

Yeshua Heals a M'tsora To Be Like Yeshua Means to Serve Others

We continue our study of the Christian Torah in the Gospel of Matthew. We have been ***"Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua"*** learning directly what He had to say on a variety of subjects. In this post, we begin to take a look at what it is to be like Yeshua. I've entitled this mini-series, ***"To Be Like Yeshua Means – To Serve Others."***

In chapters 8 - 9, Matthew structures his Gospel in a very definite pattern, alternating between miracle stories (grouped in threes) and discipleship training. The arrangement highlights our Lord's qualifications as Messiah by both His works and His words. **M'tsoraim** (the infected ones), Gentiles, and women were considered outcasts by many Jewish people, especially by the P'rushim. Many P'rushim would pray each morning, *"I give thanks that I am a man and not a woman, a Jew and not a Gentile, a free-man and not a slave."*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew had given a lengthy summary of the teaching of the Yeshua, and he now supplements it by a summary of Yeshua's daily work routine. Matthew is not concerned with the proper chronological order of these events. His only desire is to bring out different aspects of the Lord's life. Thus he recalls:

1. In 8:1-17, Yeshua's miracles of healing, and the secret of His ability to perform them; which we will explore this morning.
2. In chapter 8:18 through chapter 9:8, the personal trials that Yeshua incurred in His work.
3. In chapter 9:9-17 The liberty of the gospel as shown by Yeshua's treatment of the outcast, and His answer to those who insisted on fasting.
4. Finally, in 9:18-34, the completeness of Yeshua's healing power.

"After Yeshua had come down from the hill, large crowds followed Him. Then a man afflicted with tzara'at [commonly translated as leprosy] came, knelt down on front of Him and said, 'Sir, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Yeshua reached out his hand, touched Him and said, 'I am willing! Be cleansed!' And at once he was cleansed from his tzara'at. Then Yeshua said to Him, 'See that you tell no one, but as a testimony to the people, go and let the Cohen examine you, and offer the sacrifice that Moshe commanded.' ~ Matthew 8:1-4

Vayikra (Leviticus) 13:1 – 14:57) contains God's commands delivered to Moshe regarding tzara'at. The Cohen was to act as a health inspector and the priest to offer up the prescribed sacrifice should a healing take place. Nowhere does it say that the Cohen, or anyone else for that matter, could heal anyone infected with this insidious disease save for God Himself. Yeshua's miracles demonstrated the power of the kingdom of God in action.

This first miracle involved a man who had been estranged from the Jews because of the dreaded disease, tzara'at. Tzara'at, like AIDS today, was a terrifying disease because there was no known cure. In Yeshua's day, the Greek word for "tzara'at" was used for a variety of similar skin diseases, and some forms were contagious. If a person contracted the contagious type, a Cohen declared Him **tamei** or impure and was called a **m'tsora** (infected one) and banished Him from his home and city. This also excluded Him from participating in any social or religious activities. The infection forced the victim to live apart from others and to cry, *"Unclean! Unclean!"* when others approached, so they would not be defiled. The m'tsora went to live in a community with other m'tsoraim until he either got better or died. This was the only way the people knew to contain the spread of the contagious forms of tzara'at.

This man took a great risk when he ***came and knelt before*** Yeshua. The word for "knelt" can also mean "worshiped." His kneeling reveals his desperation, humility, and recognition of Yeshua's authority. His words to Yeshua reveal his faith. If his disease were to disappear, a Cohen could declare Him **tahor** (or clean), but only Yeshua could **make** Him **tahor**. The words "if you are willing" reveal the man's faith in Yeshua's authority in this matter of healing; Yeshua's ability was never in question. This man wanted to be clean - a huge request. The man wanted to become a person again, to be reunited with his family and community. He knew Yeshua could do it. He apparently had heard of Yeshua's healing power. Matthew 4:24 says, ***"Word of Him spread throughout all Syria, and people brought Him all who were ill, suffering from various diseases and pains, and those held in the power of demons, and epileptics and paralytics; and he healed them."*** The question was *would* Yeshua heal Him?

"Yeshua reached out His hand, touched Him and said, 'I am willing! Be cleansed!' And at once he

was cleansed from his tzara'at.” Yeshua’s love and power work together. Matthew revealed Yeshua’s heart of compassion. All people shunned m’tsoraim, but Yeshua ***reached out His hand and touched*** this man covered with a dreaded, contagious disease. That Yeshua’s touch precedes His pronouncement of healing indicates His sovereignty over the Jewish law not to touch m’tsoraim (Leviticus 5:3; 13:1-46; Numbers 5:2). In touching the m’tsoraim, Yeshua became “unclean.” He did not worry about becoming ritually unclean when there was a genuine need. When Yeshua answered the man, ***I am willing***, he showed His willingness and ability to meet this social outcast’s most basic need.

When Yeshua spoke the words, the m’tsora was cured ***immediately***. We do not know the stage of this man’s tzara’at - he may have already lost portions of his body to the disease. But when Yeshua spoke, the man’s health was restored completely and instantly. The man had his life back; he could return to his community, to his family, and to the synagogue.

Then Yeshua said to Him, "See that you tell no one, but as a testimony to the people, go and let the Cohen examine you, and offer the sacrifice that Moshe commanded." Yeshua healed the man, but also gave Him two warnings: First, *see that you say nothing to anyone*. The warning was an earnest and forceful admonition - words that Yeshua commanded the man to obey. But why would Yeshua ask this man not to tell anyone about his healing? Wouldn’t this have been a great marketing tool for Yeshua, bringing more people to hear His message? While we might think so, Yeshua knew better (John 2:24-25). Yeshua’s mission was to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God. He did not want the crowds descending on Him to see miracles or to benefit from His power. Such people would not be receptive to hear and to respond to the Gospel. Yeshua did not want to be a miracle worker in a sideshow; he wanted to be the Savior of their souls.

This verse and four others in Matthew (9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9) have been referred to as the ***"messianic secret,"*** meaning that Yeshua wished to keep His full messiahship hidden until after the Resurrection.

Different reasons have been given, such as Yeshua did not want to arouse political messianic expectations or that Yeshua wouldn’t accept the full acclamation until he finished His saving work on the cross. Most likely, there were several and different reasons for each situation. Here perhaps the obvious meaning is that the cleansed man would not be distracted by talking to people until he followed the law and went to the Cohen. The law required a Cohen to examine a healed m’tsora (Leviticus 14). Then the healed m’tsora was to give an offering at the temple, called the guilt offering in Leviticus 14:12.

Yeshua adhered to these laws by sending the man to the Cohen, thereby demonstrating high regard for God’s law. Yeshua wanted this man to give his story firsthand to the Cohen to prove that his tzara’at was completely gone so that he could be restored to his family and community. This would be *a testimony to them*. Some think that “them” refers to the Cohanim.

Yeshua would show the religious authorities that he was not anti-law, but the only one who could truly fulfill the law. If the Cohen declared that the healing had taken place but refused to accept the person and power of Yeshua who had done it, that Cohen would be condemned by the evidence.

On the other hand, Yeshua may have intended the testimony to be a positive one to the people who witnessed the healing. Yeshua’s meaning would be, *"Don't you proclaim it. Instead, let the Cohen's pronouncement witness for me and for the healing."* The Cohen’s words would testify to everyone that the man had recovered and that Yeshua did not condemn the law.

Most important, however, the testimony would reveal that the one who heals m’tsoraim had come. People believed that healing tzara’at was a sign of the Messiah’s arrival (see 11:5). Mark records that the man disobeyed Yeshua’s warning and “went out and began spreading the news, talking freely about it; so that Yeshua could no longer enter a town openly but stayed out in the country...” (Mark 1:45).

There are three lessons to be learned from this passage:

1. It is not enough to have heard Yeshua once; we have to follow Him. We need Him each and every day in our lives.
2. Sin is a loathsome, fatal sickness. Only the Great Physician, our Lord Yeshua can heal.
3. Come to Him and doubt Him not; He is ***"the same yesterday, and today, and forever."***

In my next post, we will continue to explore Yeshua’s healing of a Gentile.