

# Staying in **Touch**

## **Matthew 8:1-18**

Jesus has just concluded the Sermon on the Mount, leaving people marvelling at his obvious authority. Now he puts that same authority into action. But there's more to his actions that meets the eye! Radically, he is not "remote" and "separate" like the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law who maintain their "holiness" by keeping at a distance. Instead, he is very much "in touch"...

### **Read Matthew 8:1-4.**

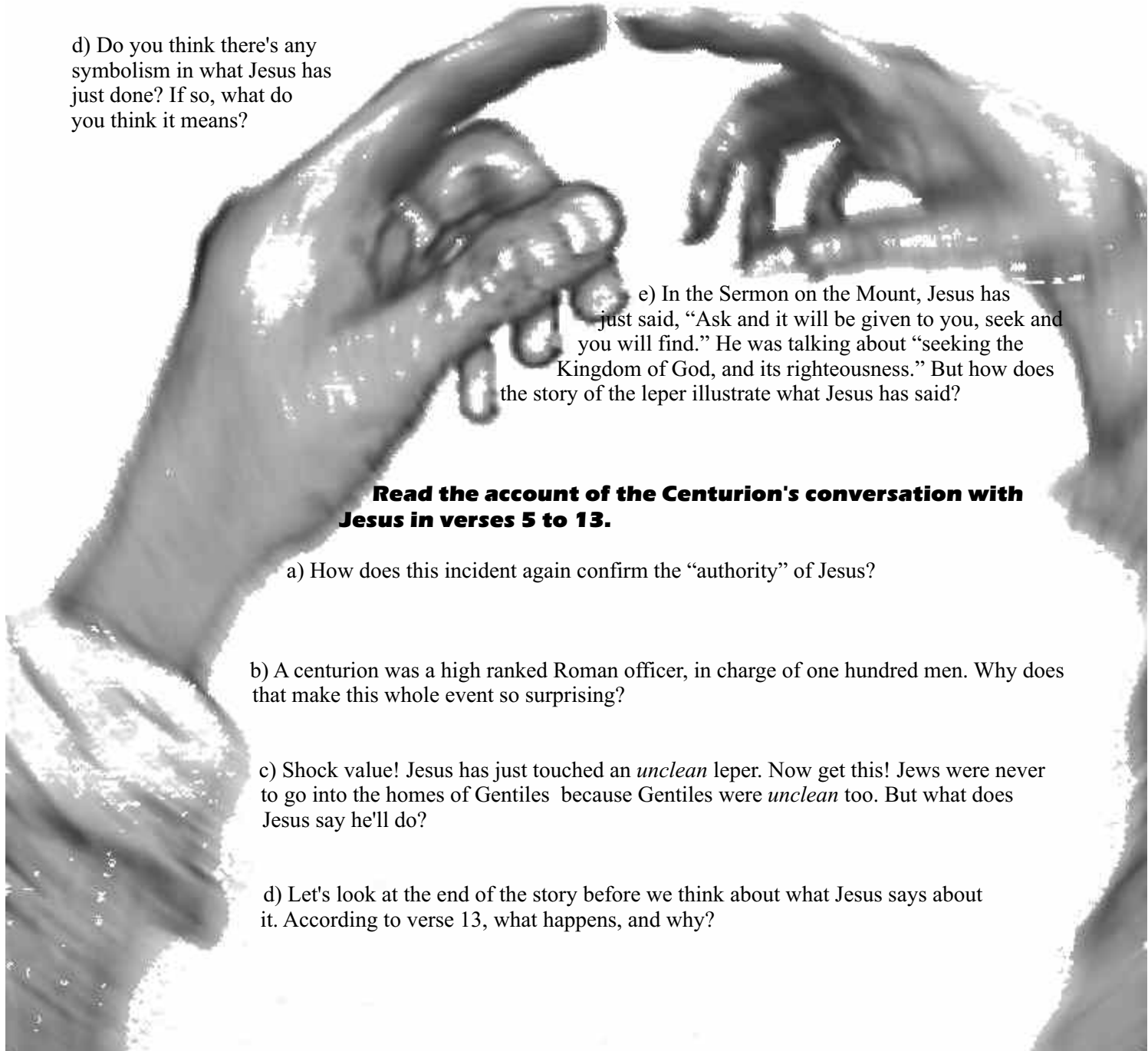
a) The leper recognises the authority of Jesus. How can you tell?

*"Leprosy" was the term used for all kinds of skin diseases, which made Israelites "ceremonially unclean." They were excluded from the temple, and from taking part in any social activities. The worst cases were confined to shanty towns outside the city and completely shunned. Lepers were certainly never to be touched. If you touched a leper, you immediately became "unclean" yourself.*

b) What is remarkable about what Jesus does? What is its effect?

c) What will the ex-leper's testimony to the priest actually demonstrate to the religious authorities?

d) Do you think there's any symbolism in what Jesus has just done? If so, what do you think it means?



e) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has just said, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find." He was talking about "seeking the Kingdom of God, and its righteousness." But how does the story of the leper illustrate what Jesus has said?

### **Read the account of the Centurion's conversation with Jesus in verses 5 to 13.**

a) How does this incident again confirm the "authority" of Jesus?

b) A centurion was a high ranked Roman officer, in charge of one hundred men. Why does that make this whole event so surprising?

c) Shock value! Jesus has just touched an *unclean* leper. Now get this! Jews were never to go into the homes of Gentiles because Gentiles were *unclean* too. But what does Jesus say he'll do?

d) Let's look at the end of the story before we think about what Jesus says about it. According to verse 13, what happens, and why?

e) Now read the words of Jesus in verses 10 to 12.

Why is Jesus so astonished? Why is this both good news and bad news?

What is the good news for US in verse 11?

What is the bad news for Israel in verse 12?

f) Think back to the theme we've seen running through the Sermon on the Mount. What was going to bring about the ultimate judgement of Israel? (Try 7:24, 26)

**Read verses 14 to 17. Again, Jesus touches (and so identifies with) the woman with a fever.**

a) How does Jesus drive out the evil spirits? (v16). Compare with verse 3, and verse 8-9. What is this demonstrating?

b) What point does Matthew tell us that he is making in telling these stories?

c) Read all of Isaiah 53. These healings are designed to bring our attention to Isaiah 53:4, and from there, the whole of the passage. In fact, Isaiah is very much in the mind of Jesus. For example...

d) Make a note of Isaiah 53:6. What is Israel like? Look ahead to Matt 9:36. What does Jesus see when he looks at Israel?

e) If Isaiah 53:4 is being fulfilled by Jesus, and verse 6 accurately describes the way Jesus sees Israel, what do verses 5 to 9 of Isaiah 53 lead us to expect will happen to Jesus?

f) What do verses 10 to 12 of Isaiah 53 lead us to anticipate?

**Read, Read, Read...**

How far can you read in Matthew's gospel in one sitting? That's the very best way to get a feel for what's happening. Why not make it a goal to read the rest of Matthew before next week. Better still, start back at chapter 1.

**Think**

The religious leaders of Israel maintained their aura of "holiness" by having nothing to do with anyone "unclean" or "undesirable." Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrates a "holiness" of compassion and mercy that's prepared to get its hands dirty. Matt 9:11-13 throws some light on this.

Which breed of "holiness" are you imitating?

