PETER'S HOUSE

And when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw that Peret's mother-in-law was lying ill with a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began serving him. And when evening had come, they brought to him many oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word, and he healed all those who were sick, so that the word spoken through Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled: "He himself took our weaknesses, and he bore our diseases."
Matthew 8:14-17

In Matthew 8 Jesus has healed a leper. He has healed the son of a centurion in the Roman military. Now Peter's mother-in-law stands as the third outsider to be healed by the Messiah.

Jewish women were not allowed inside the temple as far as Jewish men.

As a Gentile, the centurion could only get into the outer-most court of the temple.

The leper could not get into the temple at all.

Historic and customary Jewish thinking understood that God did not live within the Temple, but that he did indeed meet the nation there. In this sense, the Temple stood as the pinnacle of worship for the community and to be excluded from that worship in the fullest sense posed problems and limitations.

Matthew reveals Jesus as the King in the line of David and the Prophet in a persona like Moses. The fulfillment and completion of these foreshadows is that Jesus is also the Person that the Temple itself was a type of. Therefore, as the Promised seed to restore all humanity, he must break down all the dividing walls of hostility between humanity. Such barriers have no place in the Kingdom of God.
Anonymous

But Jesus breaks down the outer wall, letting in the leper, then the wall of the Court of the Gentiles, letting in the centurion, and now he breaks down the wall of the Court of Woman, letting in women. At the cross he will split the veil to the Holy of Holies, letting in everyone. Jesus is the great Wallbreaker. A leper, a centurion, and a woman; one physically excluded, one racially excluded, and one sexually excluded from the innermost worship of the community – those Jesus heals first . . . Jesus' mercy extends beyond the bounds of law and customs, reaches outsiders, and helps them first.
Brunner - Matthew, page 386

Again, we are told that the power and authority in this account belongs to Jesus alone and the reader is reminded that the specific stories recounted in the Gospel are only representative of the healing ministry of Jesus as a whole.

The healing ministry of Jesus is invitational for any and every one to enter the Kingdom of God.

The churches' current struggle with the right treatment of homosexual persons is an example of the discipleship that Jesus wants to encourage. The churches' majority decisions so far seem right to most Christians – there should be openness to, fellowship with, justice for, but not the ordination of practicing homosexual persons or the approval of homosexual practice. (The chaste homosexual person should be allowed ordination). This set of convictions seeks to be faithful to both the width and the depth of Jesus' gospel. Jesus loves both the heterosexual and the homosexual person, but there are sexual practices from which Jesus seeks to deliver both groups. Isn't the worldwide church's almost unanimous position on sexual practice – fidelity to marriage and chastity in singleness – even the healthiest physical counsel?
Brunner – Matthew, page 386

Most likely Matthew depended on Mark 1:29-31 for this material yet in his customary style, he trims the wording down creating a tighter account.

Matthew omits the words *"Coming immediately from the Synagogue."*

Unlike Mark and Luke's account where *Simon* is used, Matthew opts for *Peter.*

Matthew omits Mark's use of Andrew, James and John as unnecessary information.

All of this allows the focus to be placed on Jesus.

Matthew records the healing with a mere touch of Jesus' hand whereas Mark tells us that Jesus *raised her up by gently taking her hand.*

Matthew has the woman rising on her own and not by Jesus' gently raising her.

After the healing, Mark says she *served them* whereas Matthew says *she served him.*

This last point flavors the account with a rather Christocentric notation which fits well with Matthew's focus on Jesus being the embodied persona of the expected promise prophesied in the Old Testament.

Unlike Mark, Matthew omits the redundant phrase *"When it was evening after sunset"* as well as *"the whole town was gathered at the door."*

Mark and Matthew phrase those coming to Jesus with slight variation:

When it was evening after sunset, they brough to him all who were sick and demon-possessed.
Mark 1:32

And when evening had come, they brought to him many oppressed by demons . . . he cast out the spirits with a word, and he healed all those who were sick,
Matthew 8:16

Matthew's wording here makes clear that the power of Jesus is on display but also paves the way for the quote from Isaiah in the last verse of this pericope.

The last variation we have between Mark and Matthew is that Matthew omits Jesus prohibiting the demons from speaking because *"they knew him."* Most likely this is omitted because it could be a distraction from the Isaiah quote forthcoming which is a strong point he desires to make to his Jewish readers.

What we see in this passage is that Matthew uses a *chiastic structure* which is a common literary device in both Testaments. It looks something like this:

a *He saw his mother-in-law*
b *lying sick*
c *having a fever*
d *he touched her hand*
c *the fever left her*
b *and she rose*
a *and she served him*

In chiastic structures, the main point is found in the middle and then the passage recapitulates the narrative with a mirror of the prior points being addressed with the goal of a resolution or fulfillment taking place. Each point finds its parallel making the points easier to understand.

And when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw that Peret's mother-in-law was lying ill with a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began serving him.
Matthew 8:14-15

Peter's house in Capernaum served as a headquarters for the ministry of Jesus. In ancient times, it would not have been unusual for extended family to live together so the sickness of one would have been a concern for all.

Due to the limited medical knowledge of the time, fever was considered an illness in itself rather than a symptom accompanying an illness.

Of interest in Matthew's account is that no request is made for healing; Jesus alone takes the initiative upon *seeing her.*

Just as in the case of the leper, Jesus *touches* the patient. Nothing more is said of the encounter save that the *fever left her.*

It is important to know that touching a person in rabbinic tradition was forbidden.

The healing is confirmed by the stated fact that she rose from her position of illness and began to serve him and this is where Matthew keeps the passage centered on Jesus. Mark tells us that she began to serve *them,* but Matthew keeps Jesus front and center in his narrative.

The sole focus of Matthew here is on Jesus and she ministers to him in response of her healing.

And when evening had come, they brought to him many oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word, and he healed all those who were sick,
Matthew 8:16

Later in the day when it was evening and the Sabbath ended, the crowds came having heard the 'healer' was at Peter's house. They brought with them the sick of their households.

"brought to him" is an expression favored by Matthew for such instances.

So a report about him spread throughout Syria. People brought to him all who suffered from various illnesses and afflictions, those who had seizures, paralytics, and those possessed by demons.
Matthew 4:24

Just then, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher.
Matthew 9:2

Then they brought to him a demon possessed man who was blind and mute. Jesus healed him so that he could speak and see.
Matthew 12:2

When the people there recognized him, they sent word into all the surrounding area, and they brought all their sick to him.
Matthew 14:35

It is not easy to draw the line between demon oppression and other afflictions. In the account of Peter's mother-in-law according to Luke, the language used for the healing sounds almost military.

So he stood over her, commanded the fever, and it left her.
Luke 4:39

One could speculate that the fever was caused by a spirit of some kind.

Presumably many diseases we would explain differently today (e.g. epilepsy; Matthew 17:15-18) were then classified as cases of demon possession, especially those that left the person in a state of obvious disorientation. But, in any event, apparently not every physical malady was attributed to spirits or demons, as our text shows.
Hagner – Matthew, page 210

And I said to him: On what star do you sit? And he said to me: Behold the end of the horn of the moon, the star that is in the south because the errors of the half-hearted were added to the soul. Seeing this, many of the people pray to the half-god in these three names: Vultala; Thalal; Malchai; and I see them. And I,

Solomon, said to him: When then you want to do evil, why are you being destroyed? And he said: In the angel where even the half-hearted rests. I asked him: In what names are you removed? And he said: In the name of the archangel Azazel. *Testament of Solomon*

(Solomon is described as interrogating a specific demon about its celestial dwelling and the angelic power required to defeat it. 1st to 3rd century AD.)

Regardless, what Matthew makes clear is that the demonic spirits were driven out *with a word* from Jesus which not only emphasizes his unique authority but also links this authority and the fact that it is revealed in his speech to the account of the centurion: *"only say the word."*

and he healed all those who were sick – Matthew emphatically tells us that:

1) there were no diseases Jesus could not heal;

2) the breadth of the grace Jesus is dispensed to *all humanity* in the Kingdom of God.

so that the word spoken through Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled: "He himself took our weaknesses, and he bore our diseases."
Matthew 8:14-17

Matthew now connects the reality of the events taking place through Jesus by using the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.
Isaiah 53:4

"He himself took our <u>weaknesses</u>, and he bore our <u>diseases</u>."
Matthew 8:14-17

Matthew may have used Greek words of his own choosing to form the Isaiah citation to better reflect the meaning of the Hebrew. It also could better reflect the healing ministry of Jesus that has thus far occurred in Matthew 8.

When Matthew writes that Jesus took our *weaknesses*, the word he chose was ἀσθενείας – *as-then-ay-as* which means *a lack of strength / feebleness of health in mind or body / a weakness of soul to understand a thing / to restrain corrupting diseases* and *infirmities.*

This word does not occur elsewhere in Matthew.

The other word Matthew chose was νόσους – *diseases* which covers diseases and sicknesses.

Notice that neither of these words correspond to demon exorcism and to healing. Matthew uses them in a parallel way where the second word refers to the thought of the first. In this sense, no distinction is made between *weakness* and *disease*.

Rather, what Matthew is doing is connecting Jesus with the Servant of Isaiah 53 as he does in other passages of his Gospel.

> *for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
> *Matthew 26:28*

> *But when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he did not respond.*
> *Matthew 27:12*

> *Two outlaws were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.*
> *Matthew 27:38*

The thinking that went around at the time was that the Servant would take and bear the sickness of the people. Matthew is revealing to his readers that this Servant has indeed come in the person of Jesus. The three miracles thus far recorded in Matthew 8 show the fulfillment of Isaiah's words.

What Matthew wants us to know, however, is that this Servant does not accomplish his mission by these healing. Rather, that through his narrative, Matthew will reveal that the Servant must bear the sin of the people through his own suffering and death. This reality will become clear as the gospel story moves forward.

> *A third miracle is reported by Matthew with deliberate brevity. With a touch, Jesus cures the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, and again the incomparable authority of Jesus becomes apparent. Jesus casts out demons; he heals all the sick who come to him. The particular miracle stories chosen in Matthew for his narrative are thus but representatives of the vast healing ministry Jesus had among the people. This is an important part of the story for Matthew and is designated specifically as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. It is a sign of the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus. Yet it must not be overstressed as by some modern charismatics who misuse v.17 to claim the availability of universal physical healing now. <u>The point of the healings is not so much to be found in the events themselves but in their witness to the person of Jesus</u>, i.e., they are basically Christological in character . . . the healings are but one aspect of a much more important work to be performed by Jesus. The Gospel, in fact, has something far more important to tell than that Jesus healed (or can heal today). These single stories, these specific healing narratives, are not the heart of the gospel. Disease is not a true enemy that must be overcome: that enemy is sin, for the fallen world produced by sin lies ultimately behind the suffering and sickness of this age. This is the enemy to be conquered at the end of the story. Properly perceived, these healings are most important as symbols of the much greater "healing" that is at the heart of the*

gospel., the healing at the cross. Christ's atoning death will in the eschaton provide healing for all without exception.

Hagner – Matthew, page 211