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Matthew 8:14 - 8:17



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion of Matthew 8:14-17, Steve Gregg examines the story of Peter's sick mother-in-law and Jesus' healing of her. He emphasizes that while this event did not draw a large crowd like some of Jesus' other miracles, it is significant because it demonstrates Jesus' compassion and willingness to heal. Gregg also explains that Jesus' healing ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction that the Messiah would lift the burden of sickness from the shoulders of the sick. Overall, Gregg highlights the importance of faith in Jesus' ability to heal both physical and spiritual ailments.

Transcript

Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 8 and continue our studies in the life of Jesus. At Matthew chapter 8 and verse 14, we read, Now, here we have really two little stories. They both happen in Capernaum.

Capernaum was the place where Jesus set up his base of operations in Galilee. The ministry of Jesus can be divided roughly into three portions of maybe nearly equal length. They certainly would not be exactly equal.

But there was a year that Jesus spent, once he was baptized, where he remained relatively in the shadows, without doing an awful lot of public ministry. Sometimes New Testament scholars refer to this as the year of obscurity. Because in that year, there's only a few things recorded of what Jesus did.

And most of them were not public spectacle type of things, as he later did. And he later drew great crowds. And the second year, approximately, was a year of popularity.

And that was largely during his ministry in the region of Galilee. Now, Galilee was the region at the northern end of the nation of Israel. Judea was at the southern end, and the land of Samaria lay in between.

And Galilee was where Jesus grew up. The city of Nazareth was in Galilee. And there were many other, of course, cities in that district.

And for most of the second year of Jesus' ministry, and probably more than a year, he had a very popular ministry in that region of Galilee. He was much more, it would seem, held at arm's length by the people at the other end of the country, in Judea, where he spent less of his time. But he would go down there from time to time to the feasts.

But in the north, in Galilee, he was very widely received for a long period of time. And so, many of the familiar stories of Jesus' miracles and preaching occur in that region. Now, while Jesus was in Galilee, and that was nearly, well, it was over a year, it would seem, he made his base of operations the town of Capernaum, where Peter, obviously, had a home.

And many of the better-known stories of Jesus' miracles actually occur in this town. Though Peter and the other apostles forsook all they had to follow Jesus, forsaking all they had apparently did not mean that they sold their homes and were homeless, because Peter here has a home. And he offered it to Jesus as a place for ministry and for lodging.

And it would appear that Peter played host to the disciples and Jesus on a regular basis. And so, when we read of the Galilean ministry going along, Jesus would sometimes make itineraries out into the various villages of Galilee and then would come back to Capernaum where he would do some ministry and just relax and sometimes try to escape from people there. Now, it is in Capernaum that this occurs, that we read of.

Although Jesus has just recently made Capernaum his home, and so his reputation is just beginning there. As a matter of fact, in Mark's Gospel, the impression is given that Jesus has just really preached in Capernaum one or two times at this point. And so his reputation is just barely getting started here.

But he goes into Peter's house, and there we read that there's a sick woman in the house. She's sick of a fever, and apparently she's bedridden. Now, this woman is said to be Peter's wife's mother.

So, it is very clear that Peter was a married man. He had a wife, and his wife had a mother. And you can't have a mother-in-law, as Peter had, without getting married.

I know many people would love to just skip the marriage part and just get a mother-in-law out of the deal. But no, you have to have a wife in order to have a mother-in-law. And we read in 1 Corinthians 9 that Peter, of course, did have a wife.

That's not only affirmed in 1 Corinthians 9, but in the passage we're looking at in Matthew. But the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9, of himself and Barnabas, he said in verse 5, Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Peter? In other words, he says that Peter, in his travels, brought a wife along with him. So, Peter was a married man.

Now, you might say, so what? That's no big deal. My pastor's married too. Well, your pastor may be married, but if you're a Roman Catholic, your priest isn't.

And the reason your priest isn't is because the Roman Catholic Church has a tradition that priests should be celibate. That is, they should not be married. And that would go, of course, for all the Roman Catholic hierarchy, going up to the Pope himself.

Now, what's interesting about that is that in Catholic tradition, Peter was the first Pope. And yet, the Catholic Church teaches that Popes and bishops and priests should all be unmarried men. And yet, if Jesus picked Peter to be the first Pope, it's interesting that he picked a married man for that position.

Now, I don't believe, of course, that Peter was the first Pope, but it's interesting how this would impact the Roman Catholic tradition on this point, it would seem. The whole idea of the celibacy of the clergy is thrown into tremendous dispute or doubt by the fact that Peter, who very clearly was one of the most outspoken of the early evangelist apostles, was a married man, and as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9.5, all the apostles were married men, with the exception of Paul and Barnabas. And, of course, Paul is a good model of celibate clergy.

But the rest of the apostles are good examples of married clergy. And you cannot establish from Scripture a norm that those who are in ministry full-time should be single. In fact, when bishops' qualifications are given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3, Paul says that the bishop must be the husband of one wife, and have his children in order and under his control, and so forth.

Now, it's interesting, because a bishop, well, the Pope of Rome is considered to be the bishop of Rome, and yet the Bible says that the bishop must be the husband of one wife. Yet the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Pope and the bishops, the priests, must not be married, they must be celibate. So here we have an instance where the traditions of man are in conflict with the Word of God on the subject.

Anyway, that is a side issue, but it is one worth noting. That Jesus had come into Peter's house, and he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. Now, this fever was severe enough that the woman was unable to get up, and unable to do the hospitable things that she apparently normally would do if in good health.

But it says quite simply, in verse 15, Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them. So, just a touch from Jesus caused the fever to be gone.

And when she was healed, she rose up, and what did she do? She served Jesus and his disciples, she served the church. Now, this is no doubt the right thing for anyone to do who has received a touch from Jesus. There are many people that Jesus healed in his ministry who did not become followers of his, or servants of his.

We know that Jesus healed many, many people in every city. And yet, in the end, there weren't all that many people who were really following him to the end. And so, it would seem that many people received a touch from Jesus, even received a miracle from him, were healed of sicknesses, or had demons cast out of them in the course of his ministry, but who never became servants or disciples of his.

In this, Peter's mother-in-law was an exception of a positive sort. As soon as Jesus healed her, out of her gratitude to him, she arose, and she, instead of saying, well, you know, I really ought to rest a little bit, because I really need to convalesce here from my illness, she rose up and started serving, serving the church, serving Jesus and his disciples. Well, that was one of the first healings that Jesus does here in Capernaum, and news got around about it.

Well, see, it's not recorded here in Matthew, but in Mark's gospel, we are told that that same day, before Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, it was a Sabbath day, and Jesus had been in the synagogue, and he had cast the demons out of a man who had risen up and caused a disturbance in the meeting. And Jesus had just spoken to the demons and said, come out of him. And so, the man was delivered, and everyone was astonished at the authority with which Jesus spoke.

So here, on one day, on one Sabbath day, Jesus had cast demons out of a man in a public meeting, and then privately in Peter's house, had healed a woman of sickness, of a fever. And so we read in the verses that follow, that everybody who had sick friends or relatives, or who had demon-possessed friends or relatives, brought them to Jesus that night. It says in verse 16, when evening had come, they brought him many who were demon-possessed, and he cast out the spirits with the word, and he healed all who were sick.

Now notice it says, when the evening had come, they brought him these people. The reason for that is because there was a tradition of the rabbis, that a physician could not work any cures on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day was a day of rest.

It was to be a day when ordinary work was not performed. And yet the Bible in the Old Testament never really specified how many things could be or could not be done on the Sabbath. It was just a simple command, you should do no work on the Sabbath.

So the rabbis of the Jews had gone a little further than the Scripture had, and had made up a list of things that could be done and that could not be done on the Sabbath. And one of the things that they forbade was that a physician would work a cure on the Sabbath, unless it was a life-threatening illness. If it was life-threatening and the person was likely to die the next day without medical care, the physician was allowed in that case to work a cure on the Sabbath.

But here, these people have demon-possessed and sick friends and relatives, they want

Jesus to come to them, and it's the Sabbath day. But here after evening, you see the Sabbath officially ends at sundown. When the sundown came, the evening came, Sabbath was over.

So it was now okay, they thought, for Jesus to heal their friends, and so they brought them. It says, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. Now this is interesting.

When we read the Gospel accounts, it is quite clear that demon-possession was a phenomenon well familiar to the people. In fact, many times we will encounter in the Gospels summary statements that simply says, Jesus healed all their sick and cast demons out of all who were possessed. And that's meant as a summary of what Jesus did on a certain itinerary through Galilee.

It sounds as if demon-possession was about as common as sickness, and Jesus healed people about as often as he cast out demons. And that might sound strange to our ears, because we do not as often encounter or at least recognize the phenomenon of demon-possession. Now sickness we recognize a great deal.

If a person has a fever, if they're throwing up, if they have diarrhea, if there's a pox upon them, if they've got welts all over them or whatever. There's all kinds of ways to recognize sickness. But I don't know that in our modern culture we as quickly recognize demon-possession.

Now there are a number of theories about this. There are certainly some churches who take the position that demon-possession was a phenomenon of the first century merely. And that since the time of Christ and the Apostles, demon-possession just doesn't happen anymore.

Well, it's unfortunate that some people take this position, because there's not a word in the Bible to suggest that this is true. The phenomenon of demon-possession is not found very clear or very frequently in the Old Testament. But it does seem that when Jesus appeared, there was a great outbreak of spiritual warfare.

And Satan and the demonic realm really must have launched a major attack, because everywhere Jesus turned, there were people who were under the power of demons. And Jesus, of course, never had any problem casting them out. But there's nothing in the Bible to indicate that this phenomenon of people being demon-possessed somehow ended after Jesus left.

In fact, we know it didn't end after Jesus left, because when we turn to the book of Acts, we find that after Jesus had gone to heaven, the Apostles still encountered the phenomenon of demon-possession. Perhaps most notably in Acts chapter 16, where Paul and Silas encountered a demon-possessed girl in the city of Philippi, and cast a demon

out of her. So we don't find any point in Scripture at which the reality of demon-possession is no longer.

And I remember I was raised in a church that never talked about this subject of demon-possession. But we had a missionary come back from Africa once and give a report, and they spoke about casting demons out and demon-possession as matter-of-factly, as if they were talking about getting up in the morning and shaving. And I remember when I was a youth, hearing this report and realizing that, well, I had read my Bible before, and I'd seen reports of demon-possession in the Bible, but it had never occurred to me that there was still the same phenomenon to deal with today.

And hearing these reports from the mission field made it clear that, of course, there are demon-possessed people today. Well, even then, I didn't learn very much about demon-possession. The first time I encountered a demon-possessed girl and knew it, it was a very unnerving experience.

However, by the grace of God, we managed to cast the demon successfully out of her. I am not a demon-chaser, and I do not have very frequent encounters with demon-possessed people. Although I will confess that when I lived in Santa Cruz, California, I met demon-possessed people or people that I considered obviously demon-possessed, more often than I do now that I live in Oregon.

But I still believe that there are demon-possessed people all around. We've had them show up at our meetings and so forth. And I have, on occasion, been successful through the name of Jesus in casting them out, although not as often as I've encountered them.

That gets us into another rabbit trail to figure out why they don't always come out. The point is, however, if you know where to look and if your eyes are open to these things, you will discover that demon-possession is a reality. And as I said, we more readily recognize sickness than demon-possession.

One of the reasons that we don't recognize demon-possession as easily as we recognize sickness is that we live in a culture which has tended to try to find a materialistic answer, an explanation for every phenomenon. Physical sickness can almost always be traced to something organic. Well, I shouldn't say almost always, because some doctors think that a huge percentage of sicknesses are psychosomatic and don't have an organic cause.

But certainly a great percentage of sicknesses are caused by an identifiable germ, a virus or a bacterium. And the infection and so forth can be analyzed by medical science in a materialistic way. But how does one, through those means, recognize a spiritual phenomenon like demon-possession, where a demon actually is inside a person controlling them? I dare say that we have just as many demon-possessed people today as there ever were, but we misdiagnosed them.

I believe that in the realm of psychiatry and the mental health professions, so-called, we have an attempt to deal with demon-possession in a materialistic way. Many times people who exhibit all the symptoms of demon-possession are taken to a doctor, to a psychiatrist or a psychologist, and they are treated as if they have a physical condition. And very often they're treated with medications and drugs that disable their minds to a certain extent.

And this is, you know, they give them medical names. They give them names like schizophrenia or manic-depressive or some other label like that. And I'm not saying that everyone who has that label is demon-possessed.

But I also don't believe everyone who has that label should be labeled at all. I know that psychiatrists are very quick to label certain things that I don't think deserve that label. I will say, however, that when somebody has a physical ailment today, it's not hard to diagnose it usually by physical means.

But when a person has a behavioral disorder, it's not as easy to give it a physical diagnosis. And if a person today is exhibiting the classic signs of demon-possession, more likely than not that person is going to be diagnosed as having schizophrenia or some other psychiatric diagnosis, and is going to be treated in a mental hospital and given psychiatric drugs. And for that reason, he will not be recognized as they were in biblical times as being a demon-possessed person.

Now, let me make something very clear before I go beyond this point. I am not saying that everybody in mental hospitals is demon-possessed. I'm not saying that everybody who is given psychiatric drugs is demon-possessed and needs to be exercised.

I am not saying that every person who has a psychiatric diagnosis of being mentally ill is demonized. I'm not saying that. But what I'm saying is those who truly are demonized in our culture will almost certainly be given these kinds of psychiatric diagnoses and psychiatric treatments.

And for that reason, we don't recognize demon-possession as readily as they did in biblical times. But interestingly enough, in the Bible, demon-possession was treated as very matter-of-factly. You know, they brought their demon-possessed friends.

They brought their children who were demon-possessed, as if they had no problem recognizing that phenomenon. And we read that Jesus cast out the spirits, that would be the demons, with a word. That is, he had the authority to simply speak a word to them to come out, and the demons had to obey him.

And he also healed all who were sick. Now, it says, this happened, this is Matthew 8, 17. This happened that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, He himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.

This is a quote from Isaiah 53, in verse 4. Many people, interestingly, think that this scripture is talking about something Jesus accomplished when he was whipped before he was crucified. He was tied to the whipping post and received 39 lashes from the cat of nine tails. Whip.

And some people teach that when that happened to Jesus, that he purchased our healing from sicknesses. And that when he died, he not only carried our sins, but also our diseases with him. And that this is part of the atonement.

There are people who teach, many of them, who teach that sickness and sin were both paid for by the atonement of Christ at the cross. And that we can be healed and forgiven of sins as readily, through faith, just by what he has done for us there at the cross. And this scripture in Isaiah 53, 4, is one of the proof texts for that.

He himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses. It is sometimes argued this happened at the cross, or at least at the whipping post. However, Matthew doesn't agree with that.

Matthew says that that scripture was fulfilled in Capernaum, when Jesus was healing sicknesses. That night, that Sabbath night. And so, this scripture does not teach anything about what Jesus did on the cross or at the whipping post.

This scripture was a prediction that Isaiah made, that the Messiah would, in fact, heal sickness. That he would lift the burden of sickness from the shoulders of many who were sick, is what Isaiah was predicting. And that Jesus did that here in Capernaum, and in many other cases during his ministry, was the fulfillment of that scripture.

So, let us not make the mistake that is easy to make, of thinking that this scripture is talking about some legal transaction that Jesus accomplished at the cross. The Bible does teach that when Jesus died on the cross, there was a legal transaction, and that he did pay the price for our sins. But the Bible does not say that he paid the price for our physical, organic sicknesses on the cross.

This verse is not talking about that. It is talking about Jesus' active healing ministry. Do I believe in healing today? Absolutely.

I believe that Jesus, who healed when he was going through Galilee, that he heals today, and he still casts out demons and cures sicknesses. But I don't believe, as some do, that he purchased healing in the same way that he purchased the forgiveness of sins. If he did, that would mean that we could all be healed as readily as we could be forgiven of sins, and by the same means, by faith.

It would also suggest that if we cannot be healed by this means, that perhaps our sins are not forgiven either. This, I think, is a dangerous doctrine, and I don't believe it's biblical. Well, Matthew also, I think, did not believe that doctrine.

He believed that when Jesus healed the sick in Galilee, he was fulfilling the scriptures about bearing our sicknesses and caring our infirmities. We'll continue our study of the life of Christ next time.