

**+ Matthew 8:1-13 + Christ Revealed Through Mighty Mercy +  
+ 4th Sunday after Epiphany + 31 January 2016 +**

What do you look for in a savior? Now there are plenty of people out there who would say they don't need a savior, but the truth is, everyone is looking for a savior of some kind. A savior from what? A savior from sickness whether temporary or chronic or terminal. A savior from troubles in their life, in their family's life, in their marriage. A savior from problems with their health, with their weight or hair loss, with their grief, with their hurt, with their loneliness. A savior from financial debt. A savior from attitudes and worldviews and political leanings different from their own. A savior from guilt, from despair, from doubt, from death. You name the problem and people like you and me are seeking a savior from it.

So what do you look for in a savior? The quick and easy temptation is to seek a savior who will take away all your problems and ease all your troubles, who will fill all your needs and answer all your questions, who will improve your situation and heal all your relationships and make you forget everything bad or sad in your life, who will make life easier and more comfortable for you. Everyone, at some point, chases after some kind of a savior. That's why so many are looking everywhere and chasing after every fleeting sales pitch hoping to find a savior who will do exactly that.

Some follow preachers who promise that if you just believe enough, you will get what you desire most. Others follow after the cold logic of science and its empty promises of a clean, utopian future. Many put their hopes in electing the right president or congress or governor or town board with the hope that they will somehow usher in a golden age where no one disagrees because they all side with me. Many look for a savior in sports letting the distraction of entertainment numb the pain of real life for a few hours every week. All of us are tempted to look for a savior who will allow us to bend his power to our fickle will—to do what we want when we want it and who won't object if your will or mine is really foolish.

Even for a Christian, there's a real temptation to seek a savior that you really don't find in Scripture. "Why doesn't Jesus put his power on display and prove to all the skeptics and enemies of Christianity that he really is God almighty? Surely a few plagues here or there or parting Lake Ontario would make them believe! Why doesn't he make life easier for Christians than that of unbelievers? Surely that would attract them to our church! Why doesn't Jesus just wipe away all the unbelievers, especially the mean ones and the militant ones? Why doesn't Jesus just change everyone's hearts and force everyone to become a Christian? After all, life would be so much easier if our world was populated only with believers!"

But Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't usually put his power on display. In fact, whenever he has, it only fills people with fear. He doesn't make life easier for Christians. You could even say that life for a Christian is harder! Jesus doesn't wipe out all the unbelievers and he doesn't force people to believe in him. There's a reason he doesn't do any of that.

You see, Jesus Christ is a Savior unlike any of those saviors out there who have no real, lasting ability to save. There is a quality, a characteristic that he has that no earthly savior possesses. It's not his sheer power. As true God, he is almighty, all-powerful, but since our first parents Adam and Eve fell into sin, all that power only terrifies and destroys. It's not making life easier for people. Read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you'll see pretty quickly that even though he helps countless people, making their life easier is neither his purpose nor his goal. It's not even the use of force to either rescue his people or change the hearts of others. No, Christ reveals himself as our Savior through **mighty mercy**.

Back in Jesus' day, people were looking for a savior just like today. Many were looking for a savior to deliver them from the oppression of the hated Romans. Many were looking for someone to save them from all their problems and troubles and needs, while others sought rescue for themselves or loved ones from disease and illness and even demon possession. Still others were looking for the promised Savior to come. So when Jesus appeared on the scene healing people of their illnesses, casting out demons, and teaching with an authority unlike that of any of the other rabbis or religious teachers, crowds flocked to him. People saw Jesus as a savior who could help and rescue them from anything.

One day as Jesus descended from a mountain where he had been teaching, a man with leprosy approached him. An advanced stage of that devastating disease covered his entire body. On the outside it was a terrible skin disease, but on the inside he was losing the sensation of pain so that he didn't notice when he injured himself. People with leprosy and other contagious skin diseases were kept away from the community and forced to live far away from the healthy so their deadly disease wouldn't spread. This man had lived in isolation

away from friends and family for who knows how long enduring what was basically living death and he was getting desperate.

He really had no reason for hope until he heard about Jesus. We don't know how or from whom, but someone somewhere along the way had told this dying man about a savior who could rescue him from his dreadful disease. Yet someone told him more about this Jesus—that he was more than just a miracle worker. He heard about Christ's **mighty mercy**—about the powerful compassion of this Jesus.

So he cast all concern aside and approached Jesus. Everyone in the crowd around Jesus jumped back in horror. Lepers didn't do that. They warned people of their presence from a distance, but this man didn't hold back. He fell down before Jesus and offered a desperate, yet confident plea. **“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”** Down in the dust, the man knew that Jesus had the power to heal him, but he was willing to continue enduring that living death if it was Jesus' will. He trusted in Christ's **mighty mercy**.

Now you'd expect Jesus to be concerned for his own safety and step back or even shout a quick “No” before fleeing in the other direction, but Jesus' doesn't. In fact, he does the very opposite. Rather than flinch and flee, **“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.”** Technically, that action would make Jesus “unclean” and unable to offer sacrifices at the temple, but you can see Christ's **mighty mercy** in that gentle touch—powerful compassion that could respond to the man's faith-filled plea with loving action. **“I am willing...Be clean!”** The gospel writer Matthew tells us, **“Immediately [the man] was cured of his leprosy.”** Jesus then commanded this healed believer to carry out God's instructions about proving his cleanliness—appear before the chief priests and offer the required sacrifices. For this leper and the crowds looking on, Christ had revealed himself as the Savior through his **mighty mercy**.

Sometime later, Jesus came to Capernaum, the town that served as his base of operations. As he entered the town, a group of Jewish elders rushed up to him begging for help. They had been sent by a local Roman centurion to ask Jesus to heal a servant whom he **“valued highly.”** This servant was **“paralyzed and in terrible suffering” “and about to die.”** (Luke 7:2)

That was a pretty unusual request. Foreigners didn't usually come to Jesus for help. Besides he was a Roman centurion. They were among the best and bravest soldiers in the Roman Empire. They stood out in their culture, admired by neighbors and feared by enemies. You'd expect the man to be a hardened warrior, cynical and skeptical, trusting no one, but this man had a reputation for being kind and concerned about his neighbors and his servants. On top of all that, someone somewhere along the way had told this centurion about a savior who could rescue his beloved servant. Yet someone told him more about this Jesus—that he was more than just a miracle worker. He heard about Christ's **mighty mercy**. So he sent the leaders to ask for Jesus' healing help because he trusted in Christ's **mighty mercy**.

Now Jews didn't typically go to the homes of non-Jews. In fact, some said you could become “unclean” for the temple sacrifices if you entered a Gentile home. Rather than do what was easy, Jesus told the delegation, **“I will go and heal him.”** You can see Christ's **mighty mercy** in that unquestioning willingness to go and heal the Gentile servant of a Roman officer.

Yet the centurion sent a reply to Jesus, **“Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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.”** Jesus was joyfully astonished! **“I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”** The centurion recognized that as a sinful human being, he wasn't worthy to even stand in Jesus' presence. Yet by faith, the centurion knew that Jesus only had to speak the word. As a centurion, he demanded and received instant and unquestioned obedience.

He was anxious to apply that same unquestioning confidence to the spoken word of Jesus. He completely trusted that the sickness would obey Christ's command. He was fully persuaded that Jesus had the power to do what he had promised, and the Holy Spirit through the Word of God had made him bold to come to Jesus for healing. With joy, Jesus said, **“Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.”** And the servant was healed immediately. For that Roman centurion and the crowds looking on, Christ had revealed himself as the Savior through his **mighty mercy**.

So what do you look for in a savior? Power? Help? A fast lane to an easier life or do you look for the Savior revealed through **mighty mercy**? The truth is, you and I can search everywhere for a savior, but the only real Savior is Jesus. As you look back on your life, you can see how desperately you've needed that kind of a

Savior and his **mighty mercy**. No, he won't pay all your bills. He doesn't promise to heal all your diseases or numb the pain you feel, but in his powerful compassion, he saves you with **mighty mercy**.

Jesus removes your guilt with an unquestioning willingness to take that tremendous burden of your guilt on his own shoulders and leaves it all for you on the cross. He heals your hurt and your grief and your pain with the gentle comfort that only he who healed lepers and paralytics and raised the dead can give. Christ rejoices because someone somewhere along the way told you about a real savior—and not just some miracle worker, but about his **mighty mercy**. He rejoices when you listen to his Word and his Holy Spirit works rock-solid faith in your once-dead heart. Christ rejoices to see what his **mighty mercy** has done and continues to do for you.

My friends, you don't have to look for a savior anymore. He found you and he loves you and has revealed this undeniable truth to you and me. Jesus Christ is your Savior and mine through his **mighty mercy**. Amen.