**You are Made New**

Matthew 8-9

Matthew 8 transitions from the masterful teaching in the sermon on the mount in chapters 5 through 7 into the miracle-filled public ministry of Jesus. Remember that Jesus ended that sermon by describing a foolish builder who built his house on sand and ***a wise builder who laid a deep foundation*** for his house on the rock. The foolish builder, Jesus said, is the one who hears his words but does not put them into practice. The wise builder, by contrast, hears his words and DOES THEM. In other words, wisdom is seen in submission to Jesus and obedience to His teaching.

After this conclusion to the sermon on the mount we read that:

“The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.” Matthew 7:29

There is the key word for Matthew 8 and 9 - **AUTHORITY**. Already at this early stage of his ministry the crowds were seeing that Jesus was no ordinary Rabbi. He had tangible power in both his voice and his hands. If you skim these two chapters look what you find:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (8:3) leper cleansed  (8:13) Centurion’s servant healed  (8:16) demons cast out, many healed  (8:27) storm stopped  (8:32) demons cast into pigs | (9:6) paralytic forgiven and healed  (9:22) woman w/ bleeding healed  (9:25) ruler’s daughter raised to life  (9:30) two blind men healed  (9:32) many healed |

Matthew is going out of his way to demonstrate - over and over again - ***the authority of Jesus over every condition and situation imaginable***.

So this miracle filled section of Scripture starts with the remarkable authority of Jesus in his teaching and ends with this verse:

Context: the Compassionate **Authority** of Jesus

**“**And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and ***healing every disease and every affliction***.” Matthew 9:35

And don’t miss the fact that the very next verse is about ***Jesus’ compassion for the crowds*** and his response to that love is to command his disciples to PRAY for workers to be sent out into the harvest field. In other words, what Jesus was doing for two chapters he went on to commission his disciples to go and do. But we saw that last week - that we are witnesses, sent out to testify to how Jesus has changed our lives. This week our focus is on the authority of Jesus - His wonderfully compassionate authority - and how the LORD JESUS can make us new inside and out.

We will see **three simple steps to facing suffering**. First:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Come to **Jesus** in humble faith

“And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’” Matthew 8:2

Now, if you’re familiar with the healing ministry of Jesus this passage might not feel particularly surprising or impressive. If you think, “Hey, the guy had some eczema, and Jesus gave him the equivalent of some allergy meds and skin cream. Cool.” No. You’re not getting the picture.

***Think what it meant to be a leper in ancient times.*** The term “leper” was a catchall diagnosis for lots of different visible skin conditions. The concept of micro-organisms like viruses and bacteria was still over 1600 years in the future - but they were aware that some rashes were contagious and some of them could kill you.

***Plus it was a command in the Old Testament***, going all the way back to Moses, that anyone with a visible skin condition should be isolated and diagnosed by a priest. God was concerned to protect His people and gave them isolation and quarantine practices that were literally thousands of years ahead of science and medicine.

But, like so many things, ***the Jewish religious leaders took a teaching of Scripture and added layer upon layer of tradition and policy to it***. The command was to isolate someone for a week so the priest could see what’s going on. The tradition was to kick them out of town indefinitely and make them wear bells and shout “unclean,” if anyone came near them. The commands of Moses were about caring for the sick while protecting the nation. The traditions created the well defined attitude that sick people were cursed by God and should be shunned by faithful Jews.

So for this leper to even approach a Rabbi was a bold and dangerous move. ***And look at the man’s remarkable faith!*** He came and knelt before Jesus and called him “Lord.” Beyond that he said, “If you will, you can make me clean.”

This was still early in Jesus’ ministry - so probably he had already healed people which is why the leper came. But what a powerful profession of faith - to kneel before this Rabbi and humbly state, “I know you can heal me. It’s not a question of your power or authority, but simply a matter of your willingness.”

**The man’s posture is important**. He didn’t come to Jesus standing tall and demanding services. He didn’t appeal to his rights or his own worthiness. He was not like the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable who stood up tall in the temple and bragged in prayer about his own righteousness in comparison to others. The leper was more like the tax collector in that parable, staying at a distance, beating his breast and simply saying, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

When you walk through suffering and loss - ***the first question is where do you turn?*** Where do you go? **Do you go running to Jesus FIRST or later**?

* Is our first impulse with ***illness*** to call the doctor or call on the Name of the Lord?
* Is our first step in ***relational conflict*** to call the counselor or fall to our knees and pray? (Probably we call 2-3 friends to complain about the person before we think about counseling - because that would force us to admit we needed help to deal with the problem.)
* ***When you lose a loved one*** or go through some other difficult loss like a change in employment or difficult bill to pay - do we turn to alcohol or Netflix or food or some other escape mechanism - or do we turn to the Lord in prayer?

Now, we are good churchgoing Christians so we would all say, “Of course, we come to Jesus in humble faith and that’s our first step.” Yes. Good. The next question is **when we come to Jesus what is our posture**?

* Are we like this desperate leper, on our knees before Jesus?
* Or are we more like the Pharisees, standing at a distance almost JUDGING Jesus to see if he will handle our problem in a satisfactory way?

***Do we come in humble faith, on our knees?*** Do we come in bold and confident faith knowing that Jesus is ABLE to fix every problem? But ***do we come in SURRENDERED FAITH*** knowing that some problems we must walk through - and others Jesus delivers us FROM. As the song says, “Sometimes he calms the storm and other times he calms his child.”

The point for us is that whatever we are facing - whatever hardship or struggle or loss - our first response should be to **come to Jesus**. Oh brother, sister - come to the Rabbi, come to the Savior, come to the Teacher, come to the Lord. He is waiting with open arms. He is available. He knows every detail of your situation.

Come humbly, on your knees. Come in humble faith. Come knowing that Jesus CAN make you whole again. He is the Only One who can really help you and change you. Look how Jesus responded to this humble approach:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Come to **Jesus** in humble faith

“And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’” Matthew 8:3

Do you feel the surprising, ***shocking nature of this moment***? The Chosen portrays it well - with the disciples yelling at the leper, some of the guys brandishing knives and short swords. Seeing someone with a visible illness, someone dressed in shabby clothes who has clearly been living on the fringes of society for a long time - would have produced an immediate visceral response.

Imagine waking up suddenly in the middle of the night and seeing someone dressed all in the black, wearing ***a ski mask over his face***, obviously testing your windows and doors and trying to get into your house. You would have an immediate, adrenaline filled reaction.

Or imagine you’re on an airplane and you find your seat right next to someone who is pale and ***sweaty, obviously clammy and very weak*** - snot running down his face, tissues in hand, with several slimy used tissues on the floor at his feet, and right as you scootch by to sit down he sneezes all over you. You would have an immediate, emotional response, right?

***Combine those two feelings: disgust and fear*** - and you come close to how people felt about lepers in ancient times.

But not Jesus. No disgust. No fear. Only love. Jesus calls the man forward and without hesitation **reaches out and TOUCHES him**. Some healings Jesus performed with just a word or even from a distance. But this one Jesus very intentionally performed with compassionate physical touch.

Oh, if Jesus were here today and he could, he would take your hands in his, he would touch your face and look deep into your eyes, he would wrap you up in a warm embrace. I hope you can feel the love of the Lord Jesus for you right now. Come to Jesus. That is the first step to face suffering and pain. Second:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Trust Jesus for **Spiritual** healing

“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’” Matthew 9:2

Now we jump ahead a chapter to Matthew 9 - in the middle of this two chapter miracle sequence. A little group of people brought a friend who was paralyzed. Mark and Luke both include this story but add the detail that the crowd was so large and pressing in so much on Jesus that this group couldn’t get to the Rabbi and had to cut their way through the roof to lower him down in front of Jesus.

It was in response to **THEIR faith** - the faith of this group who brought their friend - that Jesus pronounces the man forgiven. We pause and struggle - exactly as the Pharisees did - because we say, “How can Jesus forgive this guy based on SOMEONE ELSE’S faith? Isn’t it by our own beliefs and our own words and actions that we are either acquitted or condemned?”

Yes, that is so. But Jesus was making a point that wasn’t about the paralyzed man or his friends. Jesus was making a very visible **statement about HIMSELF**.

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Trust Jesus for **Spiritual** healing

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins…” Matthew 9:6

Jesus was demonstrating his authority through miracle after miracle - and periodically pausing to explain that fact. The Pharisees were scandalized that a human rabbi would declare someone forgiven. And keep in mind that the common view was that if a person had a severe disability like this man it was either ***because of his own sin or the sins of his parents***. They had developed a sort of karma idea when it came to illness and disability.

So who is Jesus to pronounce a man forgiven who was obviously a terrible sinner who very much deserved his fate?

Jesus’ statement is - “Ok, so you know that only God can forgive sins. Exactly. I’m showing you 2 plus 2. Do the math people.”

And then, to put an exclamation mark on the moment - Jesus tells the guy to stand up and he does. The lesson as we think about suffering in our own lives is to ***be clear about the authority of Jesus and about His primary purpose***. Yes, Jesus healed a lot of people physically. But this moment with the paralyzed man illustrates that his PRIMARY purpose RIGHT NOW is spiritual healing, not physical. When Jesus comes back he will fix everything physically and permanently. But in the sovereign wisdom of God, He determined that it was better to leave the world broken and damaged by sin so people would turn to Jesus for SPIRITUAL transformation and TRUST HIM for the total restoration of all things that He will accomplish when He comes back.

In other words, God still thinks that **FAITH is valuable**. He still wants us to trust Him even when things don’t make sense. If everything made sense and was perfect and nothing ever went wrong, what need would we have for faith? We wouldn’t have to trust God because we wouldn’t need anything from Him!

But as it is - ***we need EVERYTHING from God***. And that’s exactly where He wants us to live. Trusting Him with all of our hearts and not leaning on our own understanding.

In your heart right now ***you probably feel like the main thing you need from God is PHYSICAL healing***. If your body is in pain or a loved one is dying, your felt need is relief and change. We joke in our house about the pain scale doctors use. “What is your pain like from 1 to 10.” Hey, Doc, when it comes to pain I like the number ZERO. I certainly am not going to live with a 2 or 3 or higher. Let’s find a way to keep my pain number right there at zero. That’s also why we say in our house, “take it like a Mom,” rather than take it like a man. God knew that men couldn’t have babies. Not an option. We like that zero on the pain scale too much.

If you live with a 6 or 7 or 9 on the pain scale all the time then I realize it is hard for you to even hear the words I’m saying. Your pain might not be physical, it might be financial or emotional - but it’s the same effect. Maslow the psychologist taught us that years ago - ***people can’t deal with higher order needs until their basic needs are met***. Don’t have a hard conversation with your wife when you are both hungry and tired. Deal with the basic physical needs first, then go on to dialogue about the budget and the kids.

Now hear me. ***Jesus is concerned about ALL OF YOUR NEEDS.*** He is the Good Shepherd. He knows every detail of what you’re going through and will meet you at every single point of need. But we know from Scripture and from personal experience that Jesus does not heal every person every time. These bodies still break down and die.

Even Lazarus died again after he was raised back to life. But the point of that little episode was also about **Jesus’ authority - even over death itself**. When Jesus called his name, Lazarus obeyed - even from the grave, even though his body was DEAD.

***Everything in this universe obeys King Jesus.*** He is the Lord. He is the King. He is in charge. His authority is unquestioned. We get all nervous and weirded out by demons and the occult - but Jesus didn’t. There isn’t a realm of thought or existence that bothers King Jesus. He rules over every atom. Every being.

So when Jesus looks at you and says, ***“My son, my daughter - take heart - your sins are forgiven,”*** you should be tremendously encouraged. ALL AUTHORITY in heaven and on earth has been entrusted to Jesus the Lord. Specifically, according to John 17, the authority to give eternal life to the people God the Father gave to him. And the declaration of forgiveness is the pronouncement of your spiritual healing - the internal change Jesus accomplishes in your heart called REGENERATION.

He takes your old frozen heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh. He takes your old, sinful self and binds it to his human body on the cross so you die with him. But your spirit remains bound to King Jesus in his resurrection as well - so you rise from the dead with him and ascend to the right hand of the Father with him. That’s Ephesians 2. Then Jesus gives you His own Holy Spirit to live in you and be with you forever.

***That is SPIRITUAL healing*** - a complete transformation. That’s what it means to be born again. That’s what Paul describes as being a “new creation in Christ… the old has gone, the new has come.”

You don’t have to do anything - in fact, you CAN’T do anything to achieve this. ***You simply call on the Name of the Lord Jesus and BELIEVE.*** You simply take Him at His word. Peter quoted Joel chapter 2:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Trust Jesus for **Spiritual** healing

“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:21 (Joel 2:32)

In that passage in Joel 2 the prophet was ***foretelling the outpouring of the Holy Spirit*** on the young and the old, men and women. He spoke for God saying, “I will pour out my Spirit on ALL FLESH.” The Jews would have understood that to mean all JEWISH people - but we know from the book of Acts that it actually meant ALL PEOPLE.

How does this help you in the midst of severe physical suffering?

***It gives you tremendous perspective, joy and hope!*** Yes, in this world we will have trouble. But we worship and serve the God who entered our dark and broken world precisely so He could bear our sins and carry our diseases. He OVERCAME the world! He conquered sin and death - our two greatest enemies. At the moment that you called on the Name of Jesus to save you, look at the gifts God gave you IMMEDIATELY for your spiritual healing:

**Trust Jesus for Spiritual healing:**

* The forgiveness of all your sins
* The transformation of your inner being
* The baptism of the Holy Spirit
* The promise of eternal life with Him

Look in your worship program for Bible verses to read on each of those gifts.

**Trust Jesus for Spiritual healing:**

1. The forgiveness of all your sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 3:23-24, 5:1)
2. The transformation of your inner being (2 Cor. 5:17; John 3:3-6; Eph. 2:4-6)
3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:17-19; Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3-6)
4. The promise of eternal life with Him (John 3:15-16; 14:4-6; 17:2-3)

These are ***spiritual promises to us as followers of Jesus***. They all come at the moment of salvation. So if you have bowed the knee to King Jesus - if you have surrendered your life to Jesus as your Savior and Lord - then He has already given you these gifts and you simply need to trust His Word. Just as Jesus spoke to the paralytic and said, “Take heart, my son - your sins are forgiven,” so Jesus speaks those words over you today - if you belong to Him by faith.

Now, don’t assume that you do. Lots of people know about Jesus and kind of flirt with Him but they have never made their vow to Him. Following Jesus is a covenant relationship, just like marriage. ***No one is surprised to wake up one day and realize they are married.*** I suppose that does happen in Vegas but that’s the exception that proves the rule. Generally if you get a marriage license and a pastor or justice of the peace along with a couple of witnesses and you make vows to one another, sealed and symbolized with the giving of rings - you are not surprised to find that you are legally married.

***Have you made your covenant vows to King Jesus?*** Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord while believing in your heart that he died for you and rose again? If you haven’t crossed that line and made the decisive commitment please talk with me or someone else about this today. Don’t wait another day!

How do we handle suffering in life? First, we come to Jesus in humble faith. Second, we trust Him for spiritual healing - because He promised to give us that as soon as we call on Him to save us. Third:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

“Two blind men followed him, crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’” Matthew 9:27

Later in Matthew 9 - after a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years was healed just by touching the hem of his robe - and after Jesus had raised a young girl from the dead - two blind men heard Jesus was passing by and cried out to him. See? They came to Jesus in humble faith. They asked for MERCY. ***And they called him Son of David which meant MESSIAH, the King of Israel.***

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

“Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’” Matthew 9:28

The blind men expressed their faith in Jesus’ power to heal and they stepped up their address to him from Messiah to LORD.

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

“Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.” Matthew 9:29-30

Again, Jesus healed through physical touch. He was not afraid of their disability. He did not keep his distance from their pain. He invited them to come closer. He went up to them. He touched them right were the problem was. And suddenly they could see.

Now, passages like this have often been **twisted by television preachers and other false teachers** who say, “Look - if you just believe, God will heal you right now!” Many, many people have been damaged by this false teaching that promises physical healing. In order for this line of teaching to work there has to be a scapegoat if healing does not occur - and guess who gets blamed if you don’t get healed? YOU. You must not have enough faith or the right kind of faith. Or there must be sin in your heart. Obviously the preacher, the healer has plenty of faith - he is healthy and drives a shiny new BMW - so he must be right with God.

* Narrative is not **Normative.**

Just because it happened in the Bible does not mean it will happen like that every time for you. Miracles in the Bible teach us about God but must not be turned into promises for us.

***This principle is obvious if you think about it at all.*** For 40 years in the wilderness God provided manna on the ground for the people to eat. When you are hungry and don’t have any food in the house have you ever thought to go out in your yard and look for manna? Why not? It happened in the Bible, why wouldn’t God feed you that way today? (I certainly wouldn’t want manna in my back yard with what our two dogs do back there!)

You have a difficult neighbor who is giving you a hard time about the condition of your grass. You aren’t watering or fertilizing enough and he threatens to report you to the HOA. ***So you get your sling and five smooth stones*** and call him out for a showdown in the street at high noon. You swing that sling round and round above your head and trust God to guide the stone right to his forehead to defeat that godless Philistine just like God did for David against Goliath! God did it for David, why wouldn’t he do the same thing for you?

One more. ***Paul was bit by a snake*** when he survived the shipwreck at the end of the book of Acts. The natives on the island knew it was a poisonous snake and expected him to drop dead right away, but he didn’t even get sick. Since that miracle helped Paul explain the gospel to the people on that island we should use poisonous snakes in our ministries as well, trusting God to protect us from their venom and use those miracles to convince others of the gospel!

Why don’t you call down fire from heaven like Elijah? Why don’t you walk on water like Jesus? Why don’t you call a dead person back to life at a funeral like Jesus did with Lazarus?

Narrative is not NORMATIVE. Just because it happened in the Bible does not mean it is normative for all of us all the time - that it is expected or demanded of us.

**The Bible is filled with promises**. Those we need to trust and hold onto and believe and apply. ***But miracles are not promises.*** They are miracles. They happened. We believe that. They teach us about the power of God and the glory of Jesus. But miracles are not guarantees.

Anyone who tells you different is selling something.

So that’s our important qualification on this point. When it comes to physical healing or any other intervention in this dark and broken world, ***we don’t TELL God what to do - we ASK HIM to help us.***

And we know going into that request that **God knows far better than we do**. There are things He sees that we simply cannot see in the big picture of our own lives and of world history. ***So we come to Father God like any child going to a parent*** - asking, trusting, knowing that Dad will do what is best for us even if it isn’t comfortable for us at the time.

The two blind men are exemplary for us here. They simply cry out to Jesus for mercy. He asks if they believe he is capable of this miracle and they say, “Yes, Lord.” That should be our response to Jesus regardless of the question.

Maybe right now the Lord is asking you to walk through a time of physical pain and struggle. Do you believe He is able to heal you miraculously? I hope so. Are you willing to trust Him if He doesn’t heal you miraculously? I really hope so.

Shadraq, Meshach and Abednego are a great example for us. When the Babylonian king demanded that they worship a giant statue of him, they refused even when threatened with being burned alive in a fiery furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar gave them one more chance to save their own lives by bowing down to the idol and they gave this incredible response:

1. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” Daniel 3:17-18, NIV

***What a statement of faith in the power of God!*** They even went so far as to state prophetically that they believed God WOULD deliver them physically. But they did not demand this miracle of God, knowing that sometimes God rescued his prophets and sometimes he let them suffer and die.

One more key passage on healing and faith. James 5.

1. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” James 5:14-15

***This is our procedure here at Oakwood.*** Anyone in the church family who has a tangible need is welcome to ask for prayer from the elders. Of course, you can and should start with your small group. But if there is a special burden, a special challenge, we follow this teaching of Scripture explicitly.

But it’s important to note that even here where the context is physical illness, the PROMISE is SPIRITUAL restoration. Notice the words used. “The prayer of faith will SAVE the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” Those are terms of spiritual deliverance and to be raised up is a resurrection promise related to the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in him. Could there be an immediate raising up physically? Of course! That is why we pray, asking for healing right now.

But notice where the passage lands: “If he has SINNED he will be forgiven.” Even here in the key Bible passage about praying for the sick the Lord guides us back to the GUARANTEE of spiritual healing while encouraging us to ASK for physical healing.

We’ve put a QR code in your worship program that takes you to our prayer request form on the website. You can always share “regular” prayer requests with that form. But if you are going through something especially difficult right now, please contact me or Marcia in the office and we would be glad to schedule a time for the elders to meet with you and pray for you.

Here is our summary for today:

**How to Handle Suffering:**

1. Come to **Jesus** in humble faith
2. Trust Jesus for **Spiritual** healing
3. Ask Jesus for **Physical** healing

Whatever you are going through right now, ***come to Jesus***. There is nowhere else to go. Nothing in this world can give you the hope and healing you really need. Come to Jesus. Come like the leper in Matthew 8, on your knees, calling on Jesus. Come like the blind men in Matthew 9 crying aloud, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

If you have called on the Name of the Lord Jesus to forgive your sins and save you, then TRUST in Him for the spiritual healing He has promised you. Study the Scriptures to know and understand and believe all that God has already given you in Christ.

And ask Jesus for help with all of your issues and challenges. All of them. “Don’t be anxious about ANYTHING, but in EVERYTHING - through prayer and petition - bring your requests to God.” Pray. Ask. Trust.

Let’s do that now.