

THE CLEANSING POWER OF THE KING

Matthew 8:1-4

If you have a Bible, open with me to Matthew chapter 8. We will be looking at verses 1-4 with a message entitled, **THE CLEANSING POWER OF THE KING**. Stand with me, and we will read our text together, Matthew chapter 8, beginning in verse 1 we read...

The Gospel according to Matthew, as many of you know, is written by Levi the tax collector, his name is Matthew in Greek. He was called to be a disciple of Jesus in the city of Capernaum where Jesus resided most of the three years of His earthly ministry. Matthew is writing to his Jewish brethren with a focus on presenting Jesus as the King of Israel. The promised Messiah, the one that they had been waiting for. Matthew will present several Messianic signs that prove Jesus is the One. By way of **overview**, in chapters 1-4, Matthew focuses on **the Person of the King** and His birthright. He shows that the lineage of Jesus gives Him the legal right to the throne of David. In chapters 5-7, Matthew focuses on **the Principles of the King** and His Kingdom, demonstrating what a citizen of the kingdom looks like. And in chapters 8-9, Matthew focuses on **the Power of the King**, where we are presented with ten miracles that will demonstrate that Jesus is the true Messiah of Israel.

Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, presents us with ten miracles in Chapters 8-9 specifically because the number ten is a significant number in Judaism. There are two ways the number 10 can be used, first, it can be used to symbolize testing or judgment. You might recall that God sent Moses, who is a type of Christ, as a deliverer, to Egypt, which is a type of the world, to bring His people out of slavery and into the Promise Land. Moses performed 10 miracles that brought destruction upon Egypt, but deliverance to God's people. As the children of Israel then wandered in the wilderness, God gave Moses 10 commandments which were meant to be a revealer of God's standard and our inability to live up to this standard. These were a foreshadowing of things to come. Secondly, the number ten can also be used to symbolize completeness, divine order, and perfection. This is how Matthew is using the number by presenting these ten miracles of Jesus. These miracles are restorative and redemptive, not destructive and condemning. By recording these ten miracles, Matthew is essentially saying, a greater than Moses is here.

The first miracle that Matthew presents and the one we will consider today is **The Cleansing of the Leper**. I find it interesting that this is the first miracle of the ten that Matthew records because leprosy is a picture of our sin condition. Although Leprosy is acquired and sin is inherent, the effects are very similar. Both leprosy and death are incurable. They both yield death in the end. Leprosy and sin make you spiritually unclean. They can both cause you to

be isolated from God and His people. They can both desensitize and cause a person not to be able to feel the pain that their disease is causing them. But just as Christ can cure leprosy, He can also cure our sin condition. His cleansing delivers a leper and sinner from death. His cleansing makes the leper and sinner spiritually clean before God and restores their standing in society. His cleansing will resensitize the leper and sinner so they can feel pain and conviction again. **What is very important about this cleansing is that you will notice the leper doesn't need multiple cleansings for his condition, but only one cleansing is necessary for the leper to be considered clean.** So too, do sinners, as it relates to salvation need a one-time cleansing to wash away our sins, past, present, and future so that we too can be declared, CLEAN! His cleansing is perpetual in nature. It is eternal. What you will find is that the leper doesn't walk away from Jesus here wondering if he has been cleansed. He knows it. You and I can have that same assurance. We don't have to wonder if our sins have really been dealt with. We can believe it and walk securely in the cleansing power of the King! Amen?

What I find is that the most Christians who struggle with their salvation struggle due to performance, they aren't performing as well as they believe they ought to be. Aren't you glad your salvation isn't about your performance but about the performance of Christ? His perfect, His righteous, His death and resurrection for our sake. And His life is credited to our account when we put our faith in Him. We are positionally justified as Romans 5:1 says, by faith in the Son of God! Our sins are gone! We've been set free! And now we are at peace with God! Effectively, we've been cleansed of our sin disease! What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! Hallelujah, Praise the King! Matthew doesn't want you to miss the most important message right up front. That Jesus can cleanse anyone of their sin condition.

I've **divided** these four verses up into four points relating to this miracle of cleansing. In verses 1-2a we find **The Chance One Must Take**, in verse 2b, **The Faith One Must Have**, in verse 3, **The Trust One Must Walk In**, and finally in verse 4, **The Process One Must Follow**. First, let's consider **The Chance One Must Take**.

THE CHANCE ONE MUST TAKE

When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him,

Jesus, now descending the Mount by which He gave the greatest sermon ever preached, is followed by great crowds. According to Matthew 5:1 there was already a crowd assembled. Jesus left that crowd and ascended the hillside and begin to teach His disciples all that is contained in Matthew chapters 5-7. His focus was on teaching His disciples the kingdom principles that they are to operate by. Those in the crowd could hear Jesus and thus when finished according to Matthew 7:28-29, this crowd was astonished. They had never heard such

a direct and authoritative command of the Scriptures before. To say that this crowd was excited is an understatement. There was an electricity in the air. Hope was stirring, faith was building, and Jesus' notoriety was growing. In other words, this is a perfect moment for a miracle to occur.

However, nothing will happen unless someone decides to take a chance and step towards Jesus. Nothing will change for anyone personally here if they are unwilling to take a chance and step towards Jesus. Understand, being part of the crowd won't change you; it's great you're here, but know this, each of us individually and personally must take a chance and take a step towards Jesus if we want Him to change our lives. Well, this is exactly what happens. Matthew records, ***A leper came to Him (Jesus) and knelt before Him.*** This guy knew his condition and what it meant in this culture, and yet he took a chance anyway, and he will be glad he did.

Leprosy was a disease that was incurable. It was a contagious condition that wasn't necessarily super easy to contract, it took multiple interactions with an infected person to become infected, but once you did you were as good as dead in this culture. It usually took on average about 9 years for leprosy to run its course, and then the person would die. What is frightening is that you could have leprosy for a number of years and not even know it. It would lie dormant and then out of nowhere manifest itself. The person sitting next to you could be infected right now!

The initial signs of this disease were revealed on the skin as reddish or white spots. As it progressed, a leper's hair would bleach white and become patchy; their fingernails would loosen and eventually decay and fall off. A person's joints would wither and shrink. Their gums would be absorbed, and their teeth would fall out. The nose, the eyes, the palette in the mouth of a person would rot away. The skin of a leper would crust with scales and oozing sores would appear all over a person's body. Their bones would also twist and deform. Lepers often got what was called "claw hands" where their muscles and ligaments contorted and their bones twisted curling the fingers in a position that caused their hands to look like claws. They were also called "lion-faced" because of the swelling and disfigurement of the facial bones. Leprosy would cause a person to become unrecognizable. Just like sin can do to us! A person can be so overtaken by their sinful condition that they can become unrecognizable to even those who know them best.

Internally, leprosy would eat away at the nerves of a person to the point that the body would become numb. The extremities of a leper would eventually have no feeling to the point that they would often hurt themselves and not even know it. That's why some referred to leprosy as a painless hell. Lepers would sleep in caves and during the night often their fingers and toes

would be gnawed off by rodents and they wouldn't even know it was happening. They would just waked up with less toes or fingers. Understand, our sin condition does the same to us if we aren't careful. Over time a person can become so desensitized to sin that they lose the feeling of conviction altogether. Eventually, they won't feel the pain that their sin is causing them, and not only them, but also those around them. They become totally numb to it.

Well, not only was the leprosy incurable medically, but it was also unbearable societally. According to **Leviticus 13:45-46**, ⁴⁵ *"The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'* ⁴⁶ *He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp."* Because of the contagious nature of leprosy, anyone with this disease was immediately removed from society and put outside the camp as it were. They were excommunicated from their community, and even worse, they were separated from their loved ones. It was a road marked with extreme loneliness.

Because leprosy made a person unclean whenever they came in the vicinity of people, they were required to make their presence known by announcing, *"Unclean, Unclean, Unclean."* Talk about adding insult to injury. The shame that was associated with the disease was very real. And whenever anyone heard those words, they would split immediately. They would run for the hills. Lepers became defined by their disease, just like so many do with their sinful condition. We love to label ourselves in accordance with our sin. I'm an alcoholic, I'm an addict, I'm a liar, I'm a...and the list goes on and on. But understand Jesus is the chain-breaker and the sin eraser. Christians are not defined by their sin condition, but by their Creator and Savior. Jesus is our identity. For we died and our life is now hidden in Christ (Col 3:3), Amen?

The Jews also believed that anyone who contracted leprosy was actually being cursed by God. They said it was a sign of divine displeasure, and a punishment for sin. As if the shame of declaring "unclean" wasn't enough, they were also treated inhumanely by many, including most Rabbi's. Some would go as far as to throw rocks at them so they would keep their distance. According to Jewish law and customs, a person was to keep a 6-foot distance from a leper lest you become unclean. Imagine if that was your child or your spouse. How difficult that would be. Well, this leper knew his condition, he knew he was doomed for all intents and purposes, and yet a beam of hope came to him, and he took a chance and came to Jesus believing that He could help him become clean.

When it says **he knelt before Him**, the idea is that he came in reverent worship and surrender to Jesus. The word **knelt** here literally means, *"to prostrate oneself before someone as an act of reverence, fear, or supplication."* The Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity. This man might now know exactly who Jesus is, but He knows

one thing, He is worthy of worship and reverence. Notice, what Jesus doesn't do here, He doesn't ridicule this man for coming nor does He run away from him. Jesus gives this man a chance to present his need. And I will say to you, if you come to the Lord in this same posture, you too can expect to be met by Jesus. He too will give you a chance to represent your need if you come to Him in this way! So, I implore you today, to take a chance and step towards Jesus and present yourself to Him in a humble posture of worship and reverence and watch Him meet you where you are at! We've considered **The Chance One Must Take**, now let's consider, **The Faith One Must Have**. Look at the rest of verse 2. The leper says to Jesus,

THE FAITH ONE MUST HAVE

saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

Before this man says a word, Jesus knows his need. Yet, what does Jesus do? He waits for him to ask. He doesn't just cleanse him, and Jesus won't just cleanse you; you have to invite Him to do so by asking Him to cleanse you. The first word from the leper's mouth is **Lord**. I don't want you to miss. This man isn't simply saying, "Sir", he is acknowledging the deity of Jesus here. His posture certainly matches His profession here. **David Guzik** comments, *"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."* This is the first time in this Gospel that Jesus is called Lord and Matthew certainly intends for his Jewish audience to recognize that Jesus is God! No wonder this leper can say without a doubt, ***If you will, you can make me clean***. This man has faith that Jesus can cleanse him of this incurable disease. Notice he doesn't say "*if you can*", but "*if you will*." Big different. This leper believes fully that Jesus can cleanse him. His request is made in accordance with the will of Jesus. That is exactly what faith looks like folks. We should be totally confident in God's ability to do whatever it is that we are asking, but we should equally be submissive to His will for our lives. Real faith is exercised when we say, "*not my will, but Your will be done*." This leper is expectant but reverent. He is asking, not commanding. He is in full submission to Jesus here.

What is interesting is that he doesn't ask for healing, but cleansing which involves healing, but goes beyond it. This leper didn't just want to be rid of leprosy, but to be rid of his uncleanness that made him a reproach before God. He wanted to be fully restored so that he could properly worship God! His uncleanness is what alienated Him from God and from others. What he is asking for is something far greater than his most immediate need of healing. I wonder how many of us come to God looking only for healing and not cleansing. Lord, heal my physical body. All the while we can be unclean spiritually. I am not trying to spiritualize this idea, but it is something to consider. Do we care more about the temporal life than we do about the eternal? This man wanted cleansing, but only if the Lord willed it. It just so happens

that this is God's will for all of us! This brings us to our third point, **The Trust One Must Walk In**. Look at verse 3.

THE TRUST ONE MUST WALK IN

³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus does the unthinkable here...he ***stretches out his hand and touched him***. Now this was religiously not cool, to say the least. This would make any other person ceremonial unclean. So, the question becomes, did Jesus just become unclean? According to Leviticus 5:3, anyone who touches anything unclean becomes unclean. This is part of the stigma Jesus is trying to break in Judaism. They held to a strict adherence of the letter of the law, while neglecting the spirit of its intent. The law was never meant to be used to mistreat or be unloving towards others. While Jesus would have appeared to step beyond the letter of law according to the interpreters of His day, He did not violate the spirit of its intent. In fact, Jesus walked in the heart of the law and helps a man that is desperately in need. Understand, Jesus doesn't become unclean. The moment Jesus touched this man His leprosy was gone, and he was cleansed. The purity of our King absorbed the uncleanness of this man. Just like He didn't for you and me on Calvary. The sin of the world was put upon Jesus, but that didn't make Him a sinner! His purity and righteousness were such that He absorbed our sin! His resurrection proves that He was sinless. So, His touch of the leper doesn't make Him unclean. His purity absorbs this man's uncleanness. He is now cleansed! Praise God!

What I love is that Jesus doesn't worry about what others might think about what He is doing. He's in-tune with the Spirit, in fellowship with the Father, and focused on the good of this leper, and thus He stretches out His arm and touches him. It must have startled the leper who is bowing at Jesus' feet. It was probably the first time this man had been touched since he was diagnosed with this disease. He didn't expect Jesus to touch him, just cleanse him. But Jesus always goes above and beyond what we could hope or imagine. Amen? He touches this leper and says, ***I will, be clean. And Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*** **The only thing left for the leper to do now was to trust in what Jesus had just given him, total cleansing from His disease.** And I will say that many who struggle with their salvation do so because of this point. They are not trusting in the cleansing power of the King. If you truly came to Christ, then your sins have been dealt with. You are justified before the Father. Your past, present, and future sins are atoned for. You are present-tense cleansed!

Understand, in order for this leper to fully enjoy his cleansing He must trust that Jesus has truly cleansed him. He doesn't have to wonder about it; He just needs trust in the cleansing power

of the King! So too must we! Well, this brings us to our final point, **The Process One Must Follow**. Look at verse 4.

THE PROCESS ONE MUST FOLLOW

⁴ 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.”

Jesus gives this leper two specific instructions. First, he’s **to say nothing to anyone**. Because Jesus didn’t want to become famous for miracles, He knew that would overshadow His message. Miracles can’t save you eternally, but the Gospel can. Jesus knew that it would be far more difficult to minister to people who really wanted to be saved if his notoriety grew as a miracle worker more than a preacher. **Mark 1:45** tells us what the leper did, *“⁴⁵ But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”* Jesus’ life became a bit more difficult because of the disobedience of this man. He had to stay in desolation to work rather than be free to enter any town or city. Don’t be disobedience to the Lord instructions, lest you get in His way. Be obedient! Amen? Secondly, Jesus tells this man, **go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them**.

This was part of the law according to Leviticus 14. A leper must present himself before the priest for inspection and a series of sacrifices must be made on his behalf before he could be pronounced clean and fully restored religiously and socially. Jesus’ instructions here confirm that He came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. It is widely accepted that no one had ever been healed of leprosy before. So, you can imagine the attention it would draw. This would be one of the many signs that Jesus would give to the Priests and Religious Leaders that He was the Messiah, and rightful King to the throne of Israel. When this man was declared clean by the priest, it would serve as an undeniable fact that Jesus was the one they had been looking for. The process needed to be followed. For you and me, we have a process to follow as well. It is called the Great Commission. The moment we are cleansed, we are told to go and tell the world about it! **Matthew 28:19-20**, *“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

This leper’s story is also your story Christian. You were diagnosed with an incurable disease. Your only hope was Jesus and His willingness to cleanse you. Like the leper, if you and I are ever going to enjoy our salvation, we must trust in the cleansing power of the King and rest in His finished work. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we*

might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21)." Jesus absorbed your sin, so you that you could be made righteous. Your salvation is not dependent on you, and your performance. It is solely based on Christ, and His perfect life. This is the cleansing power of the King, that He is able to keep us and present us blameless before God (Jude 24-25). Jesus said He has lost none that the Father has given Him (John 17:12). If you are in Christ today then you are clean. Let's rejoice in the cleansing and share the cleansing power of Jesus with everyone we can. Amen? Let's pray.