

January 17, 2010/Matt 9:18-36, 11:2-6 (ESV¹)

the printed lesson begins at verse 27, we're going to back up and start a few verses earlier and in the process take in several compressed accounts of Jesus' miracles ... the first is the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter, treated more in more detail in **Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56** ...

Mat 9:18 While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

"knelt before him" is a term suggesting deep courtesy, a pleading homage before someone in a position to grant a favor ... this is an important Jewish synagogue official ... a member of a group that is beginning to count Jesus as a dangerous heretic ... someone who has to be at the end of his rope/desperate in order to come to this place ... but there's a kernel of real faith here ... he is willing to humble himself and throw his situation on the mercy of Christ ... and

Mat 9:19 And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.

Jesus doesn't turn away the desperate, waiting until their motives or understanding are more pure ... He got up and went with Him ...

then in the middle of this story of Jairus, it's as if the camera zeros in and the action around Jesus is frozen except for this little scene that we hear through the thoughts of the woman ...

Mat 9:20 And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment,

we know from the other Gospels that this woman is also desperate ... she's spent her entire livelihood hoping to get cured from what seems to be a menstrual problem ... the consequences of her condition in this culture are that everything and anyone she touches are considered ceremonially unclean .. she can't go to the temple, she can't have normal interaction with other people, she's in a terrible state ... if her condition were known to the people around, her presence would be considered to be as rude and forward as if someone with the plague had forced his or her way into a public gathering ...

Mat 9:21 for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well."

now her theology isn't great, it seems that there's some superstition mixed in with her thinking here, but again, there's a kernel of real faith ... she knows that it's Jesus that can heal and she's willing to appeal to Him ...

Mat 9:22 Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

take heart ... indeed ... she's literally been "an untouchable" and now she's done something completely socially unacceptable by making her way to and touching Jesus ... anyone here except Jesus who knows her situation is going to be horrified-to-irate ... Jesus begins by setting her heart at ease ... then

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He tells her that it's not magic by which she's been healed ... it is the fact that she has cast herself upon the mercy of God, that she has appealed to the Son of God ...

modern "faith" heretics want to say that it's her state of mind that's done the job, that she's been able to name and claim her healing ... but Biblical faith is trusting in, relying upon, cleaving to, casting oneself on the mercy of God, and that's what's in evidence here ...

Mat 9:23 And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion,

professional mourners and flute players were hired by even the poorest of families ... the commotion here at a ruler's house has to be substantial ...

Mat 9:24 he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.

this isn't a mistake on the part of Jesus, neither is it a literal truth that she is merely unconscious ... she is dead dead ... gone ... Jesus is speaking in light of what He's going to do ...

from the point of view of the man in the street here, this is almost pathetic ... Jesus has messed up and not even gotten here in time ... the kid is gone, and now this deluded fellow is making matters worse by acting as if the game isn't over! ... if this weren't the Son of God, this would be a sensible point of view ... but the fact is that this IS the Son of God ...

Mat 9:25 But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.

Mat 9:26 And the report of this went through all that district.

now a third incident ...

Mat 9:27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."

these men may be physically blind, but they see better than many others that have physical sight ... they recognize Him for who He is, God's Son, Messiah ... and if He is Messiah, they can expect Him to deal with their physical problem ... Isaiah said so ...

Isa 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

Isa 35:6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

the understanding of these men regarding *what kind of Messiah He is* is almost surely imperfect ... they call Him "son of David," a name loaded with popular expectations of political liberation and Jewish national power ... but they do have some light and they are determined ... blind though they are, they follow Jesus home ...

Mat 9:28 When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."

Mat 9:29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."

"according to your faith" means "since you believe" ... "as you believe, so is your prayer granted" ... again, these guys have cast themselves on the mercy of Christ ... is their understanding perfect? ... no ... but God doesn't require that of us up front ... what He requires is a humble heart and our crying out to Him for grace ...

Mat 9:30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it."

Jesus is not anxious for wrong popular expectations of a political Messiahship to multiply ... but as one commentator says, the men didn't stay with Him long enough to learn obedience ...

Mat 9:31 But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

it's an interesting feature of this story, that since there are two of them they together meet the Jewish requirement for 2 witnesses to confirm legal testimony ...

Mat 9:32 As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him.

deafness and muteness in the NT are not by any means always attributed to a demonic source, but in this case there is demon possession ...

Mat 9:33 And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel."

nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel (and by implication, if not here, then nowhere!) ... Ladd: "The scribes taught and nothing happened. Jesus spoke and demons fled, storms were settled, dead were raised, sins forgiven ... His authority in deeds and words was nothing less than the presence of the Kingdom of God."

Mat 9:34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

Mat 9:35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Jesus went ... Jesus was going about ... the Greek indicates continued action ... Jesus is continuing to do exactly what Matthew has already said in **Matt 4:23** He was doing ... He's teaching the Scriptures and filling out their implications as He did in the Sermon on the Mount ... He's preaching the good news of the Kingdom, He's acting as a herald, saying that God's kingdom is here ... and He's doing acts of mercy that only He can do ...

Mat 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

the English fails to capture the depth of Jesus' emotion here ... the "had compassion" is the strongest word for pity in the Greek language ... it describes the compassion that moves a man from the deepest

depths of his being ... in the Gospels, apart from its use in some parables, it only refers to Jesus ... Ryle does a wonderful job of emphasizing the compassionate nature of Jesus and making the point that if we claim to have the mind of Christ, and don't have that heart, we are just fooling ourselves ... this is the nature of our great Savior ...

harassed and helpless is literally "torn and thrown down" ...

regarding the picture of Jesus seeing us as His sheep, see the whole of **Ezekiel 34** ... for example, verses **22-24** ...

Eze 34:22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

Eze 34:23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.

Eze 34:24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

jump now to Matt 11 ...

Mat 11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples

Mat 11:3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Josephus records that John was imprisoned at Machaerus, a fortress on the east side of the Dead Sea ... this is a guy who has spent his life as an outdoorsman, living off the land, now confined to what was undoubtedly a small, dark, but stiflingly hot stone cell ... and he's there for speaking the truth about the immorality of Herod ... apparently, he was allowed some visitors in that awful place ... he sends some of his followers to ask Jesus if indeed he is Messiah ...

people have speculated for 20 centuries as to John's motivation in sending these to Jesus ... was it some form of second thoughts about Jesus? ... remember that John the Baptist was the one that the Apostle John records as ringing out an identification of Jesus as God's Son ...

Joh 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Joh 1:30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'

Joh 1:31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

Joh 1:32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

Joh 1:33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

Joh 1:34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

various possible motivations have been given for the sending of the messengers ... perhaps, languishing in prison has played games with John's mind, and he's not quite so sure about Jesus as he was at the Jordan ... for one thing, Jesus is not turning out to be the kind of Messiah that most Jews, and perhaps even John, were expecting ... John was preaching judgment ... although Jesus' message brought with it an implied judgment on those that reject it, it was first a message of God's mercy and grace ... and Jesus was clearly not about the task of overthrowing the Romans ... it's possible that John didn't know what to make of this ... on the other hand, it may be that he understood perfectly what Jesus was doing, and more than anything this visit is for the disciples of John, to let them see firsthand what Jesus is preaching and doing ... it may be simply part of John's method of pointing people to Jesus and deflecting the attention that they wanted to pay him ... in any case, the reply of Jesus is wonderful ...

Mat 11:4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

He does not attack John or his disciples for asking a question such as this ... there's no call for blind acceptance of His claims ... they are to be checked out ... Jesus does not say "go back and tell John to turn on his positive thinking and convince himself that I'm Messiah" ... and He doesn't tell the disciples to "go back to John and tell him what a warm feeling you had while attending my crusade" ... instead, Jesus deals in verifiable, objective concrete facts ... go tell John what you see and hear ... tell him what is in fact going on here ... Christianity is nothing if it is not a matter of historical, real facts ... we trust in, rely upon, cleave to Jesus on the basis of what He has done on our behalf, in space and time ... that brings with it a natural, subjective response, but the foundation is the objective ... Jesus "has the goods" and He invites the guys from John to check them out ... that checking is not lack of real faith ... instead, to not do so, or to do so and to refuse to then bow the knee and trust in Jesus, that would be lack of faith ...

Mat 11:5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

in telling the disciples of John what to look for, Jesus alludes to Messianic prophecies of Isaiah and thereby makes an indirect, but very clear claim to being God's Son ...

Isa 29:18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

Isa 29:19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

Isa 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

Isa 35:6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Isa 61:2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Isa 61:3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

these are the work of Messiah, and they are what the disciples of John are told to look for and report to John ... "yes, disciples of John, I am Messiah ... check to see that I'm truly doing what it was prophesied that I would do ... verify it, and then put your trust in Me ..."

Mat 11:6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

once we've had a look at the goods, examined the evidence, then the responsibility to bow the knee is serious ... at that point, to not do so brings judgment ... blessed are those who choose grace instead of judgment!!! ...