

Sunday, 28-Jun-2015

Bethel Christian Fellowship, Fair Lawn, NJ

Sermon: Matt. 9:27-34: The Blind will See and the Dumb will Speak

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This is my final sermon in a series beginning back in 2006 covering Matthew chapters 8 and 9.

Let me remind you of what we have seen in chapters 8 and 9. These chapters are primarily devoted to describing great works of power performed by Jesus:

- First, Matthew shows Jesus having mercy on an outcast from Israel, a leper, by cleansing him (8:1-4)
- Next, he heals the servant of a centurion who demonstrated great faith (8:5-13)
- He heals the fever of Peter's mother-in-law and drives out evil spirits from many who were demon-possessed (8:14-17)
- Showing his power over nature itself, he calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee (8:23-27)
- He cures two demon-possessed men by casting the demons into a herd of pigs (8:28-34)
- He heals a paralyzed man, telling him, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (9:1-8)
- Finally, Jesus heals a woman subject to bleeding and then raises the daughter of a synagogue ruler from the dead (9:18-26)

That is a lot of miracles! Which leads me to ask myself -- do I actually listen when Matthew describes a miracle? Or does the narrative just sort of slither over the top of my brain?

I'm not telling you anything you don't know already when I say our society thinks talking about the miracles of Jesus is laughable and even downright silly. The cultured despisers of religion assume that it is impossible for there to be such a thing as a miracle.

Did you notice that I used the word "assume" in that last sentence? This is an *assumption*. But it is so deeply rooted in what people say and believe that even you and

I, people who read our Bibles and who listen to the word of God being preached faithfully Sunday by Sunday, get infected with this virus of disbelief.

So that is my challenge to us this morning. Matthew is taking a lot of trouble to tell us about Jesus, and the way he does this is by showing us some of the amazing, wonderful things which Jesus did! Let's listen to Matthew. Let's find out what he is trying to tell us.

So I preach to you this morning that when our eyes are opened by the power of Jesus, we see that he is *the* Messiah, *our* Messiah. This means that he is the Son of God and the Savior not just of Israel, but of the world, and, in particular, of you and me.

And when our mouths are opened by the power of Jesus, we are compelled to proclaim the good news about what we have heard.

Our passage begins with two blind men who followed Jesus, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

They followed him indoors, away from the crowd, and Jesus asked them, "do you believe that I am able to do this?"

Why did he ask that? People had reported that Jesus had cast out demons, and had healed the sick and paralyzed, and had calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee with a word. So when these two blind men called him the Son of David, it suggests that they thought he might have the power expected from the promised Messiah

But Jesus wanted more from them than mere head knowledge. After all, on Palm Sunday crowds would hail him as the Messiah and on Friday would cry out "crucify him!"

So he asked the two blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

They did -- for when he said "according to your faith let it be done to you," their sight was restored.

Do you remember the woman with the hemorrhage for twelve years, the one who said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed"? (9:21) Jesus turned to her and said, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you."

And so it is here: as with her, so with them, their faith has made them well.

I seriously doubt whether this means what the faith healers claim it means, that is, that if only we somehow believe hard enough, all our diseases and sicknesses will be healed. That is obvious nonsense, because if it were true, there wouldn't be so many reference in the New Testament to the illnesses and afflictions and martyrdoms and deaths of the saints.

But this is a call for each of us to ask ourselves whether we have more than head knowledge. Yes, I read my Bible. Yes, I *say* I trust Jesus, that I have faith in him, that he is my salvation, and I cannot work my own way to salvation. I *say* this. But do I chase after the glitter of the world? Or does my life show my faith? Do I rest on him, receive him, trust in him and in him alone?

The second miracle in our passage this morning involves a demon possessed man who could not talk. One thing we should keep in mind is that the Greek word translated "could not talk" or "mute" (*kophos*) actually can mean both "mute," "could not talk," and "deaf," "could not hear." In our passage today, the text seems to emphasize that he couldn't talk, because it goes on to say that after Jesus healed him, the man spoke. But I think it is probable that Matthew wants us to keep both in mind: when we cannot hear, then we cannot speak.

There is a wonderful prophecy about the redeeming work of God in Isaiah chapter 35. When the Lord comes to save his people, Isaiah prophesies, this is what will happen:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy. [Isaiah 35:5-6a.]

Matthew is showing us that when Jesus showed his power, what Isaiah had looked ahead and seen was fulfilled. The blind! The deaf! The mute! Here they are, in our passage today! The two blind men have come to faith; now they see. The demon-possessed man has been set free, so now he can shout for joy. How about you? Are you leaping like a deer? For when we are brought to Jesus, we are set free from our own demons, whatever they are.

What are your demons? I'm old enough and have seen enough of life to be pretty sure each one of us has problems that can be crippling, regrets which are so deep that they haunt our midnight hours.

But when you trust in Jesus, then, suddenly, you realize that you had been blind before, but now you can see! Before you were *kophos*, you were deaf. But now your ears are opened so that you can hear the truth! You are no longer mute! You can speak the truth, the Good News about Jesus, yourself!

Certainly the crowds who saw all this happen were amazed.

But they should have been more than just amazed. Matthew has not told us about these great and powerful works just so that we can be "amazed," so we can say, "Wow, did you ever see something like that?" He is making a much bigger point.

One good way to get at the point Matthew is making is to look ahead a couple of chapters, to Matt. 11:1-6:

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

2 When John [John the Baptist], who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

You will recall that when John the Baptist was born, his father, Zechariah, was given a spirit of prophecy, and foretold that John would be the one to prepare the people to receive their Messiah:

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins [Luke 1:76-77.]

When he grew up, John preached to Israel, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1). He was present at the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove and a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). But some time later, John had been thrown into prison, and was languishing there. Jesus had done great deeds, but, contrary to the expectations of many in Israel, had not set himself up as a conquering king to destroy Rome. So John, in prison, wondered -- did I understand correctly? Is this Jesus really the Messiah I thought he was?

How did Jesus respond to John’s question? He told John’s disciples: “Report to John what you hear and see.”

Here are the events which Jesus told them they should report to John:

The blind receive sight. Wait! This is exactly what Matthew showed us in today’s passage! Yes, the blind do receive sight!

The lame walk. A paralyzed man was brought to Jesus lying on a mat, and left walking.

Those who have leprosy are cleansed. Jesus cleansed a leper who came to him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

The deaf hear. Again, if we take *kophos* to mean both dumb and deaf, as I think Matthew intended, then this too is found in today’s text.

The dead are raised. The synagogue leader came to Jesus saying, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.”

And finally, the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Everything Matthew has told us about Jesus has been good news, but especially his preaching in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).

So what is the point which Matthew is making in these chapters, chapters 8 and 9? The Big Point is -- Jesus really is the awaited Messiah. Not only is Jesus John the Baptist’s Messiah, not only is he Israel’s Messiah, but also he is your Messiah, he is my Messiah. He is the anointed one, the king, the prophet who is the way to God and is God, the one who takes away my sin and your sin.

Should we just be amazed, as the crowds were amazed? Or does this call for something more than just being amazed? Doesn't it call for wonder, and worship, and thankfulness?

So the crowds were amazed -- but that does not mean that all of them understood that the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled before their own eyes. For there is a tragic verse at the end of our passage today. "But the Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons'" (v. 34).

It is not my topic today, so I'm not going to spend any time on this, but the Bible is clear that there are non-physical spiritual powers that have only evil intentions, who desire to thwart God.

As if that were possible.

I suspect most of us have come across situations where we have had some interaction with a person which seemed unnatural. We have the phrase, "they acted as if they were possessed," and sometimes we are almost certain we see this happening.

But, as Matthew has shown repeatedly in chapters 8 and 9, Jesus has complete power over the spiritual world (as he does over the physical world, over illness and disease, and even over death itself).

So for the Pharisees to have seen repeated demonstrations of the power of Jesus, and yet conclude that he is under the influence of Satan, shows willful blindness on their part. They don't want to see -- they refuse to see -- and so, in the end, they *can't* see.

Sadly, this too fulfills a prophecy of Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 6. Jesus himself, in Matthew chapter 13, talks about those people who had listened to him but rejected his message, and then quotes Isaiah's words [Matthew 13:14-17]:

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah [Is. 6:9-10]:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17
For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but
did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Which part of this describes us? Are we hearing but not understanding? Have we been
shown the miracles of Jesus, but reject him as our Messiah?

Or do our eyes truly see, and our ears truly hear? Do we believe he is able to do what he
has promised? Does he have the power? Does he have the mercy? Does he have the
compassion? Is he calling us out from living the life of a tax collector or a sinner, and
into a new life in which we walk with him and sing praises to him? When we turn to him
in faith, he makes us well.

For special reasons, specific to his path towards Jerusalem, Jesus sometimes instructed
people, such as these two blind men, not to spread the word about him.

But those days are over. He has suffered, he has died, he is risen! Today, we have the
privilege and the duty of spreading his fame all over *our* region.

May each one of us speak even as we have seen and heard. Amen.