

JESUS TOOK UP OUR INFIRMITIES

Matthew 8:1-17

Key Verse: 8:17

**“This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:
‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.’”**

In chapters 5-7 we studied Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. Now, in 8:1-9:34, Jesus demonstrates his divine power as the Messiah by healing the sick, driving out demons, calming a storm, forgiving sins and raising the dead.

In today’s passage Jesus heals many sick people. Have any of you been sick or injured recently? Is there anyone here who has never been sick or injured? We have all experienced sickness or injury that hinders us from living a productive life. There are also mental illnesses and sin-sicknesses that debilitate our spirits and fill us with sorrow and a sense of futility. How do we respond to them? We may wonder why God allowed these things and let doubt paralyze us. In our minds, we believe in God, but we can’t pray and our lives lack real power. We need to come to Jesus. Jesus took up our infirmities and can heal us. Jesus enables us to live powerful lives. Let’s learn the faith in Jesus that heals our bodies, minds and spirits.

First, Jesus said, “I am willing...Be clean!” (1-4). After proclaiming wonderful words of life, Jesus came down from the mountainside and confronted the real world (1). Jesus’ love is not just theoretical and idealistic, it reaches people who suffer in harsh reality. Jesus’ love is not with empty words, but has power to heal and bless people. God is not just “there in heaven,” but here with us in the messy realities of our lives. People around Jesus sensed this about him, and many followed him. Matthew says that they were large crowds. Jews and Gentiles, people from all regions were compelled to follow Jesus (4:24-25).

Among them, a man with leprosy came and knelt before Jesus. Luke, the doctor, describes in more detail that he was “covered with leprosy” (Lk 5:12). Leprosy is a bacterial disease that corrupts the nerves, respiratory tract, flesh and eyes. Since lepers lose sensitivity to pain, they are unaware of its ravenous advance. Notwithstanding, it turns people into hideous creatures. We like to look at beautiful and handsome people, but no one wants to see a

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person with leprosy. Moreover, leprosy is contagious, can be fatal, and was thought to be incurable. In Leviticus 13, the law required lepers to be isolated and to live alone outside the camp. Since God's curse had accompanied leprosy, there was a stigma about it that produced guilt and fatalism (2Ki 5:27). Leprosy was destroying this man's body, mind, spirit and whole being. This is not just an old story, but a picture of all who suffer under the power of sin. Just as lepers become insensitive to pain, sinners become dead in conscience. Though they sin greatly, they feel no remorse. Nevertheless, sin destroys the image of God in people, makes us sick unto death, and produces loneliness, sorrow, guilt and despair. There seems to be no way out. But there is a way.

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.’”** Though the man's situation was desperate, he came to Jesus in humility and faith. He was not frantic and emotional, but respectful and submissive. This faith must have been sparked as he heard that Jesus healed many sick people (4:24). Faith arose that Jesus could heal him too. Still, it was not easy for him to come to Jesus. He had to overcome self-consciousness, social pressure, fear and doubt. The devil must have whispered, “Jesus won't accept you. People will stone you.” Yet with faith, he could come to Jesus. Faith enables us to come to Jesus, overcoming all barriers and resistance. Faith is trusting in Jesus who will welcome us, understand us, and help us in our time of need. It is the confidence that though no one else may accept us, Jesus will accept us.

How did Jesus respond? First, **“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man”** (3a). There is surprising power in a touch. A warm hug can comfort a person from many pains and sorrows. When I see Titus Groters in the embrace of his father or mother, it seems that all his agonies are forgotten and he is so happy. This man must have craved such an embrace. Yet no one wants to touch a man with leprosy. One man shook hands with a leper unknowingly. Afterward, he washed his hands repeatedly to the point that he scraped off his skin. But Jesus was not afraid to reach out and touch this man. Jesus loved and accepted him as he was, before the man was healed. Jesus saw him, not just as a walking disease, but as a man made in God's image. At Jesus' touch, unconditional acceptance washed over him and affection warmed his heart. He knew he was loved deeply and purely. Jesus' touch healed his emotional wounds, sorrow and loneliness.

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Then Jesus said, “I am willing.” Jesus is willing, not reluctant, to heal the sick. Prayers for healing do not burden him, but please him. Jesus is willing to heal our sicknesses. We should believe this and ask for his help in our time of need. Scott Hamilton learned such faith.¹ He won the Olympic Gold Medal in men’s singles figure skating in 1984. Twenty years later, he was found to have a brain tumor. Until then, his prayers had only been for thanksgiving, not to ask what he needed. By the help of a Christian nurse, he learned that God is willing to answer the prayers of his hurting children. When he prayed with this faith, he was healed.

Jesus also said, “Be clean!” Immediately the man was cleansed of his leprosy. Here we learn that Jesus has power to heal our diseases. We just heard that Philip Brown has been chosen as the next Pastor of Washington UBF, succeeding M. Jacob Lee. Once, Philip had a stammering problem. But Jesus’ power healed him completely. I was a witness to this as it happened at a staff conference many years ago. After his orientation, Philip will be the primary Sunday messenger in Washington UBF. Jesus has power to heal us.

It is significant that Jesus said, **“Be clean!”** and not “Be healed.” In the Bible, to be clean was a very serious matter. It meant to have a right relationship with God; it was synonymous with holiness. On the other hand, being unclean meant to be defiled and dirty because of sin. God wanted his people to live holy lives, as he is holy. He taught them that only he could make them holy. He gave the old covenant animal sacrifices for cleansing, but their effectiveness was limited; they were just a foreshadow. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was once and for all, and has power to cleanse us from our dirty sins. Jesus is God who makes us holy. Though we are unholy, when we come to Jesus, Jesus makes us holy. Jesus can cleanse us from lust, pride, selfishness, greed, laziness, jealousy and all the sicknesses of sin. Jesus can restore the image of God in us so that we live in true righteousness and holiness. Jesus can make any kind of sinner into a holy saint.

Finally, Jesus told the man not to tell anyone and instructed him to show himself to the priest, and to offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them (4). Jesus’ purpose in healing this man was not to show off

¹ <http://www.iamsecond.com/struggles/cancer/>

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his power, but to bring about his acceptance into society and restoration. Jesus wants to heal us completely. Let's believe Jesus is willing and that Jesus has power to cleanse us and come to him in faith.

Second, such great faith (5-13). Like the previous passage, this one also teaches Jesus' divine power and willingness to heal, and the importance of faith. A distinctive element in this story is the great faith of a Gentile centurion, who interceded with Jesus on behalf of his suffering servant. Jesus entered Capernaum, which became the center of his Galilean ministry. As soon as he did, a centurion came to him, asking for help (5). Centurions were Roman army officers in charge of 100 soldiers. In a modern army, they may be equivalent to captains.² They were the practical leaders and backbone of the Roman regiments. They needed to be tough and well-disciplined, and able to train rough soldiers. With many soldiers and servants under his authority, this centurion was a man of standing in his community. On the other hand, servants in those times were considered as property. If they were not useful, the master would simply abandon them. We find a similar attitude in 19th century America. A former slave, Richard Toler, testified that his master cared for him and the livestock equally.³ However, this centurion was different from such masters. He took care of his servant who was paralyzed and suffering terribly (6). The hard reality of being a Roman centurion had not robbed him of his humanity. He valued his servant and loved him like a son. His love shone brightest in his servant's darkest moment. He is an example of a decent human being. Human beings should not abuse their positions, power or privileges, but seek to serve and bless those around them. Christians should be decent human beings.

The centurion's true greatness was not his humanity, but his faith in Jesus. He believed Jesus could help his servant. Jesus was moved and said, **"Shall I come and heal him?"** (7) **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"** (8). The centurion had faith in Jesus' word. His understanding came through his experience of being under authority and exercising authority over others (9). He saw that Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler of all things. He believed that Jesus' word had authority to heal his suffering servant. Many of us can testify through our experience that Jesus' word has

² <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-rank-equivalent-of-a-Roman-Centurion-in-todays-military>

³ <http://www.motherearthliving.com/Health-and-Wellness/Slave-medicine>

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great power to heal. Many years ago, when I was powerless due to my sins and guilt, the word of Romans 6:23b touched my heart, **“but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** The power of God set me free and has enabled me to love and serve him ever since. Once, one of my Bible students was too fearful to commit his life to Jesus, even though he really wanted to do so. As we prepared a message together, Romans 8:15 touched his heart, **“...the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.”** He was healed from fear and empowered by the Spirit to establish a beautiful family. One young lady felt fatalistic about her future because of her past sinful life, though she wanted to follow Jesus. Through preparing a message on Luke 22, she accepted the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. She experienced the forgiveness of all her sins, the gift of the Spirit, and gained power to live a new life. The stories of those in our ministry who have been healed through one word of Jesus seem to be endless. We are living testimonies that the power of Jesus word heals and gives new life.

When Jesus heard the centurion’s testimony, he was amazed (10a). Jesus was looking for this kind of faith but had not found it in Israel (10b). Through the centurion, Jesus saw the vision that many would come from the east and west and take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (11). Jesus also gave a warning: those without faith in Jesus are cast out (12). Then Jesus blessed the centurion’s faith, saying, **“Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment** (13). Here we also see the power of intercessory prayer. Through the centurion’s prayer, healing came to his servant. In terms of salvation, each person needs their own faith in Jesus. However, God blesses people through the faith and prayer of those like the centurion. In truth, the centurion’s faith is a reflection of Jesus himself. Jesus is our merciful and faithful High Priest, who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Jesus saves completely those who come to him (Heb 7:25). Through Jesus’ intercessory prayer we are all healed and can live healthy and fruitful lives. We should make it a priority to grow in faith in Jesus, and to be a blessing to the people of our time. Many are paralyzed and dying due to their sins. They want to serve the Lord, but something hinders them. For some, it is a rebellious spirit. For others, it is lustful desires. And for others, it may be wounds they received. They need people of faith who can teach them the word of Jesus. The word of Jesus can heal them. The word of Jesus can restore the image of God in them and raise them as wonderful blessings to our

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society and world. Let's teach the word of Jesus with the great faith that he will work powerfully through his word. Thank you, Jesus!

Third, Jesus heals many (14-17). Jesus' healing ministry extended not only to a few individual people, but to many. Jesus went to Peter's house and found that Peter's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever (14). It discouraged all the family members. Jesus touched her hand and the fever left her. Immediately she got up and began to prepare a delicious lunch for all the guests (15). Everyone became happy and began to eat joyfully.

When evening came, it was time to rest after a day of hard work. Yet at that time, people brought to Jesus many who were demon-possessed and sick (16a). Jesus did not tell them that he was finished for the day and to come back the next day. Rather, he welcomed them. Luke says, "**...laying his hands on each one, he healed them**" (Lk 4:40). Jesus gave his full attention to each person, as though they were the only one who had come to him. Jesus healed them all one by one. Jesus is the great Physician, full of healing power, mercy and compassion.

When Matthew saw these events, he realized that it fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "**He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases**" (17). Here, "infirmities" refer to chronic spiritual sicknesses, those related to the power of sin and death. Peter, who also quoted Isaiah 53:4 in his letter, understood this well. His quotation goes like this: "**He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'**" (1Pe 2:24). Sin is the root of all kinds of diseases, especially those that are chronic and may even seem to be lifelong. When we commit sin, we are separated from God, the source of life. Like a cut flower, we may look vibrant and beautiful for a short time, but we are withering day by day. We repeat the same bad behavior and fall into the same bad habits again and again. We suffer from our infirmities, become old and wrinkled, and finally die. Considering this cold reality, people say, "That's life." Is there any real hope? Yes, we have a great hope! Jesus is our hope! Jesus came into this world to take up our infirmities. When we believe in Jesus, he forgives our sins. He restores us to be children of God who can live in true righteousness and holiness. He gives us eternal life and eternal glory (Jn 11:25-26). Paul proclaimed, "**Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day**

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by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2Co 4:16-17).

Jesus did not criticize or despise us for being sick or weak. Instead, he became one of us, understood us, and came to heal us so that we may live vibrant and healthy lives. Let’s not remain in our infirmities and diseases. Let’s come to Jesus for his healing.