HEALING, TEACHING, AND MIRACLES Matthew 8:1-13

We begin with two miracles which demonstrate the nature of faith a disciple must have to gain approval.

A. Jesus cleanses a leper.

(1-2) When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

We remember an important foundational verse for Matthew's Gospel: *Now Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people* (Matthew 4:23). Matthew went on to tell 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.

*a leper came 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.

What do you think is meant here by “worshipped him”. Why is this significant?

"Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches." (Barclay)

According to Jewish law and customs, one 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.
For all these reasons, the condition of leprosy is a model of sin and its effects. It is a contagious, debilitating disease that corrupts its victim and makes him essentially dead while alive. And it followed that almost universally, society and religious people scorned lepers. Rabbis especially despised lepers, and saw them as people under the special judgment of God, deserving no pity or mercy. 

v. 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.

Nevertheless, the leper came to Jesus by himself and despite many discouragements.

Is this dogged persistence a form of faith? How good at that are we?

"Those who call Jesus 'Lord,' and do not worship him, are more diseased than the leper was." (Spurgeon)

**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.

Do you struggle with that dilemma?

How can we know if Jesus is willing to heal us? By assuming that He is willing, but listening to Him if He should tell us that He does not. This is how it happened with the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; it seems that Paul assumed that Jesus would heal his thorn in the flesh until word came to him that He would not.

**See that you tell no one:** Jesus often commanded people to be quiet about their healing or some miraculous work that Jesus had done for them. He did this because He wanted to keep down the excitement of the crowds until the proper time.

In addition, Jesus' miracles were not primarily calculated to make Him famous or a celebrity (though they certainly did give testimony to His ministry). More so, Jesus healed to meet the needs of specific
individuals and to demonstrate the evident power of the Messiah in the setting of love and care for the personal needs of humble people. Therefore, Jesus was cautious about how the multitudes saw Him and why they followed Him.

1. (5-6) Jesus is approached by a Roman centurion. Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."

Whenever the New Testament mentions a centurion (there are at least seven), it presents them as honorable, good men. Not at all what we would expect.

**Pleading with Him:** This shows that the centurion did not make a casual request. Matthew describes him as **pleading with** Jesus on behalf of his **servant**.

(7-9) The centurion's understanding of Jesus' spiritual authority. And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this **one**, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does **it**."

**But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed:** The centurion fully understood that Jesus' healing power was not some sort of magic trick that required the magician's presence. Instead he knew Jesus had true **authority**, and could command things to be done and completed outside His immediate presence.

"As the authority of the Caesars flowed through his own yielded life, so the authority of God over diseases, demons, and all else would flow through Christ's." (Meyer)
a. When Jesus heard it, He marveled: The man's understanding of Jesus' spiritual authority made Jesus marvel. His simple confidence in the ability of Jesus' mere word to heal showed a faith that was free of any superstitious reliance on merely external things. This was truly great faith, worthy of praise.

b. Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! Jesus considered the faith of this Gentile centurion - a living symbol of Jewish oppression - and thought it greater than any faith He had seen among the people of Israel.

Does God find a lack of faith in the Church today?? Can he find faith in those outside the Church??

But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness: We see that Jesus unafraid to speak of hell, and in fact did so more than any other in the Bible. "There are some ministers who never mention anything about hell. I heard of a minister who once said to his congregation - 'If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ you will be sent to that place which it is not polite to mention.' He ought not to have been allowed to preach again, I am sure, if he could not use plain words." (Spurgeon)

Are we ashamed to speak of hell these days?

Summarise the lesson in faith from this passage.