JESUS TOOK UP OUR INFIRMITIES

September 9, 2018

Matthew 8:1-17

Key Verses 8:17 “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.’”

Infirmities are chronic sickness or moral and spiritual weaknesses and defects. Recently a pastor of a California church committed suicide and it shocked everyone. He had been battling with depression and anxiety all his life. These kinds of infirmities plague many people even today and it hinders them from living a productive life. Infirmities weaken our spirits and fill us with sorrow and a sense of futility. We may wonder why God allowed these things and let doubt paralyze us. Today let’s learn what it means that Jesus took up our infirmities and bore our diseases. Chapter 8 has 3 miracles: healing the leper, healing the man with paralysis, healing the woman with fever. This is the opening triad of miracles. In Chapter 8 through 12, there are nine miracles. They come in three sections of three: three miracles, then a response; three miracles, then a response; three miracles, then a response; all designed to manifest the deity of Jesus Christ. All designed to show that Jesus is the Messiah who took up our infirmities and bore diseases.

**First**, Jesus heals the man with leprosy (1-4). 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.’” In the past, leprosy was known as an incurable disease such as AIDS today. Moreover, lepers were known as cursed by God. Leprosy makes a man look wretched. Man, as an aesthetic creature, enjoys looking in the mirror to appreciate his or her own beauty, spending quite some time, maybe too much time. But men with leprosy could not enjoy their own beauty, for their faces were covered with ulcers and their eyebrows had fallen out. Surely they hated looking in the mirror. Moreover their eyes were barely supported by their sockets, and would stare pointlessly. Their voices sounded ghastly hoarse, and they wheezed in breathing. They could not mingle with others. They were supposed to be isolated from ordinary people. They had to live in “no man’s land.” They were lonely and sorrowful people.

They say that men with leprosy feel numb while they progressively lose their fingers and toes from their hands and feet. In this respect, leprosy is comparable to sin-sickness. Sin paralyzes man’s conscience. Sin also makes man numb to his deteriorating body and soul. Men with leprosy were indeed men of strange fate because of their leprosy. They were also social outcasts. They had to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” covering the lower part of their faces whenever they happened to pass by someone else. As soon as people discovered lepers, they ran away from them, throwing stones at them as a means of self-defense. A man with leprosy could not do anything but sorrow over himself because of his ill-fate as a leper. His eyes were there only to cry. This man with leprosy could not dare to come to Jesus, because he was ashamed of his outward appearance. Even if he decided to do something, he soon broke down because of his habit of withdrawing into himself. The man with leprosy was a man of strange fate. He was a social outcast. He did not deserve to come to Jesus, either legally or personally. People might stone him to death. But he came to Jesus, believing that Jesus could make him clean. At that time, everybody knew that leprosy was incurable. But the man with leprosy had faith in Jesus that Jesus could make him clean. Of course, the man with leprosy knew that he did not deserve the Son’s mercy. So he knelt down before him and begged his mercy, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Since he was rejected by people every time, he might have expected to be rejected by Jesus. But he came anyway. It was his act of faith.

What did Jesus do for him? Look at verse 3. “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.” This one verse shows us that Jesus is the Son of God who came to this world to save men from their sins. First, “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.” This is the exact expression of God’s mercy. God’s mercy is greater than men’s sins. Nobody wanted to be touched by a leper. But Jesus touched him. Nobody was willing to help him. But Jesus was willing. Everybody believed that leprosy was incurable. But Jesus said, “Be clean!” Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Look at verse 4. “Then Jesus said to him, ‘See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’” Jesus not only healed leprosy but also helped him to go back to normal life. Now he can marry a beautiful girl.

Let’s think for a moment why Jesus touched the man. He could have healed him with one word. If we think about it, we can see that touching is very important. Touching is an expression of affection and acceptance. But nobody was willing to touch this man with leprosy. He was not only sick outwardly but also he was sick inwardly. His inner man was deeply wounded. He felt cursed by God and rejected by all people. Jesus touched him in order to show that he accepted him as the child of God. Jesus touched him in order to heal him both physically and spiritually so that he may be a useful man in the sight of God. If we touch dirty things, we become dirty. But if Jesus touches dirty things, dirty things become clean. In the Bible sin is compared to leprosy. After committing sins, our first thought is “I feel dirty.” We feel dirty because our relationship with God is broken. We long for cleanness in our hearts and minds. Jesus wants to cleanse our sins as white as snow. Isaiah 1:18 says, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

**Second**, Jesus heals a centurion’s servant (5-13). Look at verse 5. “When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.” Centurions were the core of the Roman army. They were in charge of 100 soldiers under them. At that time, a slave had no legal rights whatsoever. The owner of a slave was free to treat him as he wished. But this centurion was different. All other centurions of the world would throw out their slaves when they became sick, or sell them like old junk cars. But this centurion was grieved when his servant became ill. This centurion saw his servant as his own son. Even though he was a Roman centurion and Jesus was a country evangelist, he could curb his pride and ignore his prestige if only he could help his servant. This centurion had noble humanity within him.

But the centurion’s real greatness lies in his faith in the word of Jesus. Look at verses 7,8. “Jesus said to him, ‘Shall I come and heal him?’ 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.’” Through this brief conversation we can see that, regardless of his servant’s terrible condition, the centurion put his faith in the power of Jesus’ word. Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” But the centurion thought he did not deserve to have Jesus come to his house, for he knew that Jews thought of Gentiles as unclean; Jesus going to his house would make Jesus unclean. At the same time, he believed that Jesus’ word had healing power. The centurion had faith in Jesus’ word. He said in verse 9, “For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” We need this kind of faith. We must believe that Jesus can heal us with his word. We must believe that Jesus can heal all our Bible students when we believe in his words.

Look at verse 10. “When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, ‘I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.’” In the Bible Jesus was amazed only two times. One is here, and the other is in Mark 6:6, where Jesus was amazed at the lack of faith of the Jews. Jesus was amazed by the centurion’s faith in his word and said, “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” There are many kinds of faith, but the faith that Jesus admires is faith in his word. The centurion did not have the Bible to read, no rabbi to teach him, or no profound theology. But he had simple knowledge of Jesus. He had clear understanding of who Jesus was. Just say the word, the centurion said. The centurion was the only man who had the faith to ask Jesus for a miracle from a distance, without a touch or view of the servant. The centurion had not even seen Jesus perform his miracles. He simply appealed to Jesus based on his understanding of his soldier’s obedience to his command. When we are weak, down and afraid, the only way to rise above the struggles, setbacks, and strains is to have faith in God. Big troubles demand great faith in God who is Almighty in power, strong to deliver, and able to heal, save and forgive. In Jesus, the door of faith is widely opened to those who were formerly outside of God’s salvation. Let’s bring our troubles to him, and trust in him always.

Jesus was happy because of the centurion’s faith. At the same time, Jesus was sorry about his own chosen people’s unbelief in his word, and because they did not have membership in the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus said, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness...” (11,12). Look at verse 13. “Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that moment.” The servant was healed because of the centurion’s faith that believed in Jesus’ word. May God give us such faith in Jesus’ word so that all our children and Bible students may be healed.

**Third**, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (14-17). Jesus went to Peter’s house and found that Peter’s mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever (14). Probably she had Malaria or Typhoid fever. She was suffering terribly but she could not ask for help. But Jesus heard her cry for help and touched her hand. At that time, it was against a custom for a rabbi to touch another woman’s hand. It was against the law to touch a hand of those who suffer from sicknesses. But as he touched the man with leprosy, Jesus touched her hand. It was an expression of Jesus’ mercy. Immediately the fever left her, and 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, people brought to Jesus many who were demon-possessed and sick (16a), and Jesus healed them all. 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). We can learn two things from Jesus’ healing:

Firstly, Jesus was giving them a preview of His kingdom. When Christ sets up His eternal kingdom, there will be no more death. There will be no more sorrow. There will be no more pain. There will be no more sickness. Just as on the Mount of Transfiguration when He pulled back His flesh and revealed His glory, so does He give them visions of the coming glorious kingdom when disease is banished forever.

Secondly, it demonstrates that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would take up our infirmities and bear our sicknesses. Jesus is exactly doing that, and he is giving them a taste of the coming kingdom. Then how shall we respond to the fact that many are still struggling with infirmities? The Bible is still true. Jesus has power over our infirmities. He will heal our infirmities if he desires. He will not leave us in our infirmities if we cannot handle. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” When you are struggling with infirmities, Jesus is there with you bearing your infirmities. Jesus can understand every pain you ever feel. That is why the Bible says he is a sympathetic high priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” Jesus bore our diseases in the sense that he sympathetically feels the pain that we feel. Jesus took up our infirmities and bore our diseases by feeling with us the pain that they bring.

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. Remember that Jesus has power over our infirmities and diseases. Our infirmities and diseases have no control over those who trust in Jesus. If God does not heal your infirmities, then remember what God said to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” You can glorify God in your infirmities by living a victorious life in spite of your infirmities until Jesus comes again. When he comes again, God will transform your body into a glorious resurrection body which will have no infirmities.