

Our 2024 Theme is “Live Like Jesus.” As we prepare to celebrate the great work that Jesus did on the cross and his resurrection to give us new life, I want to take the next three weeks and talk about the “Heart” of Jesus, how Jesus felt about the downcast, his willingness to surrender to God’s plan, and his heart for the lost. I hope that it will help you and I have “A Heart Like His.”

In a book written by the former Tax Collector, Matthew, the heart of Jesus is revealed in several different stories of Jesus caring for those who desperately needed his healing touch.

One day, after Jesus preached the sermon on the mount and amazed people with his great authority, he came down from the mountain and encountered a man with leprosy.

### **Jesus’ Healing of a Leper (Matthew 8:1-4)**

**Matthew 8:1-2 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”**

Leprosy was a grotesque and highly contagious skin disease. It was a debilitating condition, but it also caused the victim to be unclean, unable to worship, excluded from social settings, and isolated from friends and family when they desperately needed “a human touch.”

Therefore, in his condition, it was unlawful for this man to even approach Jesus, much less to have physical contact with Him. In fact, the man was supposed to cry out, “Leprosy, leprosy, unclean, unclean!” every time he saw someone approaching as a warning to them.

This man with leprosy asked Jesus a good question, basically asking, *“Lord are you willing to make me clean? Because believe me, I wouldn’t even be asking you if I didn’t think you could. I’ve heard of what you have done for others, I believe you have the authority to cleanse me, I know you can, but my question to you today is, “Will you?”*

**Matthew 8:3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.**

The leper coming to Jesus was, in itself, a violation of the Law of Moses, and he made a shocking request, but now Jesus reaches out and touches the leper! The Law forbade touching a leper, and according to the Law, it would have made Jesus unclean.

- Can you imagine the man’s surprise when Jesus touched him, before answering his question?
- You can almost hear the crowd gasp as Jesus touches the man.

Jesus’ heart was so moved for the man, that he touched the unclean!

**As we observe the heart of Jesus here on this earth, He seemed to go out of His way to touch the unclean and allow himself to be touched by the unclean.**

**As Jesus touched an unclean person, the person he touched always became clean!**

Jesus’ actions demonstrated that, through him, people could be restored to the power of God and could be healed of whatever was making them unclean.

### **Let’s Make It Official**

**Matthew 8:4 Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”**

Why? As hard as it would be to not tell anyone, this was in accordance with the law of Moses spelled out in Leviticus 14. The man would then have legal proof that he was once a leper and now he was completely healed adding validity to his testimony.

- But also, if the priest heard that the man was healed and gave credit to Jesus, they may out of spite deny to him his certificate or healing.

- Jesus honored the Law of Moses and began to show us what he meant when he said, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17**

### **The Healing of the Centurion’s Servant (Matthew 8:5-13)**

As Jesus reached Capernaum, the base for His Galilean ministry, a centurion met Him, asking for help for his servant, who was paralyzed and “in terrible suffering.”

**Matthew 8:5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.**

This centurion was a Gentile *officer in the Roman army* and Orthodox Jews would have considered the centurion *unclean because of his race*. Not only was he considered unclean, but the Jewish people despised him all the more because he was a symbol and a constant reminder of Roman oppression.

**Matthew 8:6-7 “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”**

**7 Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”**

The Jewish crowd probably wondered, “What?” “Why would Jesus waste his time on a Goyim, a gentile dog?” Even though the centurion was unclean, and a symbol of Roman oppression, Jesus was willing to go and heal his servant. **Again, Jesus is willing to touch the unclean.**

**Matthew 8:8-10 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. (The centurion's faith in Jesus was strong.)**

**9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”**

**10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.**

In response to the centurion's faith, Jesus told the man that his request was answered.

**Matthew 8:13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour.**

At that moment, the centurion's servant was healed! Considered Unclean? Yes. Unworthy? Yes. But healed. *The unclean was touched by the clean and became completely clean.*

### **The Healing of Simon Peter’s Mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15)**

Simon Peter had a house in Capernaum, so Jesus went there with him. Upon arriving in Peter’s home Jesus saw that Peter's mother-in-law was “lying in bed with a fever.”

**Matthew 8:14-15 When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.** Jesus healed the woman by touching her hand. She had a fever! She was more than likely contagious. She was unclean.

### **Other Healings (Matthew 8:16-17)**

That night, Jesus healed many others who were brought to Him! The news about healing spreads fast!

**Matthew 8:16-17 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.**

Jesus’ willingness to touch the unclean, even if it made him unclean, was a foreshadowing of what He ultimately came to do. As seen in verse 17 **This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”**

## Clean In Him

These miracles recorded in this chapter demonstrate Jesus' willingness to become unclean in order to make others clean. Ultimately isn't that what Jesus came to do? He, being sinless, came to take the sins of the world upon himself.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Instead of Jesus rejecting the *unclean*, the *unworthy*, and *the outcast* of the religious world, He chose to show them the *perfection that God desires by making them clean*.

This gave them a small taste of the ultimate cleansing that would later be available when Jesus took their sins upon Himself at the cross on Calvary and shed His blood to pay the price for their sins.

For those clean, but previously unclean, He gave them a sneak preview into the New Creation that they would hopefully become replacing all the unclean with clean. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" 2 Corinthians 5:17**

## **A Heart Like His**

Jesus had a heart to seek and save the lost. Jesus had a heart to reconcile unclean people to God. We see that Jesus was willing to touch the unclean in order to make them clean.

- But if we are going to have a heart like His, what does that mean for us? We can't, on our own and within ourselves, cleanse people.

By nature, all people are born with a sin nature and declared unclean in the presence of a Holy God.

As Christians, we don't have to deal with religiously binding cleanliness laws. But we still have to *deal with human brokenness*. Brokenness that causes people to feel separate from God.

Now that we are clean, we serve to make others clean.

**2 Corinthians 5:18-19 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**

We have to be willing to touch the unclean as well, in an attempt to connect them to the cleansing power of Jesus. To let the unclean know that they too can be healed, restored, and radically changed by the touch of a loving savior's hand.

**The question is, "Are we as willing as Jesus was to touch the unclean?"**

Taking the love of Jesus to an unclean world can get messy.

- We will have to touch people with *spiritual leprosy*.
- We will have to touch those who have been *rejected due to race, nationality, or the government they represent*.
- We will have to touch those who *have fever* and are *carriers of things that we don't desire*.
- We will have to touch those who are *demon-possessed, sick, and diseased*.

**Next Step: This week I will honestly answer these questions.**

- 1. What unclean things or people groups do I hesitate to touch?**
- 2. What unclean things or people groups do I deal with, but I really despise having to?**
- 3. What unclean thing or person is totally out of the question for me to touch?**

There is no greater joy and no greater victory than to see an unclean person become clean. Introducing them to Jesus who loves the unclean so much that He would touch them and make them clean.