

Matthew 8 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 8:1-18 THE KING, HAVING SPOKEN IN WISDOM, WORKS WITH POWER

Matthew 8:1. WHEN he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him

Curiosity drew the crowd. Our Lord was popular; but he never prized this popularity for its own sake. He was too wise to think much of that which is so fickle a thing. Yet we are glad to see multitudes gathered to hear the Word, for good may come of it. Jesus came down to lift the multitudes up.

Matthew 8:2. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

This verse begins with a "behold." It was not wonderful that great multitudes came to Jesus; but it was a marvel that a leper should believe that he could remove an incurable disease. The leper rendered to Christ divine homage; and if Jesus had been merely a good man, and nothing more, he would have refused the worship with holy indignation. Those who call Jesus "Lord", and do not worship him, are more diseased than the leper was. His was a high degree of faith; for, so far as we know, no one had previously believed in Jesus in this fashion. Leprosy breeds great despair; but this poor creature rose superior to all doubt: if Jesus willed it, even he might be healed.

He did not doubt the Savior's will when he said, "Lord, if thou wilt." Nay rather, he so believed in our Lord's power, that he felt that he had but to exorcise his will, and the cure would be effected at once. Have we as much faith as this? Are we convinced that the mere will of Jesus would make us whole?

Lord, I can and do go as far as this, and farther still.

Matthew 8:3. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Anyone else would have been defiled by touching a leper; but the healing power in Jesus repelled pollution. He touches us by the finger of his humanity, but he is not thereby defiled. His touch proves his condescension, his sympathy, his fellowship. It was no accidental touch: "Jesus put forth his hand." Our Lord has come to us by his own act and effort: he was determined to come to us in all our loathsomeness and pollution. After the touch came the word: "I will." One has well observed that Jesus never says, "I will not." He wills, whether either we will or not. "Be thou clean" was the royal word of one conscious of abundant power.

What a work, to cleanse a leper! Yet it is easy enough to our King, seeing he is divine: else unbelief would be most reasonable.

With what pleasure Jesus spake! With what joy the leper heard! With what curiosity the bystanders looked on! They had not to wait: the miracle followed the word without a moment's delay. The cure was instantaneous.

He spake, and it was done. Our King's having left his throne to stand side by side with leper was the greatest of all miracles; and after that we wonder not that other miracles sprang out of it.

Matthew 8:4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Our Lord would not increase his own reputation. He sought no honor of men, and he did not wish to swell the crowds which, even now, made it almost impossible for him to go about his work. He sought usefulness, and not fame. It would have been hard for the leper to have held his tongue, but he ought to have done so when bidden. Be it ours to speak, or to be silent, as our Lord requires.

The old law stood, and our Lord would have it honored while it lasted; therefore the healed leper must go to the priest, present his offering, and get from the proper official a certificate of health. Besides, he would thus be bearing witness to the nation that there was One among them who could cure the leprosy. The man was clean, and yet he must go to be ceremonial!, cleansed. After we have the thing signified by an ordinance, we are not, therefore, to forego the sign, but the rather to attend to it with care. How prudent was it on the part of our Lord not to remove ancient regulations till the full time had come for the introduction of the new!

Matthew 8:5-7. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

A Gentile approaches our King — a soldier, one of Israel's oppressors; and our Lord receives him with an "I will ", even as he had received the leper.

This Roman officer came about his slave-boy. It is good for masters to be concerned for their servants, especially when they are sick. It is best of all when they go to Jesus about their servants, as this centurion did. The boy was at his master's house: he had not packed him off because he was ill.

The kind master watched his servant's bed, and he sympathetically describes what he had seen. He seeks a cure, but does not prescribe to the Lord how or where he shall work it: in fact, he does not put his request into words, but pleads the case, and lets the sorrow speak. That the youth is "grievously tormented " is mentioned as an argument to move our Lord to pity. One does not often see palsy and acute pain united; but the watchful centurion had marked these symptoms, and he pleads them with Jesus. Not merit, but misery, must be our plea with the Savior.

Our Lord needed very little beseeching. He promptly said, "I will come and heal him. " Lord, say this to us concerning those for whom we lovingly intercede!

Matthew 8:8, 9. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

He would not put the Lord Jesus to so much trouble as to come to his house. He felt unworthy to be served at such a cost by such a Lord. He argues that a word will do it all. He was under authority himself, and hence his power to exercise authority over others. He believed that the Lord Jesus had a commission also from the supreme power, and that this would gird him with command over all the minor forces of the universe, a command which he could exercise from a distance with a single word. If soldiers would come and go at a centurion's bidding, much more would diseases fly at the word of the Lord Jesus. It was a thoughtful argument, but it was fair and conclusive. May we also know Jesus under authority, Jesus with authority, and ourselves under authority to Jesus! May we also believe in the omnipotence of the divine word, and go forth and prove its power in the hearts of men! O thou, who art our King, display thy royal power!

Matthew 8:10. When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Isreal Jesus marveled to see any man believe; for men are incredulous by nature.

He rejoices to see a far-off one believe; for, alas! the favored hearers are slow to trust him. He marvels at a soldier, an officer, having so much faith.

Jesus did not praise the centurion to his face, but what he spoke "he said to them that followed ." Avoid fattering young converts. Learn, from what our Lord said, that he looks out for faith; that he looks for it among hearers of the Word; that he usually does not find it; but that, when he does, it may be so great as to astonish him. Great faith may grow where there is little soil, and no faith where everything seemed to promise and promote it. Great faith is very dear to the Lord Jesus; but he marvels when he sees it, for it is so rare.

Matthew 8:11, 12. And I say unto you. That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob , in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Heaven will be filled. If the likely ones will not come, the unlikely ones shall do so. Many beloved ones are there already, a sort of nucleus to which we gather, even as Israel gathered to "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob ." From "east and west " great multitudes shall come, undeterred by distance; and these shall share the same heaven as do the patriarchs of old.

How sad to think that the descendants of those patriarchs shall be cast out like refuse, thrown behind the wall in the dark, and left in the cold to gnash their teeth in anguish! What a turning of things upside down! The nearest cast out, and the furthest made nigh! How often is this the case! The centurion comes from the camp to Christ, and the Israelite goes from the synagogue to hell. The harlot bows at Jesus' feet a penitent, while the self-righteous Pharisee rejects the great salvation. Oh, that this incident may sweetly persuade us to believe greatly; and may none of us doubt the power of the incarnate Son of God!

Matthew 8:13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour .

In the words, "Go thy way", we see that, oftentimes, a return to our usual duties, and our habitual calm of mind, may be the best proof that our faith has apprehended the promised blessing. Why should he linger who has obtained all he sought? Rather let him go home, and enjoy the fruit of his success in prayer. The Lord often gives in proportion to faith. "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee ", is a word by which we are allowed to bring our own measure and set the standard of blessing which we would possess. Our Lord spoke the word as the centurion desired. The result was immediate and complete: not only was life spared, but health restored.

Many a time prolonged prayer is but muttering unbelief; and to go about one's business would be to take the Lord at his word, and honor his veracity.

Lord, grant me faith enough to go about my business, having prayed the prayer of faith. In the self-same hour in which I believe thee, be pleased to work the miracle I seek.

Matthew 8:14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever .

It was a feverish place. Piety does not make unsanitary places healthy.

Peter had a wife: let the so-called successors of Peter remember that fact.

His wife's mother took the fever: holiness does not secure immunity from disease. This mother-in-law was a specially good woman, for she was allowed to live with her son-in-law, and he was anxious to have her restored to health. The Lord Jesus saw the sick one, for, he was not put away in a back-room, and he was not careful to keep away from the contagious disorder. Jesus feared no fever.

Our Lord sees all our sick ones, and herein lies our hope for their recovery.

Matthew 8:15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.

Our Lord was entreated by her friends, and therefore took her hand, and by a touch recovered her. The first miracle in this chapter was by a touch, the second by a word, and now this by a touch again: it is all one to Jesus. The cure was instantaneous. It was a very complete cure. We expect to read that the fever left her very weak; but our Lord's cures are always perfect ones. She felt active enough to rise, energetic enough to work, and we need hardly add, grateful enough to wait upon her Physician, and all his friends. No proof of recovery from the fever of sin is more sure than the holy earnestness of the healed ones to do works meet for thankfulness towards him who has restored them.

Matthew 8:16. When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.

Our Lord made long days: set of sun was not the setting of his power.

Wise persons brought their sick within the circle of his presence, as soon as the Sabbath was ended. His power cowed forth at once. He lived in a hospital, and it was a hospital of incurables, which contained "many " distressing cases: yet in no case was he overmatched. He dispossessed the devils who possessed poor men and women; not only calling them out, but "casting them out " with a divine violence. As for sicknesses, nothing came amiss to him; he "healed all that were sick ." The Kingly One battled with legions of foes, and readily overcame them all. What were demons or diseases to the omnipotent Lord? His Word is still Almighty.

Matthew 8:17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses.

His deeds of healing proved his living sympathy with men. Becoming man, he reckoned man's infirmities to be his infirmities. He looked on men's ills as if they were his own, and did not delay a moment to remove them.

Moreover, the cure cost him much as to his corporeal frame, which was loaded with the burden of human woe. Virtue, as it went forth from him, made a drain upon his system; and thus, while his strength went forth to men, their weaknesses seemed to come back upon himself. He bowed his back beneath our burden, and thus raised it from those shoulders which had been crushed to the earth by it.

O Lord, let me never forget what a brother thou art, and how surely thy help of us proves that thou cost truly share our griefs!

Matthew 8:18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

He ran away from popularity. Having healed all that were sick, the royal Physician sought to begin practice on fresh ground. He saw the crowds becoming dangerous, and perhaps too enthusiastic, and so he took ship for the further shore to be away from their rash acts. Too often we court the notoriety which our Lord avoided. Is it not because we are swayed by inferior motives, which had no power over him? We ought not to keep to the side where we get flattery, but we should "depart unto the other side " to begin fresh work. Moreover, "the other side " may be the side which needs us most, and it is right even to leave a multitude which have had their share of privilege to go to a smaller company who have had no time of gracious opportunity.

Lord, cost thou command me "to depart unto the other side " ! Go with me, and I start at once.

MATTHEW 8:19-22 OUR KING DISCERNING HIS TRUE FOLLOWERS

Matthew 8:19, 20. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Was this scribe charmed by what he heard and saw of our Lord? We think so. In a sudden fit of enthusiasm, he calls him "Master. " He had probably hurried round the shore after Jesus, and he declares he will always follow him, let the Master go where he may. His is an unreserved discipleship which knows no time or place: "I will follow tines whithersoever thou goest. " His was an unasked-for following, for the Lord had not said to him, "Follow me." It was the best fruit of nature, but not the result of grace.

Our King soon tests this loudly-expressed loyalty, by telling the new convert that he was so poor a master, that beasts of the fields, and "birds of the air ", were better off for lodgings than himself. If the leader fared so badly, there was a poor look-out for the follower. How great was the humiliation of our Lord and King! He had no palace, and no silken canopy.

He who was our Head had not where to lay his own head.

Did this scribe have his name inscribed among the poor scholars of a homeless teacher? We do not know. How stands it in our case? Can we follow a penniless cause? Can we proclaim a despised doctrine?

Matthew 8:21. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

The first man was too fast, the second was too slow. This person was a disciple: Jesus sent him on a mission; he was not ready to start. He must do something else first. That something had to do with a dead relative. It was a grave fault to put the sepulcher before the Savior. His father would be sure to be buried by some other member of the family; but no other could obey the command of Christ which this disciple had received. We may leave work which another can do when our Lord appoints us a peculiar personal service. It must be Christ first, and father next. Living commands must take precedence of duties to the dead. Soldiers cannot be excused from war on account of domestic claims.

Matthew 8:22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Our Lord repeated his command, "Follow me ." Others could bury the dead; it was for the disciple to obey his orders. Men who are unrenewed are dead, and they are quite able to attend to such dead business as a funeral. Much of the concerns of politics, party tactics, committee meetings, social reforms, innocent amusements, and so forth, may be very fitly, described as burying the dead. Much of this is very needful, proper, and commendable work; but still only such a form of business as unregenerate men can do as well as the disciples of Jesus. Let them do it; but if we are called to preach the gospel, let us give ourselves wholly to our sacred calling. Let not the higher worker entangle himself with what worldlings can do quite as well as he can. "Follow me " is a precept which will need all our powers to carry it out; but by grace we will obey.

MATTHEW 8:23-27 OUR KING RULING THE SEA

Matthew 8:23. And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

They were wise to follow him, and safe in so doing; but they were not therefore secure from trial. In the boat with Jesus is a happy place, but storms may come even when we are there.

Matthew 8:24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

This inland lake was subject to sudden squalls and tempests, wherein the wind raged so as to lift the boat fairly out of the water. This was an unusually bad storm: the little ship seemed lost: the wing of the tempest covered it. The comfort was that Christ was in the vessel, and his presence covered the boat, as surely as did the waves. Yet the presence of our great Lord will not prevent our being tossed by "a great tempest. "

Matthew 8:25. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

He was not flurried: his trust in his great Father was so firm, that, rocked in the cradle of the deep, he slept peacefully. Winds howled, and waters dashed over him; but he slept on. His disciples caused him more disquiet than the storm. They "awoke him " with their cries. They were mistrustful, and ready to upbraid him with indifference. Little faith prayed, "Save us "; much fear cried, "We perish. " Men in a storm cannot be very select in their language, but they learn to be very earnest and eager. The appeal of these disciples may suit many. Here was reverence for Jesus — "Lord ": an intelligent supplication — "save us "; and an overwhelming argument — "we perish. "

Matthew 8:26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

He spoke to the men first, for they were the most difficult to deal with: wind and sea could be rebuked afterwards. He questions the disciples.

Alas, they had questioned him in an unworthy sense! There is no reason in our unbelief. That “Why ?” is unanswerable. If we are right in having any faith, we must be wrong in having any fear. Little faith, from one point of view, is most precious; but under another aspect it is most unjustifiable.

Why “little faith ” in a great God? It is well that it is faith; it is ill that it is little.

See the Lord rise from his hard couch. In royal dignity he lifts up himself.

A word makes a calm. As it was a great tempest, now he gives “a great calm ”: there was nothing little in the whole business, except the disciples’ faith. When our Lord rebuked the winds, he did in the best manner rebuke their unbelief. He has very happy ways of correcting us by the greatness of His mercy to us.

My soul, thou knowest what that “great calm ” is; henceforth exercise a great faith in the great Peace-maker. Be sure to have that faith when thou art caught in a great tempest.

Matthew 8:27. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

It was well that they wondered; it would have been better had they adored.

If Christ had been only man, the wonder about him would have been beyond all wonderment. He was divine, and hence to his royal word all nature yielded. This is the end of the wonder of the intellect, but it is the beginning of the worship of the heart. In this case, our glorious King for the moment unveiled his glory, and commanded obedience from the most boisterous of the elements. In our own cases how often have we had to cry out, “What manner of man is this! ” How grandly has he brought us through terrible storms! How easily has he calmed the surges of our souls!

Blessed be his name! Still “the winds and the sea obey him. ”

MATTHEW 8:28-34 THE KING DRIVING LEGIONS BEFORE HIM.

Matthew 8:28. And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.

Did they come out to oppose him? As he steps on the shore, did Satan mean to drive him back by this double legion of demons? The tombs were Satan’s castle; he used the madness of these afflicted men as his weapons of war. They had driven away everybody else; will they stop the advance of the Lord Jesus? They were “exceeding fierce ”: will they fright him to flight?

Matthew 8:29. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

This is the old cry, “Mind your own business! Do not interfere with our trade! Let us alone, and go elsewhere!” Devils never like to be interfered with. But if devils have nothing to do with Jesus, he has something to do with them. His presence is torment to them. They know that a time is coming when they shall fully receive their hell; but that time seems to be antedated when the Lord Jesus invades their solitary, lurking-place among the tombs. The devils here spoke, and compelled the lips of the men thus to plead against themselves. How very like is this to the swearer’s case, whose mouth is used to imprecate a curse upon himself! The devils owned him Son of God, for even they are not so base as to deny his Deity. The demons confessed that he was not under their rule: “What

have we to do with thee? ” They also expressed their dread of his almighty power, and feared the torment they deserved.

Matthew 8:30, 31. And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

Jews had no right to be feeding herds of swine, for they were unclean to them. The devils began to tremble before Jesus had said a word, “saying, If thou cast us out .” They cannot bear to go to their own place, and so beg to go into pigs. Devils would sooner dwell inside swine than be in the presence of Jesus. If they cannot do mischief to men, they would sooner destroy pigs than be without doing mischief. Devils cannot, however, even afflict hogs without leave from Christ. Think of these demons in their pride beseeching Jesus, and beseeching him for so small a boon as to be allowed to enter into a herd of swine. Truly the Son of God is King! The whines of a legion of devils admit his sovereignty.

Matthew 8:32. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

Our Lord never wastes words on devils: “He said unto them, Go. ” The less we say to bad men the better. One word is enough for such dogs as these tormenting spirits were. The devils soon went from the lunatics to the hogs. From a madman to a beast was a short remove for a foul spirit. Swine prefer death to deviltry; and if men were not worse than swine, they would be of the same opinion. They run hard whom the devil drives. The devil drives his hogs to a bad market. Those who pursue a downward path without consideration, will come to destruction in the end. The swine “perished in the water ”, but the devils are reserved to the judgment of eternal fire. We need not dread the powers of hell. They fly pell-mell before our Lord.

Matthew 8:33. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

Well might the swineherds flee! When evil men perish at the last, their wicked pastors will have a hard time of it.

How vividly they told their story! No item was left out! “They told everything. ” Probably all the details were brought out into exaggerated relief. Thus would they excuse their own loss of the swine which they were set to keep, but had seen lost before their very eyes. Their employers, the owners of the herd, must have greatly lamented their loss, but they must have trembled as they saw the hand of God in it. What a crushing misfortune for the swine-keepers. of Gadara! Who pities them, since their trade was unlawful! The story of the healing of the demoniacs was mentioned by the reporters as a secondary matter; but, indeed, it was the central point of the narrative. To some men souls are secondary to swine.

The healing of the two demoniacs added to the wonder, and set every ear tingling throughout the city. Yet the result on the people was not what one would have expected.

Matthew 8:34. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coast.

A rare occurrence a whole city meeting Jesus, and that city unanimous in their appeal to him. Alas, it was the unanimity of evil! Here was a whole city at a prayer-meeting, praying against their own blessing. Think of having the Lord among them, healing the worst of diseases, and yet entreating him to go away from them! They would be rid of the one glorious Being who alone could bless them. Horrible was their prayer; but it was heard, and Jesus departed out of their coasts. He will not force his company on any. He will be a welcome guest, or he will be gone. What a mercy that our Lord does not hear every prayer of this sort! How would it fare with swearers if their imprecations were fulfilled?

O Lord, I thank thee that thou didst not go away from me, when I, in my unregenerate condition. Wished thee to let me alone!