

Portraits of Christ: Touched By God (*Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 4:40-41*)

I. Taking Matters Into His Own Hands

Ezekiel 34:2 ...Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd... 6 ...and no one was seeking or searching for them.

11 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out... 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. 16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...

1. There is a crisis in shepherding in the nation of Israel. Israel's shepherds have God's law, and they have words from Him spoken through the prophets, but they do not have His heart.
2. God's remedy is to come Himself and shepherd His sheep. For the first time since Eden, God Himself is stepping onto the scene to care for His creation.
3. This is a whole different level of revelation of God's heart. Where before He revealed His heart through the law and the prophets, and it was left to man to respond to that heart and carry it out, now there is a direct manifestation of God's heart towards humanity with nothing lost in translation.

II. Touching the Untouchable

Matthew 8:1 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

1. This is the first specific miracle that Matthew chooses to record. Jesus is healing all sorts of sick people, and yet Matthew chooses to highlight this one.
Matthew 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. 24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.
2. Matthew gives Jesus' ministry a general introduction in *Matthew 4*, then begins to flesh out His message in *Matthew 5-7*, and now His activity in *Matthew 8*. He chooses as his first picture of Jesus' activity, Jesus reaching out His hand, touching a leper and making him clean.
3. The cleansing of the leper is recorded not just as a notable miracle, but because it highlights the great mission of the God-man: to come touch an untouchable people and restore them to fellowship.

4. As if to emphasize the point, Matthew then records the story of Jesus healing the centurion's servant by a word from far off - "He didn't have to touch him, you know!"
Matthew 8:5 ...a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, 6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." 7 And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed... 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

5. The back story is incredible – God put over a hundred verses into the law (*Leviticus 13-14*) about the issue of leprosy, to set up what Jesus was going to do thousands of years later.

6. Those with leprosy were condemned to live outside the camp. They were cut off from access to the Tabernacle due to uncleanness, and caught off from fellowship, living alone crying "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn others of their condition.
Leviticus 13:45 "Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" 46 He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

7. To be pronounced clean, the priest had to go to the leper, outside the camp. If the leprosy is healed, atonement must be made for the man's uncleanness, and then the priest may declare him clean. The one who pronounced him clean, then presents him before the Lord at the door of the Tent of Meeting.
Leviticus 14:2 "This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. 3 And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper... 5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water... 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean... 11 Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

8. Jesus came to a people cut off from fellowship and from the assembly of God due to uncleanness. When we could not approach Him, He came to us – meeting us outside the camp. He declared us clean, made atonement for us, and presented us to Himself as pure and spotless.
Hebrews 13:11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.
John 15:3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

III. The Hands-On God

Luke 4:38 Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house... 40 When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.

1. That's a remarkable thought. Remarkable in that a Man healed everyone that came to Him. But equally remarkable in that *God* laid His hands on everyone that came to Him.
2. All were healed, but not in some blanket release of mercy from a distance. He was capable of healing with a word. He was capable of empowering His followers to do the healing. Yet that's not the method He chose. Each and every one of them came right up to Jesus, and each and every one of them received a personal touch from God.
3. Jesus was not only willing, but seemingly eager to reach out with that personal touch to each one that came to Him. At any moment had He tired of it He could have simply said a word and the rest of the line would have been healed. But He had waited thousands of years for this opportunity to touch His creation in this way and He wasn't about to waste it in a mass healing or let His disciples have all the fun. He was going to touch each one.
4. Jesus refuses to be confined to the place of upper management. The Man who by all rights should be at the top of the ministry org chart – reserved for important meetings, big decisions and major PR opportunities while His underlings do the dirty work – was instead found in the midst of the diseased and the oppressed, laying His hands on them one at a time late into the night.
5. Jesus reveals the Father as a hands-on God. He doesn't just make the decisions to allow certain benefits to be given to His creation; He delights in personally touching each one who comes to Him.
6. There is a cry in the heart of every human being for direct access to God, and it's an echo of the cry of God's heart for direct access to man.

Song 1:2 Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.

Hebrews 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son

IV. The One

Luke 15:1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

1. It's in the ministry of Jesus that we first begin to see the heart of God for the individual. The Old Testament mostly reveals God's dealings with nations and corporate bodies. He works with and through individuals, but mostly in the context of His larger dealings with mankind.
2. In Jesus, that is turned on its head – God is interacting directly with broken men and women for no other reason than the fact that He wants to. It shatters our traditional understanding of the heavenly org chart – God at the top making the big decisions, angels passing them down to those with an anointing or a calling, and the majority of the body of Christ serving as the labor force to reach those outside, who must be cleaned up to even be allowed in the building.
3. Something shifts at the New Covenant, a mystery kept hidden until the fullness of time. God's purpose for the human heart is made known. Where God once dwelt *among* a corporate people (Israel), He now dwells *in* the heart of individual believers.
Colossians 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
4. If we don't get ahold of this, we are prone to unknowingly put some degree or another of a utilitarian agenda behind God's work in the human heart. God restoring, healing and awakening the heart (whether ours or others) becomes only a means to some larger end.
5. God has the purest of motives for His interaction with humanity. We have nothing to offer Him, nothing for which He could be using us. He has no reason to create us, redeem us, speak to us or touch us other than that He wants to.
6. God wasn't recruiting when He touched people and restored them. He was simply being who He was. It wasn't out of lack, but out of an abundance that simply flowed out of Him when anyone came to Him.
Luke 8:43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 46 But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me." 47 Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. 48 And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."
7. The one is the end for Him – a multitude of ones, who will, by the nature of the work God has done in them, form part of the glorious community of God. The unified Bride of Christ is God's dream, but She *is* made up of the one, and the corporate reality only happens when we see the one the same way God sees the one.