

“Get Up *and* Walk!” Faith *and* Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matthew 8; Lev. 13:44–50; Dan. 7:7, 8; John 10:10; Matt. 9:1–8; 1 John 1:9.*

Memory Text: “Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Arise and walk”?” (Matthew 9:5, NKJV).

If you made a list of what you most dreaded in life, what would it look like? For many of us, the list would include a family member dying or even you, yourself, dying. And while that’s certainly understandable, think about just how earth-centered that is. It’s all about our lives now. Is this really and truly what we ought to dread most, the loss of life on earth, especially when it never lasts that long anyway?

If God were to make a list of what He most dreads, it would certainly deal with the loss of either our family’s or our own *eternal life*.

Sure, God cares about physical illness and death, but most of all He cares about spiritual illness and eternal death. Though Jesus healed many people, and even brought the dead back to life, it was only temporary. They all died a physical death, one way or another, with the exception of the saints that Jesus resurrected at His own resurrection. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 550 and Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 786.)

Despite all that it accomplished in our behalf, the plan of salvation did not spare us from earthly sickness and earthly death. With this in mind, let’s consider several stories of healing, both physical and spiritual, and see what important lessons about faith we can derive from them.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.

Touching the Untouchable

After preaching the Sermon on the Mount, where He'd described the principles of the kingdom of God, Jesus reencountered the kingdom of Satan, a cold dark place filled with decaying people groaning for redemption, a place whose principles are often contrary to everything for which He stands. And at that time one of the greatest examples of just how wretched and fallen Satan's realm had become could be seen in the disease of leprosy. Though occasionally used as a form of divine punishment, such as in the case of Miriam (see *Num. 12:9–12*), in the larger context of the Bible it's a powerful and horrific example of just what it means to live in a fallen and broken world.

Read Matthew 8:1–4. What importance can be seen in the fact that, in healing this leper, Jesus touched him? See, for example, *Lev. 13:44–50*.

The leper kneels before Jesus and says, “‘If You are willing, You can make me clean’” (*Matt. 8:2, NKJV*). The Greek word for “can” is *dunamai*, like “dynamite” in English. It means full of power. “If you are willing, you are full of power and can change my life.” Jesus says He is willing to heal the leper and immediately does just that.

The fact that Jesus touched him must have sent shivers through the multitudes who saw what had happened. Surely, as He did on other occasions (such as the next recorded healing), Jesus could have just spoken the word, and the man would be healed. Why did He touch him though?

“The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the soul from sin. The man who came to Jesus was ‘full of leprosy.’ Its deadly poison permeated his whole body. The disciples sought to prevent their Master from touching him; for he who touched a leper became himself unclean. But in laying His hand upon the leper, Jesus received no defilement. His touch imparted life-giving power. The leprosy was cleansed. Thus it is with the leprosy of sin,—deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 266.

Perhaps, by touching the leper, Jesus showed that no matter how bad our sin is, He will draw close to those who are willing to be forgiven, healed, and cleansed from it.

Whom do you know, right now, who is suffering from the kind of thing we view today as “leprosy”—that is, anything that makes people recoil in horror and judgment? How can the example of Jesus help you to understand how to relate to that person?

The Roman and the Messiah

There's a good reason the book of Daniel spends a lot of time dealing with Rome (see *Dan. 7:7, 8, 19–21; Dan. 8:9–12, 23–25*). And that's because of its great power, which was prevalent also at the time of Christ. Nevertheless, a Roman officer, not only a symbol of the power of Rome but an expression of that power, comes to Jesus. The man is helpless in the face of the common trials and tragedies that beset us all. What a lesson about the limits of what earthly powers can do. The greatest and most influential leaders, the richest men and women, stand helpless against many of the common struggles of life. Truly, without divine help, what hope do any of us have?

Read Matthew 8:5–13. What important truths about faith and what it means to have faith are revealed in this story? What should it say to us, as Seventh-day Adventists, given the privileges we have?

A centurion was a Roman military officer who generally oversaw anywhere from 80 to 100 soldiers. Serving in the army for about twenty years, he was not permitted to have a legal family. Thus, the centurion's servant might have been his only real family.

In that culture, the only person more despised than a Gentile like this would have been a leper; so, this officer perhaps assumes that Jesus wouldn't want to enter his home, even though Jesus says that He will. By asking just for the word of Jesus, not His actual presence, the centurion demonstrates great faith that speaks to us today: Jesus' word is as powerful as His touch. To this centurion, for Jesus to heal someone wasn't a difficult thing. It was akin to a military officer giving orders to a soldier, which happened all the time.

Also, look at what Jesus says in Matthew 8:11, 12. What a stern warning to those who have been given great privileges. We, as Seventh-day Adventists, also are greatly privileged, and should take heed.

What daily practices and choices do you make? More important, how do these choices impact your faith? What can you do to make choices that will cause your faith to grow?

Demons and Pigs

Read Matthew 8:25–34. What do both these accounts teach us about the power of God? How can we draw comfort from what we see here about His power, especially as we struggle with things so much greater than ourselves?

In Jewish thought it was the prerogative of God alone to rule over nature and demons. After calming a violent storm with simple words (*Matt. 8:23–27*), Jesus steps onto the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in not only Gentile territory but where some demon-possessed men lived.

Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39 add details to the story of the demon-possessed men. The demons identify themselves as “legion.” A legion in the military was 6,000 soldiers. The demons were sent into 2,000 pigs.

Many have wondered why the demons asked to be sent into the pigs. One tradition taught that the demons most detested empty wandering; they preferred a home of some type, even if it was an unclean pig. Another tradition taught that demons were afraid of the water, and Jesus Himself even makes references to demons passing through waterless places looking for rest (*see Matt. 12:43, RSV*). There were also Jewish traditions that taught that demons could be destroyed prior to the final apocalyptic day of the Lord.

Yet, the most important point is this: the destructive condition of the men in this story is exactly the destructive condition that Satan desires for God’s children. But Jesus completely changed their lives. All that Satan seeks to do in our lives Jesus can and will undo for those who choose to give themselves to Christ. Otherwise we are helpless against Satan.

We are either on one side or the other in the great controversy. No matter how stark and uncompromising it sounds, Jesus couldn’t have expressed this truth more clearly than He did when He said: “ ‘He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters’ ” (*Luke 11:23, NKJV*). Which side we’re on depends upon us.

Read John 10:10. “ ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*NKJV*). How does this apply, not just to the demoniacs but to ourselves and to our lives? In what ways can and should we experience what we are promised here?

“Get Up and Walk!”

In Monday’s study, we noted that Jesus said that He hadn’t found anyone in Israel with such great faith. But, during these same hours in Israel, there was a man who had reached a place where his desire for healing of the heart was even greater than for healing of his body.

Read Matthew 9:1–8. What great hope should we take from this for ourselves regarding the promise of forgiveness for our sins, no matter what they have been or the damage that they have done? See also Rom. 4:7, 1 John 1:9, 1 John 2:12.

How fascinating that the first thing Jesus dealt with when the paralytic was brought before Him was the man’s spiritual condition. Jesus, obviously, knew exactly what the real problem was. Despite the man’s wretched physical state, Christ knew that the deeper issue was the man’s guilt over what must have been a very sinful life. Hence, knowing the man’s desire for forgiveness, Jesus utters what would have to be the greatest and most comforting words for anyone who understands the reality and the cost of sin: “ ‘Your sins are forgiven you’ ” (*Matt. 9:2, NKJV*).

Ellen G. White adds: “It was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God’s will.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor often preached about having enough faith to not be healed. This is the greatest faith of all: when we look deeper than our physical circumstances and instead focus on our eternal circumstances. So often our prayer requests are about our physical needs, and God does care about these things. But in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said we are to “ ‘seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). Thus, in the end, despite our immediate physical needs, how crucial that we keep eternal things ever before us in a world where so much is only temporal and fleeting.

Whatever our physical struggles, even in the worst-case scenario they will always and only be temporary. Why is it crucial that we never forget this truth?

Letting the Dead Bury the Dead

Read Matthew 8:18–22. What is Jesus saying to these men here about what it means to follow Him?

First, in Matthew 8:18–22, we see two men approach Jesus with the desire to be His disciples. Both are sincere; and yet, both seem to be held back by something. Jesus, who knows all our thoughts, goes straight to the heart of the matter. He questions whether the first man is really willing to give up everything—including his own bed!—to follow Him. This does not necessarily mean that a person will lose all earthly possessions if he or she follows Jesus but simply that a person needs to be ready to do so.

Jesus then asks the second man whether he's truly willing to put Jesus ahead of his own family. At first glance, His words to the second man seem very harsh. All the man wanted to do was bury his father. Why couldn't he do that first, and then follow Jesus, especially when in the Jewish faith it was considered part of obeying the fifth commandment to ensure that one's parents were properly buried?

However, some interpreters argue that the man's father wasn't yet dead, or even at the point of death; instead, the man was basically saying to Jesus, *Let me get everything with my family all worked out, and then I will follow You.*

Hence, Jesus' response.

Another call to discipleship is found in Matthew 9:9–13, with the call to Matthew, a despised tax collector. Jesus knew the man's heart, which was obviously open to truth, as his reaction to the call showed. Jesus surely knew what reaction His calling someone like Matthew would bring, which it did, as the texts reveal. From our perspective today, it's hard to see just how upsetting to the status quo the call to someone like Matthew would be to the people back then. What we see here is another example of just how universal the call of the gospel really is.

Read Matthew 9:13. Though the context is different, how does the principle apply even today, even when we substitute the idea of animal sacrifice with the sacrifice of Jesus? That is, how can we be careful that we don't let religious beliefs or practices, no matter how right, get in the way of doing what really matters to God?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “‘Thou Canst Make Me Clean,’ ” pp. 262–271, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The Germans have a saying, “*Einmal ist keinmal*.” It means, literally, “One time is no time.” It’s an idiomatic expression for the idea that if something happens only once, then it doesn’t count. It doesn’t matter. If it happens only once, it might as well never have happened at all. Whether you agree or not, think about this idea in context of Thursday’s study, when Jesus said to the man who wanted first to bury his father and then to be a disciple: “‘Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead’ ” (*Matt. 8:22, NKJV*). What did Jesus mean by implying that the man, a living man, was dead? Well, if “*Einmal ist keinmal*,” if “one time is no time,” then to live upon this earth only once, with no eternity to follow, then you might as well have never been born at all. You might as well be dead now (see *John 3:18*). Secular thinkers, who believe in no afterlife, have groused over the meaningless of a life that exists here only once, and for quite a short time too, before dissipating for eternity. What can it possibly mean, they have asked, if after this short stint we are forever gone and forever forgotten? No wonder, then, that Jesus said what He did. He was seeking to point the man to a reality greater than what this world, in and of itself, offered.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 With the idea presented above, go back and read the story in Matthew when Jesus said what He did to the man about burying his father. What should this tell us about how crucial it is to keep the big picture (and when we say “big,” we mean *real big*) in mind with all that we do? How does our theology help us to understand just how big the picture really is?
- 2 We don’t always know God’s will for physical healing, but we do always know His will for spiritual healing. In what way should this affect your prayer life?
- 3 What are the things that are most important to you? Make a list and bring that list to class. What can you learn from your priorities? What do our priorities teach us about ourselves and about our view of the world, of God, and of one another? How different would the list be if a group of atheists were doing the same thing?

An Amazing Ride: Part 2

Note: In Part 2, we continue with firsthand stories from the Solomon Islands, as told by Carol Boehm.

One of the great needs on the nearby island of Savo was for a water tank. The Seventh-day Adventists on the island gave a tank to a church of another denomination, amazing the priest and the entire congregation. They wondered why Adventists would care whether or not they had fresh water to drink. And hearts began to soften.

Recently, young people from our Mbekona church went to camp at Savo and to quietly witness to the villagers. When they arrived, they were overwhelmed to be given a welcome fit for a king. They were even invited to hold their Sabbath worship in the non-Adventist church with many of the locals attending! In turn, our youth attended their church service on Sunday. Our pastor was even asked to preach. What topic did he choose? The Sabbath! Nerves of steel, I tell you!

Our young people made friends with many of the local youth, some of whom have told them they want to become Adventists because they are a people of the Word and people of action. They have been invited back to hold meetings, and surrounding villagers have begun to show an interest in attending.

Another story comes from the beautiful island of Choiseul. The regional director and his team were holding outreach meetings there when they heard about a woman who had been living in the bush by herself for 30 years and had turned feral. She had been living with a pack of ten dogs. It took a few days for them to find her; but when they did, they were shocked to see a wild woman with fiery eyes and completely unkempt hair and nails. They gently befriended her and asked her to come back to the village with them. She did. Slowly the community reached out to her, and she began to attend some of the meetings. We have just gotten word that she has responded to a call to give her life to Jesus.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 9:1–8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Meet Jesus, who rewards the faith of those who come to Him.

Feel: Experience the power and authority of Jesus that resolve life's difficult problems.

Do: Trust in the healing and forgiving power of Jesus.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Meet Jesus, Who Rewards Your Faith.

- A** What are some common factors in the miracle healings in Matthew 8?
- B** Why is Sabbath mentioned in the midst of the miracle ministry of Jesus (*Matt. 8:16, 17; Luke 4:31–41*)?
- C** How do the miracles in Matthew 8:22–9:8 show that Jesus cares for the needy in spite of who they are?

II. Feel: Experience Jesus' Power and Authority.

- A** How does Jesus show that no one—be it a leper, a Gentile, or a woman—is marginalized and neglected in His kingdom (*Matt. 8:1–15*)?
- B** How does discipleship involve a call, a response, and a cost (*Matt. 8:18–22*)?
- C** What was the reaction of the onlookers to the miracles of Jesus (*Matt. 8:23–9:8*)?

III. Do: Trust in Jesus, and Serve Him.

- A** Each of the miracles in this lesson demands trust in the healing and saving power of Jesus. What kind of miracle do you expect in your life, and what kind of trust does it demand?
- B** In His ministry, Jesus had only one obligation—to help someone—and only one motive: love. What must you do to make your ministry Christlike?

► **Summary:** The power and authority of Jesus as the Messiah were used to serve and uplift humanity. His kingdom was inclusive. Whoever came to Him felt embraced by His love and included in His saving grace. The result was wonder: Who can this Jesus be (*Matt. 8:27*)?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 9:6*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: *Matthew 9:1–8* tells of a paralytic who had no hope of ever walking. But he had some friends who believed all that they heard about Jesus during His Galilean ministry. One day when Jesus returned to the city of Capernaum, their faith leaped into action. They carried their paralytic friend to the presence and power of Jesus. What they engaged in was a marvelous exercise of faith, as *Mark 2:4* notes: because the house was too crowded, the friends climbed up and broke open the roof and “let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying” (*NKJV*). Their faith brought an instant answer: forgiveness of sin and healing of the body. The best thing that Christian friendship can do is to bring a person in need to Jesus, the greatest Friend of all.

Opening Discussion: When Jesus asks the paralytic to be of good cheer, He assures him of two things: his sins are forgiven, and his health is restored. Why did Jesus ask: “Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Arise and walk” ’ ” (*Matt. 9:5, NKJV*)?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Over the years, the leprosy mission connected to Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, pioneered several ventures, including reconstructive surgery, to bring hope to thousands in nearby villages who suffered from leprosy. One venture was the creation of black sandals, made out of airplane tires, which were supposed to soft-cushion the feet and make walking less painful.

That good invention soon turned into an instrument of social ostracism. The distinctive sandals easily identified the lepers, which resulted in refusal by local restaurants and other eating establishments to service hundreds of these unfortunate men and women. Touched by the scandal these sandals generated, doctors, nurses, teachers, and students of Christian Medical College took up the practice of wearing the black sandals, sending the restaurant owners into chaos. The boycott eventually ended, and the sandals became a token of Christian love.

Our lesson this week deals with how Christ dealt with the less fortunate in our midst. We shall note three incidents: touching the

untouchable, including the excluded, and freeing the captive.

Bible Commentary

I. Touching the Untouchable *(Review Matthew 8:1–4 with the class.)*

“Unclean, unclean” was the leper’s required cry in order to keep all passersby at a distance. Physical decay and deformity, social ostracism, and communal isolation made the lepers the living dead. They were society’s untouchables. According to rabbinical law, at least six feet of distance should separate them from any other human being. To break this boundary was to become unclean, requiring rigorous purification ceremonies, overseen by a priest. Against such a background, our story is set. The leper knew that Jesus is the Lord and that He had the power to make him whole, but how would he bridge the gap? Six feet was a long and forbidden distance for a leper to cross in the journey to that saving point where healing stands. But the faith of the leper closed the space, and to his cry instantly came the answer: “I am willing; be cleansed” (*Matt. 8:3, NKJV*).

The story is not a simple case of a leper seeking healing but represents a broken and sinful race without any measure or means to find rest, peace, and redemption. Sin creates the greatest untouchability; it is the leprosy of the soul—where the inmost self finds itself rotting; the tenderness of the heart turns into a cold, rough rock; the vision for the nobler and the higher turns into a proud and haughty self-centeredness. “All have sinned,” says the apostle Paul (*Rom. 3:23*). Thus, all are spiritual lepers, untouchables. Viewed thus, the story of Jesus’ touching the leper gives us all hope. He crossed not a six-foot bar but the vast gulf of heaven and earth, left the presence of God, and came to the earth to touch us all. The touch of Jesus, freely available to each of us, has the power to forgive the worst of sins, to bring about healing where there is decay, and to take us from the death of sin into the embrace of God’s love.

Consider This: “The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the soul from sin.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 266. Discuss how.

II. Including the Excluded *(Review Matthew 8:5–13 with the class.)*

The story of the Roman commander approaching Jesus to heal his bonded slave on the verge of death reveals four great truths. First, the centurion, carrying the seal of Caesar in Capernaum, showed that power and authority must never blind one’s eyes to the value and dignity of a human being,

even if that person is a bonded slave. The Roman law may consider a slave no better than a workman's tool, to be thrown away when no longer usable, but the centurion transcended such monstrous culture.

Second, the embrace of divine grace through Jesus was available to the centurion and the servant—both Gentiles in Jewish culture, barely a step above the leper whom Jesus had just healed. The door to Jesus is always open and is never shut to anyone, be it a Gentile or a slave. What the world in sin excludes is included in the new world that Jesus creates.

Third, a feeling of unworthiness before divine grace is the key to experiencing the power of that grace. The centurion expressed his unworthiness to have Jesus enter his home and exclaimed, “ ‘Only speak a word, and my servant will be healed’ ” (*Matt. 8:8, NKJV*). Fourth, the power of Jesus, then and now, is to be identified, not necessarily with His physical presence but through faith in His Word. The centurion had that kind of faith, and Jesus “marveled” at it and told him to go home to see the answer to his extraordinary faith.

Consider This: The expression Jesus “marveled” is used twice in the Gospels. The first is here in the context of the centurion's faith. The second instance is in Mark 6:6, in which Jesus “marveled” at the unbelief that led the people of Nazareth to reject Him. Against that background, how do you understand Jesus' reaction to the centurion's faith: “ ‘I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel’ ” (*Matt. 8:10, NKJV*)? And how do you interpret the Messianic verdict in Matthew 8:11, 12?

III. Freeing the Captive (*Review Matthew 8:28–34 with the class.*)

While Matthew speaks of two men possessed by demons, Mark (5:1–20) and Luke (8:26–29) refer to one. This is no discrepancy; the latter two writers seem to focus on the man who did the talking. What is important is that demon possession is real, and the only safety against such control by Satan is to abide in Christ. The soul that is anchored in Christ and His promises can “resist the devil, and he will flee” (*James 4:7*).

Instead of rejoicing over the healing of the demon-possessed, “the whole city came out” and “begged” Jesus to leave town (*Matt. 8:34, NKJV*). That response is from the Gentiles. But John states the case of the rejected Jesus even more powerfully: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (*John 1:11*). Why is Christ the unwanted person across the spectrum of humanity? His presence disturbs the routine and the comfortable and brings what humanity considers as normal under divine judgment. Where He is, sin cannot claim a seat; injustice cannot wear a face; self-centered domination must yield to brotherhood; eyes blinded by the cataracts of color, race, caste, or gender must undergo a cathartic surgery; and love, mercy, and justice must

mark every contour of human life. Christ is the Great Disturber. “Why do you disturb us? Leave us alone” is the cry of those who live in the comfort zones of ease and the silence of the graveyard. But blessed are those who open the doors and invite the crucified Christ to come in and let Him sup with them (*Rev. 3:20*).

Discussion Question: In the routine of daily life, busy with numerous details of survival, recall instances in which you told Christ to leave you alone or perhaps made Him wait for a while. What are some imperceptible ways we can keep Christ away?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Consider one common characteristic of the three healings in this week’s lesson: according to the Jewish law, the leper was unclean because of his disease; the centurion’s servant was unclean because he was a Gentile; the demon-possessed men were unclean because they were Gentiles, demon-possessed, and dwelling in a graveyard. Thus, uncleanness is a common characteristic of the three miracles.

Thought Question: Who are the “unclean” today, and how can we minister to them?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The Roman centurion told Jesus, “Only speak a word, and my servant will be healed” (*Matt. 8:8, NKJV*). Trust in God’s Word is our immediate resource of victory. Whether it is resisting sin, fleeing a temptation, or seeking healing, turn to the Word. There is power in it. While we cannot see God face to face, we have access to Him through His Word and prayer. The One who spoke and it was done at Creation is still in our midst. His Word and its power are with us.

Activity: Ask each member of the class to write down an instance in their lives or a story that they may have heard about how God’s Word brought newness in life. Invite them to share it with the rest of the class.
