



Chapter 8: Jesus the Healer

Healing the Leper (8:1-4)

The Sermon on the Mount was over and Jesus moved on. His meeting with a leper is very significant. Leprosy is incurable, even today it can only be controlled but cannot be cured. In the Bible leprosy refers to serious disease of the skin. It could be spread easily, and so sufferers were forced to keep apart from other people. The man with the leprosy first showed his faith in Jesus; he knew that Jesus could heal him.

No healthy person would touch someone with leprosy. So when Jesus reached out and touched the man, the Jews who were watching would have been surprised and shocked. Jesus knew that he had the power to heal and, filled with compassion, he immediately cured the leper. However, he did not want the man to spread the news of his healing. Jesus wanted people to follow him for his teaching, rather than be attracted by his miracles.

It is only the healing work of Jesus that can save us from death. Therefore, like the man with leprosy we must have faith in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus told the healed leper to go and show himself to the priest. Although Jesus knew that many of the priests failed to honour God, he still told the healed leper to do this because it was what the Law of Moses instructed (Leviticus 13 and 14). It shows that Jesus kept the Law.

Healing the Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)

The Roman centurion was a Gentile and, like the Jewish leper, he also had faith that Jesus could heal. Jesus commended him for his faith; it was greater than any he had found in Israel. The centurion knew that Jesus did not need to go to his house to heal his servant but only needed to speak the words and his servant would be healed.

Other miracles follow in the rest of the chapter. Jesus showed his power over physical illness, over mental disturbance, and over the forces of nature. Verse 17 shows that this part of Jesus' work was in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

Peter's Mother-in-Law (8:14, 15)

When Jesus visited Peter's house, he was asked to heal Peter's mother-in-law:

"And he stood over her and **rebuked** the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them." (Luke 4:39)

Notice that Jesus spoke to the fever. Similar language is used about Jesus healing people with demons. In the same way that a fever cannot hear and understand, neither can a demon. There are no spirit beings that cause illness.

These three miracles of healing show us that Jew and Gentile, male and female can have a place in God's Kingdom. This is on the condition that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the saviour sent by God and that we show our faith in lives of discipleship.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:28-29).

Casting out Spirits (8:16, 17)

The Gospels often refer to people 'possessed by demons' (or 'possessed of devils'). People at that time thought that some illnesses (those they could not explain and which caused the sufferer to behave strangely - like mental illness, deafness, dumbness and epilepsy) were caused by demons or evil spirits entering a person and influencing them. But there are no such living beings as demons or evil spirits. God does not create spirit beings like this.

Verse 16 records an occasion when Jesus cured people thought to be possessed by demons and evil spirits. Verse 17 explains that when Jesus did this he was fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah about taking up our





infirmities and **diseases**. So these people were really suffering illnesses and did not have evil spirits who controlled them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: DEMONS

The Lord God is the only true and living God (Deuteronomy 4:39; 32:17; Isaiah 45:5). Demons were false gods or idols. Throughout history people have worshipped idols, often of wood or stone, imagining that the spirits of false gods entered and possessed their idols. The Bible warns about the evil of worshipping idols (Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 25-28).

A demon = a false god = an idol

Although these gods or demons were only wrong beliefs and not real beings, people thought they had great influence over their lives.

"They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood."

(Psalm 106:36-38)

When people thought that their condition was caused by a demon Jesus sometimes not only healed them but also showed them that their 'demon' was gone.

The Mentally Ill Man (8:28-34)

The incident at the end of Matthew 8 is also recorded in Luke 8, even though Luke only refers to one of the men. Luke 8:35 says that after the demons had been cast out, the man was **in his right mind**. This suggests that before the miracle he had been mentally ill. Luke 8:36 shows that Jesus had performed a **healing** miracle.

People with diseases of the mind have disturbed behaviour and strange thoughts. For example, they may think that they hear voices or that someone is watching them. This man, with his strange thinking, would know he had been healed if he saw the pigs rushing into the sea. He would think his demons had drowned. However Jesus, the great healer, knew exactly how to help this person.

Today medical drugs are used to control mental illnesses like this.

Pig meat can sometimes contain tapeworm larvae; if the meat is not cooked properly, these can enter the body of the person who eats it and can cause a disease called 'cystercercosis'. This affects the nervous system, sometimes producing confusion and personality changes. This could be the reason these men showed such strange behaviour (see Isaiah 66:17). However big our problems are in this life, Jesus can heal us from our sins and give us life everlasting in God's kingdom on earth.

Following Jesus (8:18-22)

Scribes were scholars who studied the Old Testament and made new copies by hand. When a scribe wanted to follow Jesus he was warned that it involved self-sacrifice. Another wanted to wait until his father had died before following Jesus. Jesus said, *"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."*

Jesus was not saying that dead people can go to the funerals of other dead people! Rather he was saying that spiritually dead people will put the cares of this life before the call of their discipleship. We should not find excuses that stop us following the true and living way! Jesus is teaching us that it is important that we get our priorities right. We must put God first in our lives. If we do not do this then, although we are physically alive, in God's sight we are as good as dead.

Chapter 9: Power and Authority

Healing the Paralysed Man (9:1-7)

In chapter 8 we saw how Jesus showed his authority and power to heal, as the centurion recognised (verses 8, 9), and also his authority over the wind and the waves (verse 26).

