

sI have four questions for you. Someone sent these last week. These are questions about your life. Start by drawing a scale of one to ten on your insert:

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (with one being the negative end of the spectrum and 10 being the positive end), how much are you enjoying your life right now?
- Has your life so far turned out differently than you thought it would?
- What would you feel if you knew nothing would change in your situation for the rest of your life? Same living situation, same financial situation, same everything?

For those who find yourself at the low end of the spectrum, here is this morning's message in two words: Jesus understands. He understands frustrated dreams and failures and wrong turns and bad luck. He understands what it feels like to be lonely, cheated and misunderstood. The author of Hebrews tells us we have a high priest who gets what its like to be wounded. Isaiah wrote, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted." And then, Isaiah tells us that not only can Jesus relate to our pain, he actually felt it. Read this with me (Isaiah 53:5) -- *He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.* We have a Redeemer who understands ... so when people stood before him and asked for healing, he *knew*. Every healing story in the New Testament shows us that Jesus understands and that our healing is what he came for. So look with me at Matthew, chapter eight. In that one chapter, there are a half-dozen stories of healing and each one teaches us something about Jesus and about what he wants for us.

Story #1: Jesus and the man with leprosy

Matthew 8:1-3 -- *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." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.* To the question of healing, Jesus says, "I am willing." And here's the thing: Jesus' willingness doesn't come from some *emotional* place. He isn't moved by sympathy. ***He is moved by his nature.*** Go back to Exodus, chapter 15, where God tells Moses ... after they've been delivered from slavery and have traveled for three days in the wilderness ... that He is *Jehovah Rophe*, the God Who Heals. Healing is in the nature of God. That's why we believe God still heals today. Because the nature of God doesn't change. So Jesus' word to the leper ... "I am willing" ... that is an *eternal* word.

Now ... leprosy in the first century was bad news. It would develop as white spots on your skin and it could get raw and painful and was very contagious. People with leprosy were required to separate themselves from the rest of the world. Nobody touched a leper.

Except Jesus. Jesus reached out his hand and touched this guy with leprosy. For a Jewish person especially, that was just *not* done. But I think Jesus touched the guy because ***some people need to be touched to be healed.*** Back when Mosaic was meeting at Evans High School, we had a guy coming to the services who wasn't a believer yet. And you know how we all hug each other at the beginning of the service? Well, one day after we all greeted each other with hugs, this man made the comment, "I've received more hugs in the time I've been here than I've received in my entire life." That man eventually became a believer. And maybe the hugs were part of what helped him stay long enough to know Jesus.

Some people need to be touched to be healed, because some healing is more than physical. That's why Jesus passed on his healing power to his followers ... so they could go out and touch people who needed to know they were touchable. Healable. Not lost causes. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you're one who has had just enough rejection and failure in your life to think that Jesus won't be there for you. That he's not willing to heal you. But this is the eternal word: Jesus is always willing.

Story #2: Jesus and the Centurion

Matthew 8:5-10, 13 - 5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." 7 Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?" 8 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. 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." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith ... 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

Jesus has authority over disease. If it is God's nature to heal and Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, then the authority he had in the first century is the authority he has today. Jesus has authority over disease. I don't know why he doesn't always heal every disease. I don't know why he doesn't always answer our prayers for healing with physical healing. Bill Reeder probably has the best answer I've heard. He says, "Jesus doesn't owe us an explanation." This story of the centurion teaches us that our part in the equation is to be faithful and God's part is to be God. So I pray for healing because the Bible tells us to. James says if

anyone is sick, let him call on the elders of the church who will come around him and pray for him and the prayer *offered in faith* will heal the sick. Healing prayer is an exercise of faith in the sovereignty of God. And while there are plenty of stories of wonderfully faithful people who don't get healed, there are also plenty of stories of wonderfully faithful people who do get healed. And there are even more stories of how God has worked in the midst of illness ... of how he's brought people to faith and brought families together. Not healing is physical. Some healing is more about building faith than it is about restoring physical health.

Can I say this? I also believe some people need to learn how to walk away from a prayer believing things will change. Are you one of those people?

Story #3: Jesus and Peter's Mother-in-law

They go to Peter's house and his mother-in-law is laying there, sick with a high fever. Jesus heals her and she gets up and makes a meal. What a great example of walking away from a prayer believing things have changed! Then after supper (Matthew 8:16-17) - *When evening came, many who were **demon-possessed** were brought to him, and he **drove out the spirits with a word** and healed all the sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."* Now, unless I miss my guess, most of us in the western world do not have a wide experience of casting out demons and participating in physical healings. It *does* happen. It happens in third-world countries all the time ... where first-generation Christians don't know any better ... but this is not part of our western paradigm. In fact, our culture has come to accept an hour in church and a blessing before meals as the center of the Christian experience ... while driving out demons and curing diseases ... well, that's just weird. But folks, when I read in my Bible what Jesus did and then read what he taught his followers to do, this is what I hear (find it in Luke 9): that followers

have power and authority to drive out demons, cure diseases, proclaim the kingdom of God and heal things that destroy people's lives. This is the center of the gospel ... and the power of it.

A pastor told us last week about a mission center he is asking his church to develop in their area. And he said, "Some of our people don't get it ... don't get what we're doing. And I tell them, "If you knew Jesus better, you'd get it." I love that. So this pastor said, "I'm trying to get my people to meet Jesus ... so they'll get it." That's it, isn't it? When we get Jesus, we get what it means to follow him. And as we follow, we find ourselves more and more in the company of the broken-hearted, the blind, the poor, the prisoners, the ones who never knew they had the favor of God ... even those oppressed by demonic forces. And we find ourselves there with a heart for healing not because *we're* that merciful, but because Jesus is.

There is a spiritual battle being waged, but Jesus has authority over demons. I heard last week that something like 30% of the healing stories in the New Testament are stories of deliverance from demons. The God Who Heals has a great desire to see people delivered from the demons that oppress them. We don't have to live as victims. Jesus came to set the prisoner free.

Story #4: Jesus and the Storm

Matthew 8:23-26 - *Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith (there's that faith piece again), why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.* Now, clearly, this is a story about a literal storm. But I include it because ***Jesus has authority over storms*** and not all storms are weather-related. Someone wrote this to me last week. She said, "How often do

we begin with a need that we believe is the issue ... when our need is really just a symptom or even a mask for the true need?" In other words, how often do we raise an umbrella instead of going inside the house? We don't have to live in storms of fear or condemnation, and we don't have to settle for a stormy life. Jesus has authority over storms. And I've noticed this ... that prayers for storms are likely to be answered.

Go back to that question I asked earlier: On a scale of one to ten, how much are you enjoying your life right now? My hunch is that for every number below ten that you went, there's a storm attached. A conflict or an emotional turmoil that needs healing. I hope you can hear this today ... that Jesus heals storms. Prayers for storms are likely to be answered.

Story #5: Jesus and the Demon-possessed Men

Matthew 8:28-34 - *When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. 29 "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" 30 Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31 The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." 32 He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. 33 Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. 34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.* We've already learned that Jesus has power and authority over demons. What I really want you to hear in this story is that line ... about the other people in this town. When they saw Jesus, ***they pleaded with him to leave them alone***. That's a pretty powerful statement about human nature.

We've said that it is God's nature to heal. But the fact is, not everyone wants to be healed. For some reason, some of us would rather live as victims. We'd rather live with our habits and our hurts and our hang-ups. We've all known people who cling irrationally to things that are clearly not good for them. That's part of our fallen nature, I guess ... to gamble with life. But there is a safer, more peaceful place. It is in the touch of Jesus. The God Who Heals.

I believe Jesus still heals. And it doesn't always look like what we expect, and it might not always happen immediately, but it *never* happens if we're not willing. What I want to say this morning is that I believe The God Who Heals is powerful enough to heal whatever you're dealing with. But only if you are willing to walk in healing.

Jesus is willing. The question is ... are you?

We're going to enter a time of prayer, and I want to pray three prayers. I want to pray first for those in the healing professions ... for nurses and doctors and therapists all those in the healing professions. Because often God heals through those who practice healing, and I want to pray a blessing and a fresh anointing over you. After I pray for those in the healing professions, I'll pray for everyone in the room, because every one of us has something that could use the touch of Jesus. And then after I pray for everyone, I want to extend an invitation to those of you who would like to have hands laid on as you receive prayer. There will be two prayer stations ... one at the cross and one in the back of the room.

End with three prayers:

1. Pray for healing professionals – any in the health professions (they stand)
2. Pray for everyone (seated, with hands in receiving position).
3. Invite those who want to be touched and prayed over.