

What Kind of Man is this? A Leper Healed
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

Today, we begin a new series. We’re working systematically through the book of Matthew.

I’m sure you recall that we’re calling our study, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.” Almost 2,000 years ago, a man named Matthew met Jesus. Matthew learned that Jesus was not a normal person - He was the great King: the long-awaited Messiah. And Matthew wanted his friends to meet this great King, so he wrote a book about his experiences.

In the opening chapters of the book, Matthew shared that Jesus had all the credentials to be the great king. He had the lineage that the Messiah needed:
- He was descended from Abraham and from King David. Matthew showed us that with a genealogy in chapter 1.

Matthew went on to tell us other things that qualified Jesus to be the Messiah. The birth of Jesus was surrounded by all kinds of supernatural events like a virgin birth and angels proclaiming his mission. He was visited by dignitaries from foreign nations - Also known historically as “The Wise Men”. Jesus fulfilled ancient prophecies made centuries before he was born. These included a prediction that the Great King would be born in a little-known place called Bethlehem.

Jesus was announced by a herald, John the Baptist. A herald walks before kings to announce their arrival - All great kings have one.

When Jesus was baptized by John, the heavens opened, and God the Father spoke from heaven with approval. The Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, Jesus had credentials demonstrating that he was the Great King.



Immediately, Jesus went into the wilderness to do battle with the enemy of the Human Race: The Devil - and Jesus was triumphant. Great Kings go before their people and fight their battles for them.

After gathering some followers, Jesus then announced his Manifesto - A body of teaching that has influenced humankind for good ever since the words were spoken. That should have been enough. The Great King could have announced his mission and called the world to follow him.

But not everyone was there to see all the credentials that Jesus offered. In fact, the number of people who witnessed these credentials was small. And history is full of people who have claimed to be someone. When we discussed "The Christian Manifesto" given by Jesus, we also mentioned that another well-known Manifesto was written by Karl Marx. That book inspired people to take over nations. What credentials did Marx offer? Well, none, actually. Karl Marx, along with his co-writer Friedrich Engels only claimed to be men with good ideas. Yet millions followed them.

Jesus made some very big claims. After Jesus finished presenting his Manifesto, Matthew recorded the reactions of the people who heard it:

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

In the days of Jesus, when a religious teacher taught, he had to quote others. Teachers of the day might quote books that were considered authoritative to Jewish people - Books like the Talmud and the Mishnah. But Jesus quoted only the Old Testament. Other than that, he stated, "but I say to you..."

More than that, when he closed his presentation, Jesus talked about the people who would enter the Kingdom of heaven someday - And why. He said that he would be the person standing at the gates of heaven. Billions of people will stand before those gates. He said that he would decide who was sincere and otherwise. He said that entrance to heaven would be based on whether people knew him or not.

So, people were rightly amazed at his teaching. Would Jesus stop there? No. We're going to find in the coming series that Jesus went on to give even more credentials of his claim to be the Great King. He would do so with acts of divine power. He would show that the creation itself obeyed him when he commanded.

With these acts, he would leave people with more than amazement. He would leave them in awe. After seeing what he did, they would ask this question:

What Kind of Man is This?

That is the title for our series. Let's read how it starts:

8 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." (Matthew 8:1-2)

What kind of man is this? In this article, we will learn that he is the Lord of life - All life in all forms. We'll focus today and in the next two sessions on the fact that he is Lord of biological life.

Let's dig into this passage of Scripture. Jesus has finished his presentation of the Christian Manifesto. He comes down from the mountainside where he made his presentation. We're told that large crowds followed him. This is important. Matthew has told us all about how Jesus presented credentials establishing his kingship. But as we said, there weren't a whole lot of witnesses. Now, Jesus is ready to present credentials in front of large crowds. He will do that with awesome displays of divine power. His first demonstration will involve a man with leprosy.

Let's talk about leprosy. Leprosy was a horrible disease. It was studied by a man named G.H.A. Hansen some years ago, so today it's known as "Hansen's disease". It's caused by a microbe that enters the human body and attacks almost everything. It attacks bones. It attacks internal organs. It becomes apparent when it causes terrible eruptions on the skin. The skin becomes discolored and sore and may bleed. The hair at the spot turns white.

Perhaps most sad is the fact that this organism attacks the nervous system. Victims of the disease lose their sense of touch. So, a person with this disease may cut themselves and not know it. They may touch something hot and receive a terrible burn and have no idea that they've been injured. As such, victims of the disease often appear horribly deformed.

Before you get too scared of this disease, we have learned in modern times how to treat it. - But in ancient days it was considered a terrible curse. In the Law of Moses, if a person showed any symptoms of this disease, they were to go immediately to a priest to be examined. If they showed clear symptoms of the disease, they were commanded to quarantine themselves. They could go outside, but they had to keep distance from other people. If they saw other people, they were to yell out, "Unclean! Unclean!"

So, this was a horrible disease on two levels. It was debilitating and eventually deadly. But it was also caused a heavy psychological damage. Victims could not be touched. They lost the sense of human contact. So, they were alone with their affliction. They faced a slow, torturous, and lonely death.

There was no cure.

Let's ask a question here: If you found yourself in this state, how would you feel? Would it be tempting to become bitter? Would it be tempting to doubt the goodness of God? In fact, would it be tempting to be angry at God?

Let's see how this man responded to his affliction. First, we're told that he came. He came to Jesus. He wasn't supposed to do that. He was supposed to stay far away. The fact that he came meant that something was happening in his heart. He was expecting something – something very different than his usual experience. Next, as he approached Jesus, he knelt down. Some commentators suggest that he did more than kneel. He may have thrown himself to the ground prostrate before Jesus. He calls Jesus "Lord." Some people used that word to show respect. But more often, it indicated a recognition a great difference in status. A person of low status would use it for someone much higher. This man realized he was standing before someone of great authority. The word is often used for God.

God was working in this man's heart. He allowed the man to recognize who Jesus was.

He then said something very interesting. He said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean". This man had confidence that Jesus had power - Great power - The power to heal a horrible disease with no other cure.

There is only one thing left. One thing stands between a life of pain and complete freedom.
- Jesus needs to be willing.

Earlier, we asked if it would be tempting for a person with this illness to be angry at God. Perhaps it would be tempting for this man to shake his fist in the face of Jesus and demand that Jesus do something about it. But no. He says, "...*if* you are willing, you can make me clean." This man has responded to a horrible, painful situation by becoming humble. He makes no demands. No clenched fists. No raised voice. He threw himself at the feet of Jesus with hope that Jesus would be merciful.

How would Jesus react?

If you look at the teachings of the ancient Rabbis, there was one teacher who was so afraid of lepers that he advised people to avoid buying an egg that was sold on the street where a leper had walked. Another Rabbi said that leprosy was so serious, he threw stones at lepers to keep them away. Any other teacher of the Law might have berated a leper for coming so close to a crowd - Much less a crowd of people who followed the teacher.

Jesus claimed to be the Great King. What would he do?

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:3)

This leper, a man who responded to his painful situation with humility, was rewarded.

If he had only been rewarded with a healing, that would have been enough. But Jesus gave him more. We're told, "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." Jesus didn't have to do that. Touching a leper was dangerous. If you touched one, you could get the disease. More than that you would be considered spiritually defiled. But Jesus did it.

He didn't just heal this man's body. He began the process of healing his heart. Jesus granted this man the gift of human contact. This was the first time anyone touched this man in a long time.

For Jesus to do this, he had to be very assured of his own power. If you said to me, "You have just received the ability to go and heal lepers, so go." I would likely be a little bit hesitant the first time. What if I failed? If I failed, I might catch this terrible disease. Unlike I might have been, Jesus was confident in his own power. So, he reached out and touched the man.

It turns out that the leper's hope in the mercy of Jesus was well placed. "I am willing", Jesus said. The Great King showed all around him that he was merciful and compassionate.

We said earlier that we would learn that Jesus is the Lord of biological life. Here's where that becomes crystal clear. Jesus spoke the words: "Be clean!" We're told that, "immediately" the man was cleansed of his leprosy. What would it take to do that? What would it take to completely and immediately heal such a disease?

It took the Human Race centuries just to get started. It took until the 1800s for medical science to reach the point where it could stop the disease first with sulphone drugs and then antibiotics. These drugs stop the progression of the disease, but they don't fix anything the disease has damaged. Here's what the CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says:

"Antibiotics used during the treatment will kill the bacteria that cause leprosy. But while the treatment can cure the disease and prevent it from getting worse, it does not reverse nerve damage or physical disfiguration that may have occurred before the diagnosis. Thus, it is very important that the disease be diagnosed as early as possible, before any permanent nerve damage occurs. (CDC Web site, Hansen's Disease (Leprosy)" Diagnosis and Treatment, accessed July 16, 2021)"

So, today, in the 21st century, we know how to halt the spread of the disease once someone has it. But we don't know how to heal the damage it creates.

Imagine the scene. Jesus is coming down after presenting his Manifesto. He has a big crowd of followers. A man who is obviously impaired with this terrible disease shows up. He's covered with sores. Jesus says, "Be clean". He successfully kills the disease, but the man is still covered with sores. Jesus says, "OK, I know he looks the same, and I know he still feels pretty sick, but

trust me, he's healed. It may take a few months, but many of the sores will eventually heal. This man won't be able to feel anything for the rest of his life, and there will be a lot of scars and disfigurement, but if he's careful, he'll live for a few more years."

I don't think that's much of a sign. Jesus wants to show his credentials. He is the great King - The Lord of biological life. So again, what would it take to **immediately** and **completely** heal such a man?

According to recent estimates by scientists, there are 30 trillion cells in the human body. - 30 trillion (with a "T"). To immediately heal someone of leprosy, you would have to scan the human body and look at every single cell. You would have to identify which cells are the microbes that cause leprosy. You would have to kill and remove every single invading microbe without hurting any of the cells that belong in the body.

You would then have to pull up a blueprint of that body. This is found in the DNA. You could bypass this step if you already knew the blueprint. If the location and exact function of 30 trillion cells was something you carried around in your head, you wouldn't need to read the DNA.

You would have to find all the places where the microbes caused damage: Internal organs, bones, skin and nerves. You would have to rebuild everything.

Then, and only then, could you declare that the man was completely healed.

That's what Jesus did. And he did it instantly. He did it with a word. He just said, "Be Clean!" Jesus could do all this, because he is the Lord of biological life.

And he did it because he was willing. He was willing because he is merciful and compassionate.

But all of that wasn't enough. Jesus wanted to give yet one more thing to this man.

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."
(Matthew 8:4)

Under the law of Moses as recorded in Leviticus 13, if someone had symptoms of leprosy, they were to show themselves to a priest. As we said earlier, if there was evidence of leprosy, the affected individual was under quarantine from that point forward. They were no longer part of society. As a practical matter, this was permanent.

However, there is a provision in the Law for someone being healed. If they believed they were healed, they could go back and show themselves to the priest. If they were in fact healed, this began a process of double-checks and sacrifices. This is important: Once that was all dealt

with, the individual could legally return to society. Unless they took those steps, they could not legally come back.

So, Jesus is instructing this man to follow the Law, so he can be fully recognized as a qualified member of Jewish society. It was not enough to heal this man's body. Jesus wanted to heal his whole life. That was the final gift.

This also showed that Jesus meant what he said to his followers on the mountainside only a short while before.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus was the Great King. He could do whatever he wanted to, but he chose to live under the Law as a perfect example. The Great King didn't say, "Do what I say but not what I do." He would fulfill the Law in every aspect of his life - Just as he promised.

This is important. Remember, much of the religious leadership in the days of Jesus was corrupt. Jesus could have said, "Ignore all of those dishonest fools." Instead, he wanted his credentials shown even to the religious leadership. During the life of Jesus, most of the religious leadership were not moved, even by great displays of divine power. But later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we read something significant in the book of Acts.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

As the early church grew, even some of the leaders who condemned Jesus came to a saving faith. Maybe one of those priests was an individual who was going about his business one day when a very joyful man came to him. Years before, the priest had to examine the wounds of an unfortunate man and declare him unclean. But now the man was back – completely healed. He said that a man named Jesus did it.

Two years later, Jesus was at the end of his earthly life. He was condemned by the religious leaders - The teachers of the law, the scribes, and the priests. He was turned over to the Romans who nailed him to a cross. As he died, he was surrounded by all the people who abused him.

He uttered just a few phrases. We normally commemorate them on Good Friday just before Easter. Here is one of the things he said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:34)"

Jesus pleaded for even the people who abused him to the point of death. He wanted them to be forgiven. He wanted even those people to receive the gift of eternal life.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

This week, we've begun a new leg on our journey through the book of Matthew. Matthew met the King of the Universe. And he wants his friends to meet him, too.

In this part of Matthew's book, the Great King is ready to show his credentials to large crowds of people. He's going to present amazing displays of divine power. Those displays of power will make people ask, "What kind of man is this?"

Today we watched as Jesus did something that we can only imagine in the 21st century: He completely healed a man of a terrible disease. He did it instantly. He did it with a couple of words. By doing this he has shown us that he is the Lord of life. In this case, biological life.

But along the way he gave much more than the minimum. He healed a man's body, but also healed the man's heart, starting with a gentle touch and then giving the man back his place in society. Because of this, he showed that he is a king with a compassionate heart. He had so much mercy and compassion that he even presented his credentials to people who would eventually kill him - Resulting in many of them being saved and entering into eternal life.

Does this sound amazing? It is! It's amazing because in the end, Jesus was more than a mere man. When people asked "What kind of man is this?", they were only beginning to see the truth. Jesus is not a merely man: He is Lord.

If Jesus is not the Lord of your life, would you invite him to be now? He's worthy of holding that place. Was Jesus the Lord of your life at one time, but perhaps that's grown old? This is the time to recommit. Talk to us, we can tell you how to make Jesus the Lord of your life. There will be some helpful links at the end of this article. In the meantime, make sure you watch for the next article as we continue to ask, "What Kind of Man is this?"

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church: www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site: PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site: PeaceWithGod.net