

¹¹ Luz, U. (2001, p. 5, 6).

¹² Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 12).

¹³ John Chrysostom. (1888, p. 172).

- ❖ **“I am willing.”** These words have such an impact. The will of Jesus is in accordance with the will of the heavenly Father. It is God’s will.
 - “Jesus says simply, ‘I will’. He does not say, ‘God wills’. Jesus himself is in control, and he is the source of healing power.”¹⁴

Verse 4

- ❖ **“Then Jesus said to him, ‘See that you don’t tell anyone.’”**
 - The Gospel of Mark explains why: “Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere” (Mk 1:45).
 - The time has not arrived to tell everyone. But now the time has come. Matthew, Mark, and Luke included this story in their Gospels to show that Jesus is the Christ.
- ❖ **“But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded.”**
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Mt 5:18, 19).
- ❖ **“As a testimony to them.”** Who are they (them)? This is not immediately clear. It cannot only refer to “the priest.”
 - is meant is a positive witness initially for the priests, but then for all the people who are listening: As Israel’s Messiah Jesus keeps the Torah.¹⁵

In addition

- ❖ “The cleansing from leprosy, which restores the person cured as a full member of the community of salvation (Mt. 8:2, 3; 10:8; 11:5 par.; Lk. 4:27; 17:14, 17) is part of the Mission of the Church.”¹⁶ And a sign of the coming Kingdom.
 - “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, **cleanse those who have leprosy**, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:4-8).

¹⁴ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 14).

¹⁵ Luz, U. (2001, p. 6).

¹⁶ Hauck, F., & Meyer, R. (1964–, Vol. 3, p. 424).

- “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, **those who have leprosy are cured**, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (11:4, 5).

Application

Verse 1

- ❖ Praise Christ because of his authority (Mt 7:28, 29), his sacrificial love, his wisdom, his knowledge, his faithfulness to the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament), which are apparent in this short story of cleansing this man who suffered from skin disease (leprosy).
- ❖ Praise Christ because of his grace, mercy, his lovingkindness.

Verse 2

- ❖ **“Leper”** Due to misunderstandings, people who suffer from leprosy often don’t get adequate treatment and are excluded from the society. It is, therefore, necessary to stress the point that “leprosy” as it is used in the Bible cannot be equated with Hansen’s disease (leprosy).
 - **“It is also important to note that institutions that work with leprosy patients prefer that we avoid putting a stigma upon anyone by calling a person a ‘leper.’** It is better to refer to the disease, ‘leprosy,’ and then to state that someone ‘has leprosy,’ or ‘suffers from leprosy,’ or ‘is a leprosy patient,’ rather than marking the individual as a ‘leper.’ We cannot, of course, call it ‘Hansen’s Disease,’ since it did not have that name at the time of Jesus, and to give it that name would be an anachronism.”¹⁷
 - It is equally important to inform Christians about other diseases which are still a taboo, so they can reach out more confidently, more lovingly, while taking care of the sick and show them the love of Christ.
- ❖ Show great reverence to Christ, as the “leper” did.
 - Pray like the “leper”, who asked: **“If you are willing.”** This doesn’t imply that God will answer all our prayers as we want, but in accordance with his sovereign will.

Verse 3

- ❖ **“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.”**
 - This touch by Jesus is of greater value than a thousand words.

¹⁷ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 221).

- “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.”¹⁸
 - Touching is a very strong means of non-verbal communication. Touching the man preceded the words of Jesus. In touching Jesus already declared him clean.
 - Touching someone can have so many different meanings in interpersonal relationships. Touching needs love and wisdom. There are moments when it is wise to refrain from touching.
 - Possible meanings without any word spoken:
 - You are not alone, I’m with you.
 - I will trust you.
 - I will comfort you.
 - I will help you.
 - I am near to you.
- ❖ **“I am willing.”** These words have such an impact. We can pray for ourselves and other people. We can hope for the best. We can plead the promises and the faithfulness of God, but Jesus Christ is willing and what he is willing will happen.
 - “The leper reveals an astonishing confidence in Jesus’ power (“you can”), especially in light of the Jewish belief that cures of lepers were as difficult as resurrections from the dead (based originally on 2 Kgs 5:7). At the same time, the leper defers to Jesus’ sovereignty (“if you are willing”). **These twin thrusts are crucial in all Christian prayers for healing.**¹⁹

Verse 4

- ❖ Important in a Jewish context to show that Jesus didn’t abrogate the Law and the Prophets.
 - “What is the significance of the theme of leprosy in the First Gospel? First, the saying of Jesus in 11:5 makes the cleansing of lepers an item of eschatological expectation. So 8:1–4 stands to 11:5 as fulfillment to prophecy. Secondly, Matthew alone adds to Jesus’ instructions to missionaries the command to heal lepers (10:8). This helps extend the idea of the *imitatio Christi*: the disciples should do what their Lord did.”²⁰

¹⁸ Blomberg, C. (1992, p. 139).

¹⁹ Blomberg, C. (1992, p. 138).

²⁰ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 12).

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