

His Miracles Affirm Jesus Christ as Messiah; Teaching on Discipleship

Matthew 8:14-22

Matthew 8:14-17 - *"Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.*

¹⁶ *When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, ¹⁷ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."*

¹⁸ *And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ¹⁹ Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." ²⁰ 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."*

²¹ *Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ²² But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Background Notes

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The King was about to arrive! The King arrived, and in Matthew 5-7 He spoke taught about the moral and spiritual qualities of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 8 and 9 record a number of miracles that show the power of the King. These miracles not only backed up the claims of Jesus Christ as Messiah and King, but they were designed to teach us spiritual truth. Even the arrangement of the first four miracles in Matthew 8 is not arbitrary - it's done with purpose and design. Put together, they seem to give us a spiritual picture of God's program for the kingdom of heaven. Now the teaching gets a little bit heavy here, but I'm sure you can follow it!

In the healing of the leper we have a spiritual picture of the Lord's first advent, coming to the nation of Israel (v2-4). He came with the power to heal their sinful condition if, as the leper did, they would be willing to turn to Him. But the chief priests and religious leaders of the nation failed to recognize the promised Messiah, even though the evidence that had been predicted in the prophecies was staring them in the face. "...*go your way, show yourself to the priest...*" (v4). But clearly they didn't announce this to the nation, and they rejected His claims as the Messiah.

The healing of the centurion's servant (v5-13) portrays the kingdom of heaven at the present time. The centurion and his servant were Gentiles, and the Lord found greater faith in these Gentiles than He did in Israel. "*Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!*" (v10). How true today!

Notice, too, that the Lord was not physically present, but was absent from the scene at the time of this second miracle. So in this present dispensation our Lord is in heaven - but His saving power is at work in this world.

In the third miracle of Matthew 8, the Lord “returned to the house of Israel.” As the Lord Jesus came into Peter’s Jewish home, and restored Peter’s Jewish mother-in-law to health and service, so the relationship between the Lord and the Jewish people will be restored. In a coming day, Israel will be restored to spiritual health and service to the Lord among the nations!

Then in verse 16 we read, *“When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick...”* What a wonderful picture of the coming millennial kingdom of our Lord here on this earth! The Lord will return and Satan will be bound. The Lord’s millennial kingdom will be a great time of healing and blessing for **all**. What a wonderful spiritual picture of our Lord’s program for the kingdom of heaven we have in these four miracles!

Doctrinal Points

1. Disease will be eliminated when all the effects of sin are removed.

Verse 17 contains a quotation from Isaiah 53:4: *“... He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.’”*

Some Christians believe that they can claim Matthew 8:17 as a present promise of healing from disease, because, they say, “Jesus died for our sicknesses.” But that is not what this verse says! Notice from the Matthew 8 context that this prophecy was fulfilled in our Lord’s healing ministry, not in the atonement. *“When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick...”*

Now it’s true that Isaiah 53 goes on to speak about our Lord’s atoning work for sin on the cross, and the Bible clearly teaches that there is a connection between sin and disease. If sin had never entered the world, there would be no disease or sickness. So there is a connection between sin and sickness. The Bible also teaches that in the eternal state there will be no disease or sickness in heaven. *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).* Those future blessed conditions are only possible because of the work of Christ on the cross. All the problems associated with sin, including sickness, will ultimately be removed - only because the Lord Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for mankind’s sin.

Our Lord's healing ministry, in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, certainly looks forward to and anticipates the time when there will be no more sickness or disease. However, Matthew 8:17 is definitely not a promise of healing from disease at the present time. The Lord **can** heal from sickness today, if He so wills, but don't pull Matthew 8:17 out of context and claim it as a present promise for healing! Disease will only be eliminated when all the effects of sin are removed.

2. Discipleship demands a change in priorities.

"And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came 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." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (v18-22).

What did the Lord mean by the statement, "let the dead bury their own dead?" He meant 'let those who are spiritually dead take care of burying the physically dead.' In other words, there are plenty of unbelievers available to do the everyday, necessary jobs in this life, but not everyone can serve the Lord as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. To be a disciple of the Lord, you must be saved and fully committed. **Discipleship demands a change in priorities.**

When I left regular employment to go into the Lord's work full time, another Christian told me that it was sad that I wouldn't be able to use my education and training as a research scientist for the benefit of mankind. I was surprised at this statement coming from a fellow believer, and I almost responded, "Let the dead bury the dead. There are many unbelieving research scientists around who can do that job, but only believers are called to do the work of the Lord."

The overall teaching of this passage is that **discipleship demands a change in priorities**. The scribe said, *"Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go" (v19)*. The Lord's answer indicated that security for self must be low on the priority list of a disciple. *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (v20)*. Do you see what the Lord was saying? Personal security must be low on the priority list - whether it's financial security or job security or even the security of having a home. All these things must move down on the disciple's priority list.

Another would-be disciple said, *"Lord, let me first go and bury my father" (v21)*. It's important to realize the true situation here. It sounds like the man's father had just died and the Lord was telling this would-be disciple, "If you want to follow Me, you can't even attend his father's funeral!" No - the man's father was not dead yet. What the man meant was that he would follow the Lord sometime in the future, after his father died, and after the family affairs and inheritance were settled. **Then** he would be free to follow the Lord! So the Lord Jesus essentially was saying to him, "**Now** is the time to follow Me. Family affairs will be taken care of in due course when your father actually dies, and perhaps other family members who are not My disciples could handle the legal affairs. If you want to be a disciple, you must **change your priorities now.**"

The same is true today. Family relationships and responsibilities have their place, but they must be in the proper place on the priority list. Your priorities will be different if you're single rather than married with a family, and other Scriptures bear on this subject, but in every case, **the Lord must be first**. Discipleship demands a change in priorities.

Are you a disciple? Are you a fully committed disciple of our Lord Jesus? Discipleship demands a change in priorities.

Practical Application

If we're saved, we should serve!

"So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them..." (v15).

When Peter's mother-in-law was healed, she immediately became involved in serving the Lord! When the Lord saves us and heals us from the sickness of sin, we should start to serve the Lord - **right away!** That's the norm. That's expected!

The Lord doesn't take us to heaven the moment we're saved, because we're saved to serve. We're saved to worship. We're saved to do a number of things, but certainly we're saved to serve.

When children are saved, we should teach them how to serve. Christian children can help in many small ways in mission projects and various other Christian service activities. When our children were young, whenever possible we tried to have them join us in serving the Lord. Even if it was only stuffing envelopes for devotional mailings, that was serving the Lord!

I trust all of you are involved in some kind of Christian service. I hope that you're encouraging your children and grandchildren to be involved in Christian service as well. If we're saved, we should serve!