

Surprising faith

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.
Matthew 8:2-3

Matthew's account, as well as those of Mark and Luke, of this leper gives no indication of where the leper was before this. Since it is the first incident that he records upon Jesus descending from the mountain (v. 1), it is not improbable that the leper had heard at least some of the teaching, albeit from somewhat afar off due to the stigma and related rules of his disease. Another detail that Matthew provides is that great multitudes were following Jesus at this point after the Sermon on the Mount. In that case, it is quite surprising that a leper in that day would come close enough to Jesus for this interchange to take place, in addition to probably having to make his way through the multitude. The boldness of his entrance was accentuated as he took a humble position of worship, which we learn from the other writers evidently began with kneeling and ended with falling on his face before Jesus.

Yet the boldness of his entrance was outdone by the strength of his threefold confession. First, from his position of worship he calls Jesus "Lord," indicating that he understood that this man that he worshipped was more than just a man, and before anything else deserved any and all respect and awe that could be mustered. Was this perhaps stimulated or confirmed by the authority with which He had spoken? The leper also unequivocally states that Jesus can make him clean. This confession of the societal outcast moved past the astonishment of the multitude and boldly confirmed complete faith in Jesus' authority and ability to cleanse him from his incurable disease. His third confession, in between these two, reveals his understanding that Jesus also had the authority of prerogative to cleanse him or not. No doubt the crowd witnessing the Sermon and then this event was once again surprised at the bold faith of this man, in his presence, profession, and willing trust in Jesus' sovereignty.

They surely experienced additional surprise when Jesus, moved with compassion according to Mark's account, simply reached out and touched the physically and ceremonially unclean man, against the societal boundaries, and replied, "I will; be thou clean." To see this man immediately cleansed, not just in the process of recovery, such that he could be sent to the priest for final pronouncement of the fact, should have been the final surprise for the crowd, in addition to an attestation of the validity of this man's faith in the person and authority of Jesus the Son of God. Should it be any less for us today?