

PHARISEES AND LEPERS

Matthew 8:1-3

By Raymond White

Why did Jesus do miracles? The simple answer “because he loved people” doesn’t do justice to the question. Maybe a better way to ask it is why did God have Jesus do miracles? The answer to that question is what the Bible says; namely:

Matthew 9:6 ...that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins

John 5:36 The works that I do bear witness of me...

John 11:42 ...that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

John 20:31 ...that ye might believe...

The Bible declares this so often that it’s not debatable: The purpose of the miracles was to declare Jesus to be who he said he was, and not merely to do kind things for people. Yes Jesus loved people, but the kindest thing he could do for people was to save their soul, and that required a conspicuous declaration. And for that reason, he did miracles — so that people who saw them, believed.

Did it always work? Did people who saw the miracles always believe? Sometimes they believed and sometimes they didn’t. Pharisees in particular had a difficult time believing.

Matthew 12:24 When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.

What an odd conclusion. They didn’t doubt the miracles, they just concocted an absurd explanation to avoid conceding anything to Jesus. Jesus had no place in their world view and was a threat to their established positions. In other words, they had too much to lose and were therefore strongly motivated to reject Jesus.

Now, lepers, on the other hand, had nothing to lose, so that freed them to believe whatever the facts demanded of them. On the social ladder, no one was lower than lepers. They were not permitted in the camp (**Numbers 5:2**) and no one was permitted to touch them (**Leviticus 5:3**). Not only did they have to endure such a terrible disease, but also a terrible life long loneliness as well. But despite the scorn and the rejection, lepers came to Jesus.

Matthew 8:1 ...great multitudes followed him :2 And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

This leper came right through the crowd. Didn’t he know that he wasn’t supposed to be there? — that everyone hated him and would shout him away? Maybe they would throw rocks at him or hit him with sticks. Didn’t he know that? Yes, he knew. But he also knew that his plight was desperate and there was only one source of help. He didn’t care what the crowd thought of him or even what the law said. He thought about only one thing: getting help from Jesus. And he got it.

Matthew 8:3 And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus touched the untouchable. When we touch uncleanness, we become unclean. But when Jesus touched uncleanness, the uncleanness, it was cleansed.

This really speaks to motivation, doesn't it? Why were the lepers so accepting of Jesus while the Pharisees to rejecting? The answer can only be it depends on what they had to gain or lose. If Jesus threatens your secure life style, the motivation is to reject. But if Jesus holds your only hope for happiness, the motivation is to accept. It is a rare person who can set aside his personal situation and assess the truth based on facts alone. We are all so motivated. The trick is to arrive at a place where we realize that there is no hope without Jesus. They we will turn to Jesus.

For selfish reasons? Well, yes, of course. I am selfish enough to want eternal life just as I am selfish enough to want to not have cancer. Selfish is a poor choice of words but I know no other. We all make decisions for our own best interest. You can call that selfish or something else. But in any case, God has our best interest at heart, and he wants us to act in our own best interest; namely, he wants us to accept Jesus as our savior for there is no other. In that regard, we are on equal footing with the lepers, without hope. Actually, so were the Pharisees; they just couldn't see it so easily though the truth was staring them in the face.

To be a bit fair to the Pharisees, there were some Pharisees who did accept Jesus. Nicodemus was one of them. They really were religiously motivated. Now, the Sadducees on the other hand, not one ever accepted Jesus. They were politically motivated.