

Homiletics Analysis: Matthew 8

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Matthew 8 is a concentrated display of the authority of Jesus Christ across every sphere of human need and cosmic resistance. The chapter opens with three healing accounts — a leper (vv. 1–4), a Roman centurion’s servant (vv. 5–13), and Peter’s mother-in-law along with a crowd of diseased and demonized (vv. 14–17) — before pivoting to a discipleship exchange that exposes the cost of following Jesus (vv. 18–22). The chapter then moves to two episodes of dramatic power: the stilling of the storm (vv. 23–27) and the exorcism of two Gadarene demoniacs (vv. 28–34). These six episodes are not loosely assembled. They are arranged to demonstrate sequentially that Jesus commands disease, social exclusion, Gentile need, systemic illness, natural chaos, and the demonic realm alike. Matthew frames all of this in explicit fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4 (v. 17), tying the healing ministry to the suffering Servant who bears affliction rather than merely removing it. The discipleship interlude (vv. 18–22) is deliberately placed at the chapter’s center, interrupting the miracle sequence to insist that the One who commands wind and demon commands the total allegiance of those who follow Him.

This Text — Intent

God is calling readers to transfer their confidence entirely to Jesus — not as a helpful supplement to existing trust structures, but as the singular authority over every domain of existence that threatens human life. The intent is not primarily to inform readers that Jesus performed miracles, but to confront readers with the question the disciples ask in verse 27: “*What kind of man is this?*” That question is structurally the pivot of the chapter. Everything before it presses the evidence; everything after it confirms that even the demonic realm has already answered the question (v. 29). The reader is being pressed to answer it personally. The discipleship interlude makes clear that the answer to this question cannot be merely intellectual — it demands concrete, costly reorientation of life. The chapter intends to produce not mere amazement but *following* — the same response Matthew himself gave when Jesus said, “Follow me” (9:9).

Subject Sentence: Jesus demonstrates total authority over disease, nature, and the demonic — and calls for total allegiance in return.

Primary Claim: The Christ who commands wind, demon, disease, and death will accept nothing less than everything from those who claim to follow Him — and gives everything to those who do.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Miracles as Proof of Messiahship vs. Miracles as Compassion

Some traditions (particularly revivalist and charismatic) read the healing accounts primarily through the lens of divine compassion — Jesus heals because He is moved with pity, and the church is called to pursue the same healing ministry today. This reading is not wrong in what it affirms: Matthew 8:3 does record that Jesus was “moved with compassion” (though Matthew uses *ēthelen*, willing, not the pity-term), and Isaiah 53:4 grounds the healings in the Servant’s solidarity with human suffering. However, this reading is *qualified* when it becomes the organizing category, because it causes the reader to miss Matthew’s primary interest. Matthew is not constructing a theology of compassion — he is constructing a Christological argument. The healings are arranged as *evidence* for a verdict: Jesus is the Messianic King with authority over every sphere. The compassion is real; it is not, however, the claim.

The Centurion’s Faith and “Universalism Lite”

Some interpreters read the centurion episode (vv. 5–13) as an endorsement of implicit faith among the nations — a kind of pre-Christian saving faith accessible apart from specific knowledge of Christ. This reading must be *refuted*. The centurion’s faith is explicitly faith *in Jesus* — he approaches Jesus directly, addresses Him as “Lord” (kyrie), and demonstrates extraordinary confidence in Jesus’ specific authority. The remarkable point Matthew makes is not that a Gentile had generic piety, but that a Gentile recognized the nature of Christ’s authority better than Israel had (v. 10). The statement “not even in Israel have I found such faith” is a rebuke to Israel’s unbelief, not a commendation of Gentile religiosity. The Reformed reading holds: this episode is Christological (what kind of authority does Jesus have?) and missiological (the covenant is opening to the nations through explicit faith in Israel’s Messiah), not a template for inclusivism.

The Discipleship Interlude — Cost vs. Radical Grace

Wesleyan and discipleship-tradition interpreters (particularly Dallas Willard’s stream) read verses 18–22 as primarily about the cost of discipleship — Jesus is weeding out half-hearted followers and calling to a demanding standard of self-denial. This reading *partially holds*: there is genuine confrontation of superficial commitment. However, the Reformed reading adds a dimension this approach misses: the context of the interlude *between miracles* means that the one demanding total allegiance is the same one who just healed a leper and stilled a storm. The cost of discipleship is intelligible only in light of *who* is asking. Discipleship in Matthew 8 is not raw self-denial — it is the reasonable response of

someone who has correctly answered “What kind of man is this?” The Wesleyan emphasis on human decision and response is appropriate; where it overreaches is in treating the demand as standing independent of its Christological grounding.

The Gadarene Exorcism and Spiritual Warfare Frameworks

Charismatic and Pentecostal interpreters sometimes use verses 28–34 as a primary warrant for strategic-level spiritual warfare — territorial spirits, binding and loosing, regional demonic control. This reading must be *refuted* at the exegetical level. The text does not present this exorcism as a model for human spiritual warfare at all. It presents it as a *demonstration of Christ’s unilateral authority*. The demons’ recognition of Jesus (“Son of God... before the time,” v. 29) is Matthean Christology, not a template for exorcistic practice. The townspeople’s request that Jesus leave (v. 34) is the chapter’s deepest irony — those who witnessed the most dramatic display of authority in the chapter are the ones who reject Him. The episode ends not with a spiritual warfare methodology but with a discipleship question: when you see what Jesus can do, do you want Him in your town?

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 53:4** — Matthew explicitly cites this in verse 17: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” The healings are not merely demonstrations of power but fulfillments of the Servant’s burden-bearing. This grounds the miracles Christologically and redemptive-historically — Jesus heals because He will ultimately bear.
- **Psalms 107:23–30** — “He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.” The Psalm attributes command over wind and wave to YHWH alone. Matthew’s storm-stilling episode (vv. 23–27) is a Christological claim of the highest order — Jesus does what the Psalms say only God does.
- **Daniel 7:13–14** — The Son of Man receives dominion over all things. Matthew’s repeated use of the Son of Man title (including in the discipleship interlude, v. 20) places Jesus within this framework: the authority displayed in chapter 8 belongs to the one to whom all authority has been given.
- **Genesis 1:1–2:3** — God’s authority over creation by word alone stands behind the storm-stilling. When Jesus commands the wind and it obeys, Matthew is invoking creation-level sovereignty. The disciples’ question, “What kind of man is this?” has a Genesis-level answer.
- **Romans 10:11–13** — “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The centurion’s faith episode anticipates the Pauline mission: the covenant promise opens to every nation through explicit trust in Israel’s Lord. This passage is the theological elaboration of what Matthew 8:10–11 inaugurates.

Aim: To confront the reader with the full weight of Jesus’ authority over every sphere of existence, so that the question “What kind of man is this?” produces not mere amazement but the costly, confident allegiance of genuine discipleship.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
8:1	Jesus descends from the mountain; large crowds follow	Connects to Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7); authority in word now matched by authority in deed
8:2–4	Leper approaches, worships, requests healing; Jesus touches him, heals, commands silence and priestly verification	Physical touch of the untouchable; Jesus contracts no impurity — He transmits purity; Leviticus 13–14 priestly protocol invoked
8:5–9	Centurion approaches, asks healing for paralyzed servant; Jesus offers to come; centurion refuses, cites his own authority structure as analogy	Roman military man understands delegated authority better than Israel; “only say the word” is remarkable faith statement
8:10–12	Jesus marvels; declares centurion’s faith surpasses all Israel; predicts Gentile inclusion and Jewish exclusion in the kingdom	Missional expansion signaled; shocking reversal for Matthew’s Jewish audience
8:13	Jesus heals the servant at a distance; “at that very moment”	Word alone suffices; no physical contact, no proximity required
8:14–15	Peter’s mother-in-law lies ill with fever; Jesus touches her hand; fever leaves; she serves them	Domestic sphere included; healing issues in service/ministry (<i>diēkonei</i>)
8:16–17	Evening; crowd of demonized and sick brought; Jesus heals all by word, casts out spirits by	Matthew ties healing to the Servant’s suffering; “all” — no case exceeds His authority

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	word; fulfillment citation from Isaiah 53:4	
8:18	Jesus orders departure to the other side	Transition; the Gentile territory of the Gadarenes lies across the sea
8:19–20	Scribe volunteers to follow wherever Jesus goes; Jesus warns: Son of Man has no permanent home	Cost of following the homeless Messiah; Son of Man title with Daniel overtones
8:21–22	Another disciple requests permission to first bury his father; Jesus commands immediate following	Radical priority demand; “let the dead bury their own dead” — discipleship supersedes even sacred familial obligations
8:23–25	Jesus boards boat; falls asleep; violent storm; disciples cry out in fear, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!”	Disciples address Jesus as Lord (<i>kyrie</i>); prayer posture even in panic
8:26	Jesus rebukes their little faith; rebukes wind and waves; great calm	Rebuke precedes miracle — faith failure noted before power displayed
8:27	Disciples marvel: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”	The chapter’s pivotal question; chapter’s Christological summit
8:28	Arrival at Gadarene territory; two demoniacs emerge from tombs — violent, isolating, untouchable	Tombs = unclean; violence = uncontrollable — every social and spiritual boundary violated
8:29	Demons address Jesus: “Son of God! What do you want with us? Have you come to torment us before the appointed time?”	Demons know exactly who Jesus is; they possess better Christology than the crowds; “before the time” — eschatological awareness
8:30–32	Demons request permission to enter pigs; Jesus grants it; herd rushes into sea and drowns	Jesus grants the request — He is in control even of demonic petitions; destruction of the herd follows

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
8:33–34	Herdsmen flee, report to city; whole town comes out, sees Jesus, begs Him to leave	Deepest irony of the chapter: witnesses to the greatest display of authority reject the one who displayed it

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	8:1–4	The Authority to Cleanse What Is Untouchable
2	8:5–13	The Authority That Transcends Every Boundary — Including Israel’s
3	8:14–17	The Authority That Enters Every House and Fulfills Every Promise
4	8:18–22	The Authority That Demands Total Allegiance
5	8:23–27	The Authority Over Creation Itself
6	8:28–34	The Authority Over the Demonic Realm — and the Freedom to Reject It

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus demonstrates total authority over disease, nature, and the demonic — and calls for total allegiance in return.

Primary Claim: The Christ who commands wind, demon, disease, and death will accept nothing less than everything from those who claim to follow Him — and gives everything to those who do.

Applications (Five)

1. Stop treating Jesus as one resource among many. (*Mind/Belief*) The chapter’s accumulative structure — leper, centurion, fever, storm, demons — is designed to exhaust every category of threat before the reader is done. Matthew is not giving a collection of

helpful stories; he is closing every escape hatch. You do not need to augment Jesus with your own competence, your financial security, your relational network, or your therapeutic framework. Every domain that threatens your life is already under His command. The practical question is whether your actual decision-making — not your Sunday declarations — reflects this. When the storm comes, who do you actually cry to first?

2. Let the question of verse 27 become your most urgent question. (*Affections/Worship*)

“What kind of man is this?” is not a historical curiosity — it is the chapter’s deliberate crisis point. Matthew has arranged six episodes of escalating authority for one purpose: to press this question into you with enough force that you cannot answer it abstractly. The disciples who asked it were in a boat with water coming in. The question hit them at the point of maximum vulnerability. Where is your maximum vulnerability — the place where you are most afraid, most out of control, most certain of your own insufficiency? That is where Matthew wants you to ask this question. Let it produce not admiration but worship.

3. Examine what you are putting ahead of Jesus before you will follow. (*Will/Behavior*)

The discipleship interlude in verses 18–22 is not a denunciation of family loyalty or professional ambition — it is an exposure of the conditions we quietly attach to following Christ. The man in verse 21 had a legitimate, sacred obligation (burial of a father was among the highest duties in Jewish culture), and Jesus still said: not even this. What is your version of “let me first”? Not the obvious sins — the respectable delays. The career milestone you are waiting to clear. The relationship you are waiting to stabilize. The financial threshold you are waiting to reach. The chapter will not let you call these wise prudence. It calls them a failure to answer the question of verse 27 correctly.

4. Receive the specific assurance that your case is not beyond Him.

(*Affections/Worship*) The arrangement of healings in Matthew 8 is also an arrangement of inclusion: a Jewish outcast (the leper), a Gentile (the centurion), a woman (Peter’s mother-in-law), a crowd, two violent madmen. No demographic is left outside the scope of His authority. The chapter is addressing the reader who fears that their situation — their particular shame, their specific estrangement, their category of desperation — might be the exception. It is not. Matthew’s “he healed all” in verse 16 is the most inclusive phrase in the chapter. Receive it. Your case is not the one that exceeds His authority.

5. Take the townspeople of Gadara as a warning, not merely a curiosity. (*Mind/Belief*)

Verse 34 is the chapter’s most unsettling verse. People who witnessed the most dramatic exorcism in the gospel narrative — two men freed from years of violent, isolating demonization — asked Jesus to leave. They preferred their manageable world, even with its demoniacs, to the disruptive presence of the Son of God. This is not simply ancient irony. It is a category of response to which you are susceptible. Every time Jesus’ lordship threatens something you have organized your life around — a comfort, a control structure, a preferred version of yourself — you face the Gadarene choice. The chapter closes with rejection, not triumph, as a warning: knowing what Jesus can do is not the same as wanting Him present.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Matthew 8 is the New Testament's most concentrated single-chapter demonstration of the Lordship of Christ over the entire created order. The chapter teaches that Jesus exercises authority not merely as a commissioned agent (as the prophets did) but as one in whom the authority of YHWH Himself is personally present — the one who stills seas (Psalm 107), fulfills the Servant's burden-bearing (Isaiah 53), and receives the demons' confession that He is the Son of God (v. 29). The healings teach that no sphere of human affliction — physical disease, social exclusion, ethnic boundary, domestic illness, systemic suffering, natural violence, or demonic oppression — lies outside His sovereign reach. The discipleship interlude teaches that this authority is not merely observable but properly responded to only through total, undivided allegiance. The chapter's theology is ultimately Christological in the deepest sense: the question is not primarily "what can Jesus do?" but "who is Jesus?" — and the answer generates not spectators but followers.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Matthew 8 is a foundational text for the Reformed conviction that the lordship of Christ is not a domain alongside other domains but the comprehensive frame within which all of created reality is properly understood. The chapter resists every form of partial Christology — Jesus as healer, teacher, moral exemplar, or spiritual guide — by insisting that He commands every realm by His word alone. This is creation-order sovereignty enacted in the Son of Man, anticipating the post-resurrection declaration that "all authority in heaven and on earth" has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). The centurion episode carries particular Reformed significance: it enacts the expansion of the covenant community beyond ethnic Israel on the explicit basis of faith in Israel's Messiah alone — a preview of the Gentile mission and a demonstration that justification (acceptance before God) is by faith from first to last. The Matthew 8:17 citation of Isaiah 53:4 is also exegetically significant for Reformed soteriology: Matthew applies the Servant's burden-bearing to the healing ministry, anchoring the incarnation's physicality within the redemptive-historical framework of substitutionary suffering. Christ heals because He ultimately bears.

Main Takeaway

The Christ who put His hand on the leper, healed a Gentile's servant from a distance, silenced a storm with a word, and made two violent demoniacs into human beings again is the same Christ who looks at you in your particular crisis and asks whether you will let Him cross your threshold or ask Him to leave. He has authority over everything in your life that

terrifies you. What He does not have — what He will not take by force — is your trust. Matthew 8 is an extended argument for giving it to Him.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the miracle accounts as isolated anecdotes rather than a cumulative argument.** The most common homiletical failure in Matthew 8 is preaching one episode (the storm-stilling, the centurion) as a standalone text, divorced from the chapter's accumulative structure. Matthew is building a case. The force of "What kind of man is this?" (v. 27) depends on the reader having witnessed five prior episodes of escalating authority. Preach the chapter as a structured argument, not a collection of vignettes. If you preach a single episode, tell the congregation where it sits in that argument.
- **Reducing the applications to a healing theology or a faith-formula.** Charismatic and Word of Faith traditions sometimes use Matthew 8 (particularly the centurion's "only say the word" and the "he healed all") to construct a theology of guaranteed physical healing for believers who exercise sufficient faith. The text does not support this. The healings in Matthew 8 are Christological demonstrations for Israel (and the reader), not a repeatable formula or a covenant entitlement. The centurion's faith is extraordinary precisely because it is unusual — Matthew does not present it as the expected norm. To turn it into a faith-formula is to import a framework the text actively resists.
- **Preaching the discipleship interlude (vv. 18–22) as moralism.** The two discipleship exchanges are sometimes preached as raw ethical demands — "stop making excuses and commit to Jesus." This misses the Christological grounding. The demand for total allegiance is intelligible only because of who is making it. The "let the dead bury their own dead" statement is not a general principle about priorities — it is a specific call issued by the one who just healed the dead-in-all-but-name and who will shortly raise the actually dead. Preach the demand in light of the authority. Otherwise you produce guilt, not discipleship.
- **Sentimentalizing the storm-stilling as a comfort passage without confronting the rebuke.** Matthew 8:26 opens with Jesus rebuking the disciples for little faith *before* stilling the storm. Many expositors move quickly past the rebuke to the miracle and use the episode as a comfort text ("Jesus is with you in your storms"). This is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The text offers comfort only on the other side of a Christological confrontation: you panicked because you had not yet answered the question of verse 27. The comfort flows from the answer to that question, not from the mere fact of Jesus' presence in the boat.
- **Missing the Gadarene rejection as the chapter's deliberate closing note.** Matthew ends the chapter with the townspeople asking Jesus to leave. This is not a

narrative curiosity — it is a warning to the reader. Expositors sometimes rush past verse 34 to get to the more comfortable material in chapter 9. But the chapter ends in rejection by design. The people most dramatically confronted with the evidence are the ones who refuse to follow. This is the chapter's final discipleship test, posed to the reader: having seen everything Matthew 8 has shown you, what do you do with Him?

- **Underreading the Isaiah 53:4 citation in verse 17.** Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4 is often dismissed as a loose application — Matthew is simply finding a prophecy to attach to the healings. But the citation is exegetically load-bearing. It grounds the healing ministry within the Servant's substitutionary framework: Jesus heals by bearing. This is not merely parallel; it anticipates the cross. If the healings in Matthew 8 are already fulfillments of Isaiah 53, then the healing ministry and the atoning death are not separate tracks of Jesus' work — they are one redemptive movement. To preach Matthew 8 without verse 17 is to lose the theological center of the chapter's miracle accounts.