

HE TOOK UP OUR INFIRMITIES

Matthew 8:1-17

Key Verse: 8:17b

“He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.”

In today’s passage, Jesus comes down from the mountain where he had given the Sermon on the Mount, and begins to heal people from their sicknesses. Jesus heals a man with leprosy, a centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law, and a crowd of people. Matthew summarizes Jesus’ healing ministry by quoting from Isaiah 53:4, “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” Let’s accept this wonderful Jesus who took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.

First, Jesus said, “I am willing. Be clean!” (1-4).

Look at verse 1. “When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.” Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount resonated in the hearts of listeners, and captured their souls. They could see the vision of heaven, forgetting the crimes and disasters in the world. They found new hope in Jesus. They wanted to be with Jesus all the time. So they followed Jesus in large crowds.

Look at verse 2. “A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’” This was a man with leprosy. Leprosy makes the skin rot and causes muscles to atrophy, contorting the limbs. Leprosy is contagious, incurable, and fatal. Moreover, leprosy erodes the nerves, making one numb. Some lepers are so insensitive to pain that they lose body parts without knowing it. Lepers were cast out of society to live in colonies. To make it worse, there was a stigma to leprosy. In the Old Testament, Miriam (Nu 12:10), Gehazi (2Ki 5:27), and Uzziah (2Ch 26:19-20) were all smitten with leprosy by God as punishment for particular sins. They became warnings to the nation. The Jewish people naturally looked down on lepers as sinners being justly punished by God.

In his condition, this man could have become fatalistic. He could have soothed his mind with aimless distractions. But he did not. He came to Jesus. When he came, he knelt down and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” He believed Jesus could heal him. At the same time, he totally yielded to Jesus’ sovereignty. He was not demanding, but asked according to Jesus’ will. He was humble before Jesus. He had awesome respect for Jesus. Outwardly he was a man with leprosy, but inwardly he was like a prince before his king. He was still a man with a soul, whose life was sparkling like a star in the sky. He teaches us how to come to Jesus. We must come as we are with great faith in Jesus’ power. We must humbly ask mercy, subject to his will. 1 John 5:14 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

How did Jesus respond? Look at 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.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. This was not necessary. Jesus could have healed him without a touch. But Jesus understood how much this man suffered in social isolation, never shaking hands or hugging loved ones. So Jesus touched him. Jesus’ touch revealed his unconditional acceptance of the man, even before he was healed. Jesus’ touch expressed his affection for the man. Jesus’ touch warmed his soul, melting icy scars from rejection. To Jesus, he was precious regardless of his disease.

Then Jesus said, “I am willing.” Jesus was not burdened to heal this man. Jesus was willing. Jesus took pleasure in healing this man. In fact, Jesus wanted to do for this man even more than he requested. Jesus shows us the love of God. God loves his people dearly. God wants to bless his children. God is not burdened by our humble requests; he is willing to help us. When we know God’s willing heart, we can approach God with the faith that pleases him. Moreover, we become willing to serve others. 1 Peter 5:2 says, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be....” There are so many who serve others willingly. Dr. John Jun, Mother Barry, and Missionary Grace A. Lee serve overseas missionaries willingly and with great affection. It is the expression of God’s willingness.

Then Jesus said, “Be clean!” There was power in Jesus’ word. As soon as Jesus had spoken, the man was cured of his leprosy. His diseased flesh became clean, as clean as that of an infant child. His muscles became strong; he

looked magnificent, like the handsome boy David as portrayed in Michelangelo's sculpture. He must have smiled from ear to ear, showing his new white teeth. Now he looked like a prince outwardly, matching his inner bearing.

Jesus did not stop there. Look at 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.'" This man may have been tempted to do many things with his new body. He could have gone home to show his family members that he was well. He could have gone to the mall to show himself to young ladies. He could have gone to the basketball court. But Jesus gave him clear direction to first show himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded. Jesus wanted him to be thankful to God. Jesus wanted him to live by the word of God. Jesus' love and compassion for one person is so great. Jesus healed his body, mind and soul, and even restored his social life. Jesus is willing to do all this for those who come to him.

In the Bible, leprosy is compared to sin. Sin eats away a person's soul, disfiguring his inner man and bringing about spiritual death. Still, a person who is dying spiritually may feel fine. That's why we need Bible study. The Bible is like a mirror for the soul that exposes our condition. It helps us see our sicknesses as they are. Then we can come to Jesus for cleansing. I was once very sick with the sin of selfishness. I could not speak a few words to others at mealtimes. I thought this was normal. But selfishness destroyed my soul day by day. Through Bible study with a good shepherd I could find this as sinsickness and come to Jesus. Jesus cleanses my selfishness daily, enabling me to serve him. For the last few weeks, I have been encouraging one young man to bring his fiancé home to meet his parents. It was not easy for him. So I and prayed for him every day. Finally, he invited his fiancé to his parents' house for dinner one Sunday evening. But he said nothing to me about it. I was shocked. Through prayer I learned that he was an only son, just like me, who did not speak up when he should have. After that, new love for him grew in my heart. By the way, things are going well for him. We all struggle with sinsickness: selfishness, pride, laziness, lustful desire, jealousy, bitterness and so on. Jesus wants to cleanse us and heal us completely. Jesus says to each of us, "I am willing. Be clean!"

Second, "just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (5-13).

Look at verses 5-6. "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 'Lord,' he said, 'my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.'" Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, leaders of a hundred men. They were expected to be loyal to the death and to inspire soldiers under them to exhibit the same loyalty. It is not uncommon for soldiers to be hard-hearted. They are exposed to killing, which desensitizes their humanity. Recent statistics show that U.S. soldiers returning from the Iraq War have not adjusted well to family life. They easily become abusive and violent. But this centurion was different. He was full of compassion toward his servant. He felt his servant's pain as though it were his own. He could not ignore his servant's suffering. He had to do something to help his servant. This compassion compelled him to seek Jesus' help. He came to Jesus humbly, showing great respect. Jesus was moved by his request and said, "I will go and heal him." However, this meant entering a Gentile's house, which was illegal for a Jew. But Jesus did not mind. Jesus healed the sick even when it violated Jewish laws of separation. Jesus breaks down barriers to practice God's love and bring healing to those who come to him by faith.

Look at verses 8-9. "The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, "Go," and he goes; and that one, "Come," and he comes. I say to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.'" The centurion realized who Jesus was. Jesus was the Son of God, while he was just a sinful man. The centurion trembled at the thought of Jesus coming to his house. Furthermore, the centurion knew it was not necessary, for he understood the power of a commander's word. It was absolute. It would be obeyed as a matter of life and death. Though the commander gave his order in Rome, it would be carried out in Capernaum without fail. The centurion applied his understanding to the spiritual world. Jesus is the commander-in-chief of heavenly forces. Legions of angels, infinitely more powerful than Roman soldiers, were at his disposal. God's almighty power was available to Jesus. The centurion was sure that if Jesus just said the word, his servant would be healed somehow.

Look at verses 10-12. "When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of

teeth.” Jesus was astonished at the centurion’s faith. Jesus was rarely astonished by anything. But Jesus was astonished by this man’s faith. Jesus praised his faith as exemplary to the entire Jewish nation. Then what was it that pleased Jesus?

Simply, it was the centurion’s attitude toward Jesus’ word. The centurion trembled before Jesus’ word, expecting it to be obeyed without question. He learned this attitude through his experience as a soldier who obeyed his commander at any cost. This is the attitude we must have toward Jesus’ word. If Jesus just says the word, God’s power will perform a miracle. UBF Missionaries in Uzbekistan are in a difficult situation. The government is becoming increasingly Muslim, and hostile to Christians. There is a real danger that they will be deported from the country. But they accepted the word of Jesus, “The gospel must first be preached to all nations.” They concluded that if they remain in Uzbekistan, the gospel will be preached through them. And if they are deported, the gospel will be preached in another way. They believe the gospel will be preached in Uzbekistan anyway because Jesus said so.

Korea UBF leaders trembled before Jesus’ world mission command whenever they studied the Bible. They sent out missionaries by any means. Other church leaders told them that world mission was only possible for rich Americans and Canadians. But they ignored these words because they honored Jesus’ words more. Now there are more than 1,500 UBF missionaries who have gone out to more than 70 nations of the world. Many recognize Korea as a great missionary sending country. On the other hand, many North Americans now seem to think that only sacrificial, hardworking Koreans can do world mission and that rich and lazy North Americans are too spoiled and easygoing. How ridiculous this is! We must learn the faith of the centurion who trembled before Jesus’ word and accept the world mission command by faith.

Look at verse 13. “Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that very hour.” By the centurion’s faith, his servant was healed. Jesus works through one person’s faith and compassion to heal others. We can be a blessing to others when we practice Jesus’ compassion and have faith in Jesus’ word. One man has many abilities that can be used by God to bless others. But he suffered from despair because of others’ sins and his own sins. Many times he has laid down like a paralytic. But a godly woman has prayed for him with faith that if Jesus just says the word, he can be healed. Now he is overcoming despair gradually and serving God in many ways. Let’s practice Jesus’ compassion by caring for one needy person. Let’s teach the mighty word of Jesus to those who need healing of all kinds.

Third, Jesus took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (14-17).

Look at verses 14-15. “When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.” Jesus did not stop healing when he went home. Jesus immediately noticed that Peter’s mother-in-law had a fever. Without being asked, Jesus touched her hand and healed her. As soon as she was healed, she got up and began to wait on him. Those who are healed serve Jesus joyfully.

Look at verse 16. “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.” Jesus had been working hard all day long. Now it was evening time, and he needed some rest. But suddenly Jesus was surrounded by demon-possessed people. They were not beautiful and helpful people, but demon-possessed people. To any other person, it could be their worst nightmare. It was much more difficult than being a substitute teacher in the worst high school class. It was more difficult than teaching in a prison. What did Jesus do? Jesus did not run away. Jesus accepted those who came to him. Jesus was willing to spend time with them. Jesus helped them one by one by driving out evil spirits and healing their sicknesses. Jesus’ compassion is endless. Jesus’ power is matchless. Jesus came to heal all mankind.

Matthew summarizes Jesus’ healing ministry in verse 17. “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” Jesus’ healing ministry fulfilled God’s will. God is willing to heal mankind. God loves the people of the world. When people suffer from sickness and wounds, God feels it. God wants to heal all of his sick children one by one, missing no one. But this healing ministry is costly. Matthew’s quotation is from Isaiah 53, which foretells the ministry of the suffering servant. To take up our infirmities and carry our diseases, Jesus suffered much. Jesus was despised and rejected by men. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him

and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” The real sickness of all people is a sin sickness. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to heal our sinsickness. When we trust in Jesus he takes up all our infirmities and carries our diseases.

There is no reason for us to remain in sinsickness. Let’s come to Jesus for healing. Let’s learn the compassionate heart and the faith of the centurion who obtained healing for his sick servant. May Jesus’ words of compassion and healing spread to many young people.