

Text: Mt 8.1-4, 9.1-8; Lk 5.12-26; Mk 1.40-45, 2.1-12

Once again, we are looking at miracles Jesus performed. We are still in the early months of Jesus ministry, though we can't precisely place the events on a timeline.

We can put them in order, primarily because of Mark and secondarily Luke. We will see again that Matthew is not much concerned with chronological order.

I think we should also mention we are still in the period *before* the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew places it early as sort of an announcement of the new teaching of Jesus, from which everything else flows.

In the order of events, however, the Lord was building large crowds due to his miracles, which set the stage for his teaching. His miracles taught something also, but I would guess that people, being what they are, missed the point of both the miracles and the teaching. All they wanted Jesus for was to see some new miracle (or to have Jesus heal themselves or a loved one).

Now, to be sure, there were likely some sincere followers, but you have to admit that it would be sensational to see the healing of sick people and demons cast out. *How well could you concentrate on the teaching with all that going on?*

Our passages tonight involve two healings. These events occurred several days apart, but they are the next two things covered by the Gospels.

I. Willing to heal the leper (Mt 8.1-4, Lk 5.12-16, Mk 1.40-45)

A. Chronological notes

1. Matthew's words could imply that this follows immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, but the other gospels clearly put it before the Sermon
2. Matthew's words are all true – but chronology not important to him (Mt 8.1)
 - a. After the Sermon, the Lord came down the mountain
 - b. After the Sermon, large crowds followed him
 - c. But verse 2 begins an account that occurred previously
3. Mark and Luke are indefinite concerning the time of this event, but we know it occurred

- a. In one of the cities to which Jesus traveled (Lk 5.12)
- b. When the leper approached Jesus (Mk 1.40)

B. The healing of leprosy

1. The Law detailed the procedures by which leprosy was dealt with (Lev 13-14)
 - a. How leprosy was determined
 - b. How cleansing was demonstrated
 - c. What happened after cleansing (sacrificial offerings, etc)
 - d. The laws of leprosy were in the midst of the laws of cleanness and uncleanness – very symbolic of the distance between sinning man and holy God
 - 1) Leprosy is a general term covering many diseases of the skin including what we would call leprosy today
 - 2) Leprosy blocked participation in any of the religious rituals
 - 3) Leprosy broke off social contact with those who were clean – they lived separate, lonely lives

In the same way, sin completely blocks man's way to God — God is of holier eyes than to look upon evil.

2. This leper came to Jesus, beseeching him “If you are willing”
 - a. As far as we know, this man is the first leper Jesus ever healed in his ministry
 - b. The OT records only two instances of the healing of leprosy:
 - 1) Miriam cleansed from leprosy by Moses (Num 12)
 - 2) Naaman the Syrian was cleansed by the prophet Elisha (2 Ki 5)
 - c. Thus, the leper sees something in Jesus that no other Israelite has seen to this point
3. Jesus is willing: but specific instructions
 - a. Keep silent
 - b. Show yourself to the priest (acc. to the Law)

- 1) Mt notes that this was a “testimony to them”
- 2) Since the healing of leprosy was so rare, this presentation to the priest would be a startling evidence of Messianic arrival

C. The crowds that followed

1. The leper did not (could not?) keep silent – causing crowds to increase
2. Why did Jesus want the leper to keep silent?
 - a. “To avoid being considered just a ‘miracle worker.’ Note that many of these commands follow miracles. Jesus did not want people to follow Him just to see Him do tricks. He came as the Son of God to bring salvation and forgiveness from sin, not just physical healing and miracles.
 - b. “To avoid undue publicity which would hinder His mobility and ministry to His disciples. Note the result of the leper’s disobedience in 1.45.
 - c. “To avoid the mistaken notion of the type of Messiah He came to be. He came to suffer and serve and sacrifice Himself, not simply to display His power (*cf.* 10.45).
 - d. “To avoid the premature death that increased popularity could bring.”¹
3. How Jesus dealt with the crowds
 - a. He would slip into the wilderness areas to pray (Lk 5.16)
 - b. He eventually spent a good deal of his time in the wilderness, ministering to people away from the cities (Mk 1.45)

What would have been a dramatic sign to the priests was nonetheless a dramatic sign to the people. Healing the leper drew all kinds of interest.

¹ These four reasons from *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts : Old and New Testaments*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

II. Redeeming and healing the paralytic (Lk 5.17-26, Mt 9.1-8, Mk 2.1-12)

A. Mark gives us a specific chronological note (Mk 2.1)

1. The Lord returned to Capernaum some days after the healing of the leper
2. Matthew tells us he traveled by boat (across the Sea of Galilee) to come to "his own city" (Mt 9.1)

B. The crowds have not abated – Jesus is teaching in a house with crowds pressing in and around the building

1. Four friends arrive with a sick man, find no way in through the crowd
2. Jewish houses were usually one story, with outside stairs to the flat roof
3. Unconcerned with the damage they cause, they tear the roof open and lower the man to Jesus feet
4. In the audience are Pharisees, teachers of the law, and scribes
5. Jesus pronounces forgiveness of sins (redemption!)
 - a. No doubt the man had been injured as a consequence of sin
 - b. Jesus does this in response to "their faith" (Lk 5.20) – likely the faith of the friends and of the injured man

C. The reaction of the scribes and Pharisees

1. Their reasoning is quoted, but they were reasoning "to themselves" (Mt 9.3), "in their hearts" (Mt 9.4, Mk 2.8, Lk 5.22)
2. Jesus responds publicly to their inner reasoning
 - a. He shows that he knows their thoughts (Mk 2.8)
 - b. He compares the claim to forgive sins with the claim to be able to heal (Mk 2.9)
 - c. He commands the paralytic to rise and carry his bed (Mk 2.10-11)
3. The man picked up his bed and went home, thus proving that Jesus has the authority to forgive sin

D. The crowds, of course, marvel, but it is unlikely that most of them “get it”

Conclusion:

Do you get it?

The Lord’s miracles are not a religious show. Jesus performed many dramatic miracles, a precursor of the kingdom era when there would be no more sickness, no more sorrow, no more suffering.

But there is a spiritual point to be made in these miracles:

1. The Messiah has come
2. The Messiah has authority over sin

The Messiah has authority over you and me also. We come to these passages not just for our own “vicarious spectator thrills” two thousand years removed, but to observe and adore and serve our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.