

MATTHEW 8 NOTES

One of the most dramatic chapters of all of Matthew is at hand. Jesus calms a sea and two demoniacs with simply a word. Through the ministry of delivering people from evil spirits, the clash between the two kingdoms is brought right out into the open—and the no-contest winner is Jesus. The reactions of the people vary from awe to fearful rejection. But as the pages of Matthew continue to turn, you will see that wherever God is at work in the Person of Jesus, you will find Satan at work, resisting both God's purposes and His people. The same holds true today. Let us learn from Jesus how He effectively engaged in spiritual warfare, for He will share His authority and power with His disciples in the coming chapters.... and you are in the same conflict, ready or not! Let's become fully equipped "to stand firm against the tactics of the devil, to resist, to hold your ground" (Ephesians 6:10-17).

Matthew 8:1-4: Cleansing of the Leper

A diagnosis of Leprosy was one of the most feared in the ancient world, as it effectively cut off the person from all society: from the synagogue worship and family. For fear of death the leprous individual was forbidden from coming near anyone. What is so shocking about this leper, and what chance did he take in "approaching Jesus" (8:2)? _____

What did Jesus do that shocked everyone watching? (8:3) _____

Throughout the Old Testament, if a holy person touched an unholy object or person, he was immediately defiled and had to undergo ritual purification. Here, however, the reverse is true: Any impure or diseased person who touches Jesus is healed or made pure and Jesus does NOT become contaminated. This is a dramatic reversal of what was experienced prior to Jesus' arrival.

How are we all essentially a "leper," as the Church fathers alluded? What does Jesus do for each of us that brings us back into the arena of being able to worship God again? Do you appreciate this "access" (Ephesians 2:18)? _____

"Jesus can heal your deepest brokenness—the break between you and God. That is the healing we most need, a healing of that relationship. That is the healing that stretches into eternity. That is the peace that lasts forever. And it is offered to you."¹

Catholic Connection: "Leprosy rendered a person 'unclean' or 'unfit for public worship.' The passage does not say Jesus 'heals' the leper; it says he 'cleanses' him. Similarly, we speak of needing 'cleansing' from sin before we can properly engage in worship. In Jesus' healing of the leper, we see a sign of the sacrament of Reconciliation: Jesus reaches out to save us from sin's leprous touch and restores us to full membership in God's family. Notice that Jesus does not send the man on his way but sends him first to the priest to be officially restored to the community. In the same way, we go to a priest for Reconciliation."²

¹ Benninkmeyer, Lisa. From the devotional *Rest: 31 Days of Peace*. Quoted by *Daily Catholic Wisdom*. April 30, 2021. Accessed online at yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org.

² Cavins, Jeff and Sarah Christmyer. *Workbook: Matthew: The King and the Kingdom*. (c) 2019 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 200.

“Leprosy is a vivid image of sin: it is ugly, disgusting, very contagious, and difficult to cure.” We are all sinners, and we are all in need of God’s forgiveness and grace (Romans 3:23-24). The leper in the Gospel knelt down before Jesus, in all humility and trust, begging to be made clean. If we have recourse to our Savior with that kind of faith, we can be sure that he will cure the wretchedness of our souls. We should often address Christ with this short prayer, borrowed from the leper: ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’”³

Matthew 8:5-13: Healing of Centurion’s Servant

Why does Jesus praise this centurion? Why are his words quoted at Mass? _____

Matthew 8:14-15: Healing of Peter’s Mother-in-Law

What does Peter’s mother-in-law do immediately after her healing? What implications can you draw from this? _____

“After his body-or soul- is healed, everyone is called to ‘rise up’ from his previous position, to serve Jesus Christ. No laments, no delays; instead, one should make oneself immediately available to the Lord.”⁴

Matthew 8:16-17: Jesus as Mighty Healer and Exorcist

Jesus often asks: “What do you want me to do for you?” How would you answer this question today, to God the Healer of mind and body? _____

“In this gospel Jesus drives out unclean spirits...and he wants to perform the same cleansing operation in our lives. What God intended from the beginning is that our hearts be temples of his presence. So Christ comes into our world. What does he find? He finds that the temple of our heart is filled up with all sorts of things that are not the divine power. Therefore, when Jesus comes into your life, he will always have a cleansing role to play.

Bishop Fulton Sheen once talked about the ‘expulsive power’ of Christ. When you place him in the center of your soul, he will expel all those things that don’t belong in that center and make them find their proper place. And so Jesus the nonviolent warrior, Jesus the judge, God’s own mind, now comes into our hearts when we invite him through conversion. He will have this cleansing authority and cleansing power.”⁵ How open are you to Jesus’ cleansing and ‘expulsive’ work in your own life now? _____

What makes you eager for Him to work as a Savior on your behalf? What causes you to hesitate or resist? _____

“As we read through the gospels we cannot help but be struck by the extraordinary numbers of references to Jesus confronting Satan and the whole realm of demons. **A major theme in the New Testament is the clash between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of**

³ *The Navarre Bible: The Gospel of Matthew: with Texts and Commentaries.* (c) 1998 by Four Courts Press, Dublin, Ireland, pp 87.

⁴ *The Navarre Bible: Matthew*, pp 89.

⁵ Barron, Bishop Robert. *Daily Gospel Reflections: Mark 1:21-28*, January 14, 2020. Accessed online from *Word on Fire* at wof@wordonfire.org.

Satan. The climax of human history, in fact, occurs when God, in Jesus, overpowers Satan and frees the human race from Satan's dominion.

Jesus' ministry of deliverance is central to an understanding of the Gospel: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). The entire New Testament shows that Jesus was not primarily a Teacher (although He was an extraordinary Teacher) but that His chief title is *Savior* or *Redeemer*. The traditional title *Savior* means, of course, that He actually saves us; He rescues us from a real danger, from something evil.

Christian tradition says that the evil that weighs down the human race is so powerful that our own unaided humanity cannot successfully overcome it (Ephesians 6:12). Another traditional way of saying this is that we need grace, God's help. In fact, the early Church had to condemn a heresy, Pelagianism, that taught that our human efforts were in themselves enough to bring us salvation.

The basic evils that Jesus came to confront were:

- *Sin
- *Sickness
- *Affliction by evil spirits
- *Nature out of control (i.e., the storm at sea that Jesus rebuked)
- *The last enemy of all, death itself.

So when Jesus began His public ministry, He preached good news—that is, the Gospel: "the time has come... The Kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15). **The flip side of preaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand is preaching that the kingdom of Satan is being destroyed.** Consequently, delivering people from evil spirits is, along with forgiving sins and healing the sick, an essential part of the Gospel. To the extent that we no longer realize the reality of the supernatural power of the demonic realm—against which we are powerless in our own unaided humanity—we no longer sense the need for a Savior, for Jesus. Even for many professing Christians, Jesus has become simply an excellent teacher of values, among many other teachers, like Confucius and the Buddha. **The Jesus of Scripture, by contrast, is clearly presented as the Savior, the One who rescues us from sin, sickness, and domination by evil spirits.** The very name *Jesus*, in fact, given to Mary through the message of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:31) means 'God saves.

Because of the multitudes of sick and oppressed, Jesus shared His authority as the Son of God with His disciples; and every time He sent them out to preach, He 'gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness' (Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1; Luke 10:9, 17)."⁶

"Jesus came not only to forgive our sins, but also to remove our sicknesses. There are four kinds of healing Jesus brings to us:

- a. Physical healing (physical sickness)
- b. Inner healing (emotions and memories)
- c. Healing of spiritual weaknesses (personal sin and our fallen nature)
- d. Deliverance from evil spirits (demonic oppression)

See Matthew 8:16-17, Romans 7:15, and Romans 8:26-27.

⁶ MacNutt, Francis. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual*. (c) 2009 by Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI, pp 38-40.

Typically God is more eager to heal us than we are to be healed (John 35:19-20; John 14:9-11; Matthew 7:11; and Isaiah 49:15-16). Jesus' heart, like the heart of His Father, is to heal the whole person. He wants to be involved in our wounded humanity and restore us."⁷

Which of these four categories of healing are you in most need of Jesus' healing touch today? _____

Matthew 8:18-22: Ultimate Allegiance to Jesus

"The apostles drop everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 4). In contrast, these followers hesitate to give up their security and their family obligations. These things are important but commitment to Jesus must come above all else."⁸ Does following Jesus cause you to pause in hesitation? For what reason? Or like Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10), is your experience more like welcoming a sudden, unexpected cascade of grace with total abandon and enthusiasm? _____

A Loving Disciple's Offering by Fr Joseph Tetlow, SJ⁹
Eternal Lord of all things,
I feel Your gaze on me.
I sense that Your Mother stands near,
and the great beings crowd around you,
angels and powers and martyrs and saints.
If You will help me, please,
I would like to make an offering:
I want it to be my desire, and my choice,
provided that You want it this way,
to walk this earth the way You walked it.
I know that You lived in a little town,
without luxury, without great education.
I know that You refused political power.
I know that You suffered: Leaders rejected you.
Friends abandoned You. You failed.
I know. I hate to think about it.
None of it looks romantic to me, or very useful.
But it seems to me a toweringly wonderful thing
that Your divine majesty might call me to follow after You.
Amen.

Do you have the energy or will to follow Jesus? (Nehemiah 8:10) _____
"From the very outset of his ministry, Jesus rarely stays in the same place; he is always on the move. He 'has nowhere to lay his head.' Anyone who desires to be with him has to 'follow him.'

⁷ MacNutt, Francis and Judith. *Workbook: Level 1: Student Manual: School of Healing Prayer*. (c) 2007 by Christian Healing Ministries, Jacksonville, FLA, pp 19-25.

⁸ Cavins, Jeff. *Workbook: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*. pp 201.

⁹ O'Brien, Kevin, SJ. *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life*. (c) 2011 by Loyola Press, Chicago, IL, pp 161.

This phrase ‘following Jesus’ has a very precise meaning: it means being his disciple (Matt 19:28)..... Following Christ, then, means we should make ourselves totally available to him; whatever sacrifice he asks of us we should make: the call to follow Christ means staying up with him, not falling behind; we either follow him or lose him. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) Jesus explained what following him involves—A Christian believes in Jesus—a faith he receives at Baptism-and is duty bound to serve him. Through prayer and friendship with the Lord every Christian should try to discover the demands which this service involves as far as he personally is concerned.”¹⁰ How is Jesus calling you to be His totally committed disciple today?

Matthew 8:23-27: Calming of the Sea

“Jesus calls the disciples who are with him in the boat ‘men of little faith.’ They have enough faith to go to him for help; what do they lack? _____

Their fear betrays their uncertainty. Can he help them, or not? Will they survive? It is the age-old question: Do you trust God even when circumstances make it appear He is ignoring you or that He is not in control?”¹¹ _____

Jesus’ calming of the sea proves that He is divine, for only God can control wind and wave. He is mighty in word and deed.

Matthew 8:28-34: Jesus Clashes with Satan’s Kingdom: Healing of the Demoniacs **God has power to conquer evil.**

“The Gospels contain seven specific accounts of Jesus casting evil spirits out of individuals:

1. The man in the synagogue tormented by an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37).
2. The blind and mute demoniac (Matt 12:22-29; Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-22).
3. The Gerasene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).
4. The Syrophenician woman’s daughter (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).
5. The epileptic boy (Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43).
6. The woman with a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17).
7. The mute demoniac (Matt 9:32-34).

Three of these incidents appear in all three synoptic gospels, which indicates their importance. The sheer volume of material in the gospels that describe these exorcisms indicates the importance the evangelists ascribed to Jesus’ ministry of deliverance.”¹²

How welcoming are you to Jesus? _____ “The attitude of local people towards this miracle reminds us that meeting God and living a Christian life require us to subordinate personal plans to God’s designs. If we have a selfish or materialistic outlook we fail to appreciate the value of divine things and push God out of our lives, begging him to go away, as these people did.”¹³

(C) Glenda Canfield, October 2022.

¹⁰ *The Navarre Bible: Matthew*, pp 89-90.

¹¹ Cavins, *Workbook: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*, pp 201.

¹² MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, pp 44.

¹³ *The Navarre Bible: Matthew*, pp 92.