

## GETTING CLOSE TO JESUS

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
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**Let's Begin**

*It has been my experience that the closer we become associated with a particular person, the more aware we become of the weak points in their life. Especially do we revere famous people; often times ignoring what would be a glaring weakness were it not for the distance between them and us. Not so with Jesus.*

*In fact, just the opposite is true of Jesus. Inevitably, the closer we get to Him, the greater our amazement and appreciation will be. This is precisely what we find with Jesus' disciples, the more they got to know Him. "What Manner of Man is This?" is the question concerning Jesus that the disciples asked (v. 27). After all, who can cleanse the lepers, stop the storm, lasso its waves with a word and turn the formerly raging sea into a surface smooth as glass? Only one answer the Bible offers—the God-Man whose name is Jesus.*

*Today, we are looking at getting close to Jesus. I'd like you to pay particular attention to two non-negotiable truths we learn from Matthew 8:*

- I. Cleansing the Sick: Salvation from our Sin (vv. 1-22)**
- II. Calming the Sea: Security in our Savior (vv. 23-34)**

**I. Cleansing the Sick: Salvation from our Sin (vv. 1-22)**

The miracles Jesus performed served a grand two-fold purpose: Not only did miracles prove Jesus to be the Son of God, *miracles also showed that what Christ did in the physical realm, He also did in the spiritual realm.* Miracles in that sense were sermons in action. The cleaning of leper is a beautiful example of the sinfulness of sin and the mercy of God.

First, observe the misery of the leper (vv. 1-2). As Jesus was coming down the mountain, the multitudes continued to press about Him (v. 1). Recall that Jesus had just finished the masterpiece of all sermons where He kept thousands of people spellbound as "the people were astonished at his doctrine... [teaching] them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28-29). There is an important note for us here: *We cannot stay on the mountain with Jesus no matter how delightful the experience is. Instead, we must go down into the valley where needy, hurting people are.* In fact, to stay on the mountain would be to cease following Jesus, for He has descended to the valley. Christians must follow Jesus' example and help hurting people.

**The first one who meets Jesus may be the most needy person presented in the Gospel record—the leper.** No one can imagine how horrible the conditions for the unfortunate one who contracted leprosy in the first century. Lepers were, in the latest stages of their condition, quarantined in a despicable camp where one's only companion was another unfortunate leper, whose life expectancy was about nine years.

When lepers were able to move freely about, one could always hear them coming. To not forewarn others that one is a leper by screaming "Unclean! Unclean!" could be punishable by death. Crowds were incensed by such. So, for this leper to approach Jesus without forewarning Him would have been an outrage.

*Little doubt exists, as we consider these verses, that leprosy pictures vividly for us the foulness of sin. A leper was a walking sermon. What an ugly thing sin is. Sin is foul but it cannot be hidden. Sin, like*



### Reflection Connection

*Do you think it was cruel that lepers were quarantined? How do you think Jesus' disciples felt when Jesus associated with the lepers? Explain.*

leprosy, is progressive in nature and rarely ever kills us off quickly. Instead, *like the little white spots leprosy brings, sin starts innocently, but spreads in a slow but lethal fashion.*

Perhaps one may think social drinking is harmless enough but millions of social drinkers inevitably become alcoholics. One may think a little playful flirtation possesses no harm. However, adultery stands knocking at the door. A young person habitually cheats in school thinking it is no big deal. Later in life, he finds himself stealing from the company who pays his salary. The nature of sin is as the nature of leprosy—it kills. There exists no relief by family, no remedy by physicians and no rescue by religion. Sin is unmistakably incurable.

**Second, notice the motivation of the leper** (v. 2) He came and “worshipped” Jesus. His confidence that Jesus could assist him when no one else could is amazing. We’re not told how he heard about Jesus. In the end, it doesn’t matter. What’s important to understand is the confidence he possessed that Jesus is the only

*Jesus’ compassion flowed naturally and flawlessly.*

one who could rescue him. Falling before the Son of God, he uttered: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” How telling is what the leper did not say. He did not say, “Lord if you can, you will make me clean.” No such insulting confidence is seen in the leper. He worshipped Jesus, not doubting His ability, but only humbling himself to the will of God.

**Third, observe with me the mercy of the Lord** (v. 3). See the leper kneeling—his horrible growth filling his white face, tight skin and a rag over his mouth. His countenance is as a haunted animal. The crowd gasps and shrinks back being taken completely off guard by this horrible man who gave them no warning he was a leper.

Jesus’ compassion flowed naturally and flawlessly to the leper’s ugly condition. Matthew records the unthinkable action: “Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him” (v. 3). Touching the leper was an act of unutterable kindness for he assuredly had not been touched for years. In itself, this must have been a psychological lift for this social outcast. The Bible tells elsewhere that “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). *Jesus touches the untouchable. If He did not, no hope could exist.*

As a result, Jesus did not contract the leper’s misery; instead He communicated His cleansing mercy. Jesus said to the leper “I will, be clean” (v. 3). Jesus was willing to save. He is always willing to save (1 Timothy 2:3-4). **The problem is not His will to save; it is your will to be saved.** Elsewhere Jesus said, “I would...ye would not,” (Matthew 23:37).

Upon the touch of Jesus “immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” *Sin can’t survive the touch of Jesus. His mercy is too great and His love is too strong.* And, Jesus still touches lepers today. He can do the same for you. All around us there are cured lepers. *It can happen to anyone in this study right this very minute.*

### Reflection Connection

*How did Jesus best demonstrate His role as King? If so many people were getting healed, why did the people not believe? Do you think if miracles were performed on a similar basis, people today would believe? Why or why not?*



**Reflection Connection**

*Do you believe all suffering has a purpose? Why or why not? How does God use difficulty in our lives to help us? Do you think things could get so bad we could not stand the pressure? Why or why not?*

As this encounter ends, Jesus sends the cleansed leper away to fulfill the customary laws of their society by gaining a clean bill of health from the priest (v. 4). But the Lord of mercy was hardly through. No sooner than the leper left Him, a centurion come running asking Jesus to heal his servant which He did (vv. 5-13). This mercy act was followed by healing Peter's mother-in-law (vv. 14-15), others who were sick and even demon-possessed (v. 16). Matthew makes sure we understand that Jesus was simply fulfilling His heavenly role as King over His Kingdom (v. 17).

**II. Calming the Sea: Security in our Savior (vv. 23-34)**

The series of miracles in the first part of the chapter show the power of Jesus. His divine power healed physical disease but even more telling His love on the Cross would heal spiritual disease—sin. Only through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection could life come. Mercy continues to flow from the Son of God today.

**Reflection Connection**

*How did Jesus best calm the disciples' fear? Share a time in your life for the class to consider when fear overcome your life. Ask others to share their experiences as well*

In this section, while Jesus' power is no less on display, the focus is more within the natural realm and how He rescues from physical danger. Even more, we will learn that as God's children, we find absolute security in our Savior as we daily walk by faith in Him.

Verse twenty-three opens with Jesus and His disciples headed down to the Sea of Galilee and getting into a ship. Immediately, we're struck with the image of life being similar to a voyage on a sea. In Herman Melville's masterpiece, *Moby Dick*, life is portrayed precisely as that—a journey on a ship seeking out the great, mysterious whale. Literary critics argue that the whale in Melville's novel is symbolic of none other than God Himself and our ceaseless quest to find Him.

*His love on the Cross would heal spiritual disease—sin*

Let's examine the problem the disciples encountered (vv. 23-24). *That we face problems should never surprise us, for even the disciples, as close as they were to Jesus, continually faced one crisis after the next.* Matthew says there "arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves" (v. 24). Their problem? A sinking ship filled in that blank. This "great tempest" we're informed is the result of the Sea of Galilee being 650 feet below sea level and surrounded by a mass of mountains and hills. When the cold air rushes down ravines, it collides with heated air above the sea's basin. The result is astounding: the sea, that only moments ago was calm and quiet, turns quickly into a wild, roaring and lethal weapon against unwary sailors.

Maybe you are going through a storm today. That Christians are exempt from life's storms must be the most successful myth Satan ever originated. This myth is perhaps responsible for more discouragement in our lives than any other single factor. Note also that they were in the storm as a result of following Jesus! **Jesus does not promise a smooth fare but He does promise a safe finish.**

**Reflection Connection**

*When is the last time you had a major doubt? If possible, share it with the class. Is there a difference between faith and confidence? Explain. Could someone have confidence but no faith? Why or why not?*



### Golden Greek Nugget

The word translated “tempest” (v. 24) literally means “a shaking.” It is used several other times in the New Testament, many of which are translated “earthquake.” The word picture we get from this is powerful and reveals precisely why the disciples were terrified. They’d not seen or experienced anything like that on the sea before, even though they were seasoned veterans on the open water. It was as if an “earthquake” took place on the surface of the Sea of Galilee.

The ship was “covered with waves” and when that happens, the water goes to the bottom of the boat. The usual result is a quick sinking. Not this one. Jesus is on board! The gospel song says, “No water can swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and skies.” *Remember Jesus saved you to take you over, not under. He’s our Savior. And being our Savior makes Him also our security.*

**Second, note the peace Jesus experienced** (v. 24). As death assuredly approached and the disciples were now in panic, Jesus is found peacefully sleeping away. This is the only time in the gospels where we read of Jesus asleep. As a side note, the term translated “was sleeping” is a verb tense in the Greek which means Jesus “kept on sleeping.” Imagine the picture of a sinking ship that had been ransacked by a storm-tossed sea and Jesus sleeping away. His peace stands in quite a contrast to the panic of His disciples. Here we have recorded perfect humanity in divinity. Jesus is the God-Man.

Are there times when trouble comes and Jesus seems asleep in the back of the boat? After all, He doesn’t always do what we want Him to, when we want Him to do it. We have our own time table but we soon learn He works on His. Jesus needs no wake up calls. Never oversleeps. Our security is not in our hands; it is in His.

**Third, observe the plea our Savior embraced** (v. 25). The disciples were seasoned sailors and experienced fishermen. They had been there and done that with these storms. They were just a part of everyday life in the fishing industry. However, this time they thought they were going to drown. Fear griped them—“save us: we perish” In essence, they were saying “Save us right now! We are on way down!”

*Before we judge them too harshly, note that they did precisely as did the leper. They came to Jesus. What do you do when troubles, problems or crises arise? Your response tells a lot about you. Do you run to your friends for advice? Do you head to nearest bar and get bombed? They did the best thing one can do—come to Jesus.*

What we discover in the disciples’ plea is what we find in us—a curious mixture of faith and fear. “Save us” is the language of faith. On the other hand, “perish” is undoubtedly the language of fear. If we’re honest, we must admit that we don’t always respond the way we should. Sometimes we simply blow it. How easy to see in the Bible what we should do; it’s another matter entirely to do it when a crisis arises. What is the key to doing as the Bible says?

**Fourth, let’s examine the power the disciples must exercise** (vv. 26-27). Jesus asks a haunting question to His panic-stricken disciples: “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” Instead of being filled with faith, they were filled with fear. Rather than exercise faith they expressed their doubts. Faith is simply taking God at His word. How like the disciples most people are. They possess unhealthy fear for their health, their job and growing old. Yet, faith calls us to action; when have problems, our solution is to find a promise and by faith claim it!

*Ultimately, fear and faith cannot be roommates. Both cannot carry the same heart address. The two are much too different. If our eyes are on the sea, fear obviously rules. If our eyes are on our Savior, faith carries the day. Fear looks at God through circumstances while faith looks at circumstances through God. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Faith is the power we must exercise, for without it, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:16).*

**Just when you need Him, Jesus be near. He can calm the waters in your storm filled life.**

### Wrap Up

*Getting close to Jesus is the greatest decision you will ever make. Some would have us believe it is either too difficult or just plain impossible. The first glimpse we got of Jesus in this chapter should have destroyed that myth. The most despicable social outcast imaginable came to Jesus as he was—a leper. Jesus did the unthinkable by touching him and making him whole. What a perfect picture of Jesus accepting us as we are and cleansing us from our leprous sinful heart. But even more, Jesus not only becomes our Savior, but also secures us all the way through life and even into eternity. No storm will ever take our ship down. Jesus saves; Jesus secures.*

