

Matthew 8

Verses 14-17

The Fever Left

13.08.2006

Have you ever noticed how we can add in lots of details to a story someone is telling us, even though they haven't said it?

eg **“huffed and puffed and blew his house down.”**

By simply saying that line, most of you will have an idea of the story. Did you think about the first or the second little pig? What sort of house was it?

In the Bible, there are some easy to remember parts, and there are some other parts that we think we know so well.

There is nothing wrong with knowing stories, and certainly nothing wrong in knowing parts of the Bible. However, one of our human weaknesses is to stop listening when we think we have heard something before.

We tend not to listen well, instead we assume we know it.

In the gospel reading today, there are a few sections like that, in only four verses.

The first comes with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This is more fully described in Mark 1:29-31. That passage tells us it was a Sabbath day, they had been to the synagogue, and James and John went with Jesus to Simon and Andrew's home. The disciples told Jesus about Peter's mother-in-law, then Jesus took her hand and helped her up. She then served them (on the Sabbath).

However Matthew has hardly mentioned most of that. He tells this account of the event in Jesus' ministry, but places it straight after Jesus met the leper and the centurion. We are told *“When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.”*

The leper had no home. The centurion had claimed he was not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof, but Jesus had made Peter's home his home whenever he was in Capernaum.

Here he was honoured as the great teacher, whom Peter followed as a disciple.

The leper had boldly knelt before Jesus and asked for help. The centurion had approached Jesus. But Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed and he went to her.

Jesus reached out his hand to touch the leper to cleanse him. He just spoke the word to heal the centurion's servant. But Jesus touched Peter's mother-in-law's hand and the fever left.

He ordered the leper to offer the sacrifices Moses had commanded as a testimony to them. The Centurion left in obedience to Jesus' command. But there was no command to Peter's mother-in-law. She simply got up and began to serve.

This part of Jesus' life shows us his authority over sickness. There is no doubt about that. Yet it also shows how astounding his compassion for people is, whether they're family, immigrants or homeless. He did not have a blanket approach, but dealt with each one individually, seeing the needs, hurts and requirements in each.

And this so impressed the crowds that they too, wanted to experience what Jesus was giving. *“That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick.”*

He could not rest. They kept flocking in, hoping for relief.

They were healed and freed. It is as if the three healings described by Matthew, although unique, are samples of what happened frequently as people called on him for help. We see his generosity and compassion and authority over spirits and sickness.

Yet Matthew wants us to grasp a much fuller sense. He does not want us to say “I have heard this before, I know what he's going to do next, so I do not have to listen hard now.”

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For Matthew did something wise, which he did at least 17 times in his gospel. He stated that by doing this thing (healing in this instance) Jesus fulfilled a promise from the Old Testament. He said *“This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”*

What does that mean? Do you know, or do you think you know? It comes from Isaiah 53:4.

In Isaiah 53, a suffering servant is being described as the despised and smitten one. Verse 4 says *“Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.”*

The most natural way that the Jews interpreted that verse before and during the time of Jesus, was to consider this man, the suffering servant. He identified with the people. When he took up our infirmities, it did not mean that he took ours away, it meant (for them) that he too became sick. When he carried our sorrows, they thought it meant that he shared and knew the same griefs and pangs as the people of Israel.

So to them, his suffering was proof that God had struck him down. *“yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.”*

They did not expect someone who would lift the burdens off them and heal them. They read it as someone who so identified with them, that he was racked with the same suffering and diseases.

So when Jesus came, we are told he fulfilled this prophecy. Yet the surprise was that he did it in a way that surprised their socks off, so that they only wore sandals without socks. This was an aspect of the Messiah which they had not been prepared for.

Jesus opened the Bible to them in a way that they had not considered. His compassion, mercy and authority bowled them over. Never before had someone like this been able to do so much.

But what about the second part of Isaiah 53:4, which speaks of him being considered smitten by

God? In Matthew 8, official persecution is not mentioned. Rather, there were signs of individuals and towns responding against Jesus. This will build up until Matthew 11 where John the Baptist is killed, then from chapter 12 the Pharisees begin the major push to destroy Jesus.

Matthew’s gospel shows Jesus growing in acceptance as he shows his compassion and authority, until the Jewish leaders cannot accept him anymore.

And we know that they **“huffed and puffed and blew his house down”**. They succeeded in getting people to see him as stricken and smitten by God. Though he took up their infirmities and bore their diseases, they turned against him and had him killed. But as Isaiah 53 and Matthew will go on to say, *“It was the Lord’s will to make him suffer and crush him. That he might bear the sin of many and make intercession for us.”*

Jesus did heal. Jesus did die. Jesus did rise again.

He surprised them with his fulfilment of the story they thought they knew. But thank God that he did *“take up our infirmities and carry our diseases.”* Others could only be blighted by them. Only Jesus could transform the meaning, to give us hope.