

Main Street UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Matthew 9:18-34, 35-38 **“Who’s In Control Here?”**

August 2, 2015
(10th Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIIA'1,2,3: MATTHEW 9:18-38 "WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?"

All Desperate Cases, Signs Of Kingdom

1) vv.18-25, 26 TWO STORIES IN ONE: JESUS OVERCOMES DISEASE AND DEATH // 8:1-17.

//Mk. 5:21-43, Lk. 8:40-56, Details Omitted, (23 to 9 verses)

a) vv.18-19 Ruler's Daughter (High Status): Part I.

2 Female: Younger/Older, Miracle + Report

18 While he was thus speaking to them, Still At Meal, Speaking Of New Wine (Unconfined), 9:17
* behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, //8:2 (Inclusion), Representative Of Old Garment/Wineskins
"My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." Gift Of Faith, First Raising
19 And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. Responsive: Focus On Conversation
Disciples As Observer-Learners

b) vv.20-22 Woman With Hemorrhage (Low Status), Life Not In Immediate Danger.

20 1 And behold, a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years Isolation, Lev. 15:19-33, 18:19
came up behind him and touched the fringe (tassels) of his garment; Blue Cord, 23:5, Num. 15:37-39, Dt. 22:12
21 2 for she said to herself, Got In The Way Of An Urgent Task
"If (perhaps) I only touch his garment, I shall be made well (saved)." Real Faith, Sozo/Saved (3x)
Touch Her = Unclean Till Evening, Touch Dead = 7 Days
22 2' Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, Not Magic, Direct Knowledge Of Her Thoughts
"Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well (saved)." 9:2, Quasi-Magic Becomes Encounter!
1' And instantly the woman was made well (saved). p.v., Not Touch But Word, VICTOR OVER DISEASE
Faith = Receptivity Based On Trust, 2 Stories Of Impurity

a') vv.23-26 Ruler's Daughter: Part II.

Disciples Written Out Of Mk., Focus On Jesus

23 1 And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd making a tumult, Mourners
24 2 he said, "Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." Euphemism, Jn. 11:31, Calm Of Divine Knowledge
25 3 And they laughed at him. No Swoon, Professional Mourners, 1 Cor. 15:24-26 (Last Enemy)
2' But when the crowd had been put outside, Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:20-24), Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:17-37)
1' he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. 8:15, // 11:2-6, Jn. 11, Lk. 7:11-17 VICTOR OVER DEATH
Spirit Returns (Lk. 8:55), Touch=Week Unclean (Num. 19:11-12)
26 And the report of this went through all that district. [M], All (3x), Good News Of Revelation Travels
vv.27-31, 32-34 Are Doublets?

2) vv.27-30,31 HEALING TWO BLIND MEN //20:29-34, //10:46-52, Lk. 18:35-43).

27 a And as Jesus passed on from there, Screens Out Details, Faith Pursues, Is. 29:18, 35:4-6, 42:7 (Blind/Deaf Healed)
b two blind men followed him, crying aloud, Dt. 19:15, Son of David 1:1, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30ff., 21:9, 15
"Have mercy on us, Son of David." 9:9-13, First Use Of Title, Blind With Insight
28 c When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; 8:7, 15:23, Not Comply Immediately
and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" //8:2, "If you can..."
d They said to him, "Yes, LORD." Faith = Confidence In Jesus As Lord
29 c' Then he touched their eyes, saying, Jesus Is Responsive To Holy Spirit
"According to your faith be it done to you." p.v. In Response To Their Faith//8:13, 9:22, 15:28
30 b' And their eyes were opened. p.v. VICTOR OVER BLINDNESS
a' And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." Mk. 1:43-45, 3:12, Hint Of Trouble, Knows What? //8:4
Jesus Is Meek/Humble, 11:29, 12:16-21
31 But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. 2) Miracle + Report

3) vv.32-34,35 DELIVERANCE OF DUMB DEMONIAIC (//12:22-24, Mk. 3:22, Lk. 11:14-16 [Q]).

32 As they were going away, behold, a dumb (mute) demoniac was brought to him. Faith Of Others, 3) Miracle + Report
33 And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; 11:2-5, VICTOR OVER DEMONS
+ and the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." 8:10b //8:8, 14-17, Is. 35:4-6, Ex. 4:11
34 - But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." Sorcerer, 10:25, 12:24, Label Good Evil, Threat
Opposition Mounts, Jesus Is Equal To Every Occasion
35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, Mk. 6:6b, 34, Inclusion //4:23, 10:23, 28:19 (disciples)
teaching in their synagogues 6:2, 23:6, 10:17, 12:9, 13:54
and preaching the gospel-of-the-kingdom, Word: 1) Teach, 2) Preach
and healing every disease and every infirmity. Deed: 3) Heal

vv.35-38 Transition To Missions Discourse (10:1-42), // Mk. 6:6b, 34, Lk. 10:2 [Q]).

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, 14:14, 15:32, Motivation, Came Because Of The Reports
because they were harassed and helpless, like "sheep without a shepherd." //Mk. 6:34, Failed Leaders/Lit. torn & helpless
37 Then he said to his disciples, //Lk. 10:2 [Q], Shepherds, Num. 27:17, 1 Kgs. 22:17, Zech. 10:2, Ezek. 34:1-10, 37:24
"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; No Miracle Here, Need Is Greater Than Workers, Pray!!
38 pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Pray, More Need Than Jesus Can Meet!

A Brief Treatment Of IIIA', Matthew 9:18-35, 36-38

The final section of the essay on miracles and discipleship (III. 8:1-9:35 + 36-38) is complex and serves several purposes. There is a density of five healings (bleeding woman, ruler's daughter, two blind men, dumb demonic) in three clusters to achieve the literary aim of ten miracles of Jesus to match the ten of Moses. Each miracle report (vv.18-25, vv.27-30, vv.32-34) is followed by a note how Jesus' fame spreads and uses the word *all* (vv.26, 31, 35a). The unit concludes with a threefold summary of Jesus' *gospel-of-the-kingdom* method: *teaching, preaching, healing* (v.35b // 4:23). Thirdly, there are at least twenty-six verbal parallels between A. 8:1-17 and A' 9:18-38 which is a clear indicator of Matthew's editing for a cohesive essay with clear inclusions and multiple echoes. The issues of sources is also complex. The first section (vv.18-25) is a radical editing of Mk. 5:21-43. The second (vv.27-30) is unique to Matthew (M) with an echo in 20:29-34. The third (vv.32-34) is a doublet of 12:22-24 with parallels in Mk. 3:22, Lk. 11:14-20 (Q). It is clear Matthew's selection and editing of 9:18-35 is for his purpose of illustrating how Jesus is victor over death (vv.18-19, 23-25), disease (v.20-22), blindness (v.27-30), the demonic (vv.32-34), and how his fame grows as he travels (vv.19, 27, 32a, 35a) enacting the immanent kingdom in word (vv.35b,c) and deed (v.35d). His characteristic *And behold* is used three times (vv.18b, 20a, v32a); there is an emphasis on *touch* (vv.18c, 20b, 21b, 25a, 29a), on *crowds* (vv.23, 25a, 33b, 36a), on *faith/believe* (vv.22b, 28b, 29b). As much as Jesus is able to do with God's bruised people, he remains an impressive one-man-show; more workers are needed, and for this *his disciples* (v.19//v.37a, an inclusion) are to pray.

Matthew's freedom to pare Mk. 5:21-43 down to basics evinces editorial freedom and the insight that Mark did not yet have the full force of Scripture. The phrase *While he was thus speaking to them* (v.18a) refers back to Jesus' response to the disciples of John and the Pharisees in vv.14-17; the old wine is the synagogue ruler; the new wine is Jesus. The daughter has just died; strong faith is evident as her father kneels and asks for a resuscitation (v.18b). Jesus responds with disciples in tow (v.18b), but is interrupted by the touch of a woman who's been bleeding for a dozen years. The tassels are at the corner of Jesus' prayer shawl and attached with blue cords as reminders to obey God's law. Her semi-superstitious approach needs correction. Jesus encourages her (*take heart*), claims her as family (*daughter*), and praises the trust that brought her near (*your faith has saved you*). In Matthew the healing follows Jesus' word (v.22c). Upon arrival, Jesus dismisses the mourners with a prophecy, "the little girl is not dead but sleeping," and is ridiculed. When they are ejected, he raises the girl by the hand back to life (//8:3,15). Precedent is found in Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:20-24) and Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:17-37). The two healings are linked in that to touch either made one ceremonially unclean. But what is *in Jesus* is more powerful than the forces that exclude and isolate, increase misery, and deliver people to death.

The healing of the two blind men has a 7:1 concentric pattern (a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a') with a confession of faith, "Yes, Lord" at the center (d. v.28c). On either side *believe/faith* language is found (c.v.28b//c' v.29b). The contrast in b//b' is between *blindness* (v.27b) and *their eyes were opened* (v.30a). The story opens and closes with a pre (v.27a) and post healing narrative (v.30b). In fulfillment of Is. 29:18, 35:4-6, 42:7, the blind are healed as the new age dawns. A case is building that faith in Jesus is well placed: the ruler, the woman, two blind men. The fame of Jesus spreads (v.31). The deliverance of the dumb/mute demoniac is told matter of factly with the faith of others opening the way. That he spoke is proof, and a division is revealed between the acclamation of the crowds (v.33b) and the charge of the Pharisees that Jesus is a sorcerer (v.34b). The final summary (v.35) is comprehensive in geography and effects. The bridge paragraph (vv.36-38) is a witness to Jesus' compassion and a call to pray for more helpers.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

"And Jesus went about... teaching... and preaching... and healing...."

Jesus' four-fold program: travel, instruct, announce, display the kingdom.

M A T T H E W 9 : 3 5

Reverend Jonas Nightengale is Elmer Gantry for a new generation, a fast-talking, slick, tent-revival-evangelist who rakes in money deceiving audiences with staged miracles. Then unexpectedly, a crippled teenage boy is healed at one of his rallies, and Jonas is shaken. *Leap of Faith* is the film, and Jonas is played by Steve Martin. It's a movie about fraud and faith, about the human craving for divine displays, about God's surprising mercy and the call to repentance.

The night after the last rally, Jonas enters the empty tent to stare up at a giant crucifix of Jesus, "Hey, boss. Remember me? Got a question. Why did you make so many suckers?" He then turns to the chairs and mimics his own preaching: "You say love never endeth? Well, I say love never stops! You say the meek shall inherit the earth? And I say the only thing the meek can count on is getting the short end of the stick! You say, Is there one among you who is pure in heart? And I say, No one!"

A voice comes out of the darkness. Jonas turns to see the teenage boy whose leg was healed. "Hello, Boyd. Why aren't you out signing autographs? Or dancing?"

"Um, I want to know when you plan to leave town."

"Leave? Couple days, I guess."

I wanted to know if I could go with you. I'll earn my keep."

"You're a little too old to be running away with the circus, aren't you, kid?"

"It's not that. You made me walk again. A lot of people tried, but couldn't."

"Hold it, kid. I had nothing to do with your walking."

"Sure you did. Everybody saw it."

"Look, I run a show here... strictly for the suckers. I've been pulling one kind of scam or other since I was your age.... And you, kid, are the genuine article."

"Are you saying you think you're a fake?"

"I know I'm a fake."

"Well what difference does it make, if you get the job done?"

Jonas leans forward, "Kid, it makes all the difference in the world."

Matthew 9:18-35, 36-38 5

At the film's end, Jonas quits life as a con-artist.¹ A boy was healed; a huckster repented. I'm not sure which is the greater miracle. It's a great film.

A Pew research survey from several years ago found that:

“Seventy-nine percent of Americans believe in miracles.
Sixty-eight percent believe in angels and demons.
Fifty-eight percent pray daily (outside of religious services)...
Thirty-four percent have experienced or witnessed a divine healing of illness or injury.
Thirty-one percent say their prayers are answered at least once a month; 19 percent say their prayers are answered at least once a week.
And— oddly enough— one in five self-described atheists, whose main tenet is to reject belief in God, say they believe in God or a universal spirit.”²

On the weekend before Christmas 2004, The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York sponsored a national survey of 1,100 doctors on the subject of miracles:

“Physicians believing that miracles have occurred in the past: 74 percent. Physicians believing miracles can occur today: 73 percent. Perhaps the most surprising result of the survey,” the report notes, “is that a majority of doctors (55 percent) said they have seen treatment results in their patients they would consider miraculous.”³

We are— it appears— a culture wide open to the idea of divine activity. Yes, there is fraud and easy-believism and hucksterism out there, which it is the job of healthy skepticism to inspect; there is also simply too much positive evidence to ignore once wheat and chaff are distinguished.⁴

¹ PreachingToday.com search under *miracles*.

² Adelle M. Banks, "Pew Report Shows Americans Are Religious in Unpredictable Ways," Religion News Service, posted on www.christianitytoday.com (6-23-08).

³ www.wnd.com/2004/12/28152.

⁴ For a collection of miracle stories, see Calvin Miller, *Miracles and Wonders* (New York: Warner Faith, 2003); for a Roman Catholic survey across history, Bert Ghezzi, *Mystics & Miracles* (Chicago, ILL: Loyola Press, 2012); also recently Eric

The physical world is not all we deal with; we are surrounded by an invisible realm with which we all have interaction, and not all of it friendly, thus Jesus’ regular encounters with the Satan he treated as an enemy and the demons he treated as vermin.⁵ The invisible God and the invisible world of spirits good and evil do not keep a polite distance from human affairs. The world is not wound up like a great mechanical watch and left to run down on its own with God observing passively with arms crossed.⁶ The world is not merely a closed system of cause and effect. There is observed regularity- what we call *scientific law*; there is also the unexpected, the singular, the quirky, the odd and wonderful, the unrepeatable stuff of lived history. Calvin Miller speaks of “an unpredictable God in a predictable world.”⁷ We are embedded in a world of mystery, a multi-level universe, much of which is not under our inspection or control. Ours is an open system. A. W. Tozer summarized the challenge of biblical faith this way: "Anything God has ever done, he can do *now*. Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do *here*. Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for *you*."⁸ Simply put, if it’s already happened, then it’s not impossible. The world has not changed; God has not changed, and there simply is no Christian faith worth following if it denies the action of God upon the world.

You should beware of any preacher or learned writer who focuses exclusively

Metaxas, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2014); for the testimony of a cardiologist, Chauncey W. Crandall, *Raising the Dead: A Doctor Encounters the Miraculous* (New York, NY: FaithWords, 2010); the definitive biblical and philosophical study is Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts, Vol. 1-2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2011); for an accessible philosophical treatment, Robert Larmer, *Dialogues on Miracle* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

⁵ For a summary of research on Jesus’ exorcisms, see Darrell L. Bock, *Who Is Jesus?* (New York, NY: Howard, 2012), Chapter 6, “Jesus and Exorcism,” 79-93; N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne), “Battle and Temple,” 119-130.

⁶ This is the model of philosophical deism which– if allowed– sees miracles as occasional intrusions (*deus ex machina*). For a critique of the idea of miracle as a violation of natural law (an Enlightenment idea, 18th century!) when applied to Jesus’s deeds of power (1st century), see Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Magic* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), Chapter 2, “The Concept of Miracle and Jesus’ Healings and Exorcisms,” 20-34.

⁷ PreachingToday.com search under *miracles*.

⁸ *Idem*.

on the supposedly more-noble ethical teaching of Jesus. This is a classic skeptical strategy to separate out the offensive miraculous elements, what they often call *primitive superstitions*, in order to focus on the ethical material which is the only part they think still applicable in our day. You will hear them patronize Jesus by saying, “He was a man of his times,” or “He adapted himself to the primitive beliefs of his people,” expecting you to automatically agree, since you too are an enlightened modern person. Jairus’ daughter was not dead, just in a swoon; the bleeding woman’s problem was psychosomatic, so we understand she in effect healed herself; the two blind men suffered conversion reactions; the man who could not speak was not demonized but suffering from a psychiatric ailment Jesus overcame by the loving force of his personality, and on and on they prattle.

But this will not do; it explains too little; it rips apart what Jesus held together, which was a single vision of the kingdom of God that included divine revelation in words and divine revelation in deeds of healing and exorcism and power over nature. You can’t have one without the other. What’s left is a distortion, a list of moral principles and the supposed inspiring example of a teacher who died for what he believed. Was Jesus at best a noble failure who lives on in his ideals? No! He was virgin born, lived a ministry chock full of miracles, all certified by God after his death in a unique resurrection from the dead, and his power continues in the church across history. Jesus taught the kingdom, displayed the kingdom, embodied the kingdom. This is the Savior we worship, not some trimmed down Jesus with the offensive elements removed for easy consumption. As part of a study of both the historicity and theology of the miracles, Rene Latourelle, a Catholic scholar, writes:

“I... believe that if the Absolute breaks through into the history of the race in order to save it, it is completely intelligible that this extraordinary goodness should find expression in unparalleled saving gestures such as healings, exorcisms, and raisings from the dead. Miracles are simply the good news of grace and salvation made visible: humanity made new, the world made new. This is how the apostles thought who were witnesses to Jesus.”⁹

Jesus is more than a noble example, more than an inspiring teacher, more than the founder of a world religion. Lots of other notable men and women fill that

⁹ *The Miracles of Jesus And The Theology Of Miracles* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 127.

Matthew 9:18-35, 36-38 8

description, but Jesus is none other than God on public display in first century Israel, God come down to make things right, and what happens in and around him is indeed the preview of a new world. This is what it looks like when love comes to town. Jesus is at war with this world’s current management and all the pain it intensifies. People living behind enemy lines– and that means all of us– matter greatly to God. People need to be saved from what they have done and from what has been done against them. In Jesus death is pushed back, diseases healed, demonic squatters evacuated; lost and wandering sheep find a Good Shepherd and a new fold; disciples are trained; a great harvest is anticipated, and more laborers are needed.

I’ve been a pastor for thirty-eight years, and I tell you, without the gifts of the Spirit and the signs of the kingdom, the church is impotent. Good advice and human zeal and pop-psychology and correct doctrine and management techniques are not enough. We are embedded in and up against forces of destruction and distortion and deceit that are greater than us all. It’s why we still sing the poetry of Martin Luther: “For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe. His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate; on earth is not his equal.”

Ours is a spiritual battle with an enemy who– according to St. Peter– prowls around seeking people to devour.¹⁰ Sin and evil are rearranged into new forms and not yet eliminated. But for all its faults, the church remains the handmaid of Jesus Christ, and if he does not put fresh bread in our hands, we have nothing to distribute.

Jesus was a healer. At his touch, illness left as if displaced; when he spoke to conditions, things changed. People were immersed in the healing energies of God, dunked in a vat of divine love with real results. The only question was, What is the source of the power? His followers had one answer, which was the Spirit of God through the Son of God; some Pharisees had another– less flattering– explanation, “This man is a magician, a false prophet; he casts out demons by their prince to deceive the simple; Jesus is an agent of Evil.” But to argue that something real was not happening was not a possibility; there was simply too much evidence. A young woman with life restored, an older women whose social isolation ended and whose hemoglobin was now on the rise, two blind men who could see again, a man restored to speech and inward freedom. Yes, and the same girl who was raised later died; the next day there were women in Israel who started hemorrhaging and were never healed and new cases of blindness that were never relieved; there were fresh infestations of

¹⁰ I Peter 5:8.

evil that never got near enough the Lord for relief. I agree completely: all healing is temporary, but the continuing anguish of our world—then and now—does not diminish the hope we see in Jesus and those he helped. He remains our window into the coming kingdom for which he taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

Till perhaps the end of the first century— and a bit beyond— there remained people who could give personal witness to what Jesus did for them.¹¹ Particularly if they were children when the event occurred. Faithful Jews and flagrant sinners, village people, a retired centurion or two, a few Gentiles, all with stories of what happened when Jesus came near. Never again could they doubt the love of the Father or the outreach of the Son or the power of the Spirit. They tasted the riches of the kingdom and touched the hem of the Holy Trinity. This is the clear implication of Matthew’s summary in verse 35, “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages” doing three things, “*teaching* in their synagogues, and *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and every infirmity.” That is what the kingdom of God looks like in full array and in awesome display. Makes church as usual look pretty tame, doesn’t it? Of these events the disciples were observers-in-training, because the clear intent of Jesus was to share his ministry with them. Verse 19, “And Jesus rose and followed him, *with his disciples*,” and later in verses 37 and 38, “Then he said *to his disciples*, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few....’”

What would it mean to interview hundreds of such people and take their oral histories decades after the events? After a few dozen an impression would begin to form, “Something happened here.” So many people telling essentially the same story with no intent to collaborate or deceive. Matthew could write his summary in the mid-80’s, fifty or so years after the events, and not risk contradiction, first because his report was unimpeachable, and secondly because the same type of events continued to happen. We want to be the kind of church that makes the Bible easy to believe. Wherever the church welcomes the Holy Spirit for the sake of its mission, deeds of power will be found.¹² They are not under our control; we do not dispense them from

¹¹ For a full accounting, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹² For samples from across church history, see John Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), Appendix A, “Signs and Wonders in Church History,” 156-173; Morton Kelsey, *Healing & Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995); Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2005).

some treasury, but we continue to look for what only God can do. I've often been encouraged by the words of Frederick Beuchner, who writes:

“If you feel like a fool as you are doing this, don't let it throw you. You are a fool of course. ... If your prayer isn't answered, this may mean more about you and your prayer than it does about God. Don't try too hard to feel religious, to generate some healing power of your own. Think of yourself rather– if you have to think of yourself at all– as a rather small-gauge, clogged-up pipe that a little of God's power may be able to filter through if you can just stay loose enough. Tell the one you're praying for to stay loose, too. If God doesn't seem to be giving you what you ask, maybe he's giving you something else.”¹³

TURNING TO THE TEXT

1) vv.18-25, 26 Two Stories In One.

It could be said of Jesus that his policy was to turn interruptions into opportunities, and in verses 18 through 25 we have an initial interruption by a Jewish ruler intersected by a second intrusion by a bleeding woman, one story spliced inside another. It is often *along the way* that some of the best stuff happens. In the middle of his teaching a synagogue leader shows up, and on the way to the ruler's house Jesus was touched from behind. Interruptions were opportunities, and it was only the constant wisdom of the Spirit in each situation that kept Jesus on track. Needy people were always clawing for attention. At times he retreated for rest, but mostly he was exposed. It's what having the heart of God means. Messy, demanding, desperate people are welcome in his presence. So if you are too important to be interrupted, you're too important; and if you want a tidy little sanitized life, don't follow Jesus. The scene Matthew presents is dynamic. All we have to do is notice the links between the various episodes:

“While Jesus was thus speaking... *behold*, a ruler came in and knelt before him saying.... And *behold*, a woman who had suffered with a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him.... And when Jesus

¹³ From his book *Wishful Thinking*, as quoted in *Leadership*, Vol. 6, no. 2.

came to the ruler’s house.... And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud.... And as they were going away, *behold*, a dumb demoniac was brought to him.... And Jesus went about all the cities and villages....”

Behold... behold ...behold. At every turning point it is Matthew’s favorite word. This was what it was like for Jesus to keep up with the purpose of his Father and the pacing of the Spirit. He hardly finished one before the next intruded, and from each event rings of publicity went out in grand circles of excited gossip, “And the report of this sent through *all the district*.... But they went away and spread his fame through *all that district*.” What I want you to sense is the dynamism of what’s occurring. What’s rare for us was commonplace with him. There was a time when there were no miracles, meaning the time before his baptism, but after that an artesian well bubbled and people came for a drink from the waters of life.

Moving in this new dimension was something he learned by experience. There was a time when Jesus cast out his first demon, healed his first blind person, raised his first dead girl, which is likely the case that is before us.

Because of our high regard for Jesus, we easily forget he was a learner and developing a track record in new areas. As he obeyed, the Holy Spirit provided the punch; they operated in perfect cooperation. Nothing is more important than having Scripture on the hard disk of our memories so we may learn to distinguish the impulses and ideas of the Holy Spirit from all the clutter and static in our busy hearts and divided minds. Jesus saw clearly; we see dimly. He heard accurately; we hear in bits and pieces; his obedience was immediate, ours often halting; he never failed, we often get it wrong. But it’s OK; there’s simply no other way to learn than the try-and-fail, try-and-succeed empirical method. It’s all O.J.T. That Jesus recruited ordinary folk to follow and learn from him ought to encourage us all. The disciples—as Jesus’ contemporaries— had a world view that was congenial to God’s activity, which at least made it intellectually easier to process what they saw each day. Our skepticism and inherited philosophical materialism, on the other hand, makes it harder for us. We have trouble seeing, much less processing, the works of God.¹⁴ So we

¹⁴ On the issue of world view and selective vision, see Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity With Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989); also his recent *The Evangelical’s Guide To Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2015),” Chapter 5, “Our Problem as Westerners,” 75-93.

Western Christians tend to allegorize, psychologize, and individualize what we read in Scripture. “It’s all, you see, not about the plain meaning but about an abstract principle, not about something that happened outwardly but something within the human psyche, not about a public event with common meaning but about something that applies to my personal, spiritual walk as an individual Christian.” Baloney!

So if you are intellectually offended by Jesus raising dead girls and solving female problems, and if the notion of blind eyes opening messes with your world view, and if you don’t understand how demons could possible attach to people and disturb function, and if the notion of Jesus doing this everywhere he went seems incredible by its sheer volume, and if you are not so sure you want to be invited into this new way of viewing the world where the kingdom of God clashes with the kingdom of darkness in spiritual warfare, then welcome to one of the biggest problems in the modern, Western church. And there’s only one name for it; it’s *unbelief*; it’s inherited skepticism; it’s a poverty of spiritual experience; it’s us sitting in judgment on the Scripture rather than the Bible sitting in judgment on our blindness and poverty. What Jesus assumed was normal operations, we rebel at and try explain away with reductionist theologies. Either it never happened, and Jesus was simply a naive man of his times. Or, it used to happen, but now God has a better way in this new dispensation. But skepticism and cessationism do not match the evidence. God does not sprinkle out acts of power to satisfy our curiosity, but this is the nature of the world God created. It’s fully accessible to the Designer who possesses all the passwords. There is more going on that we acknowledge.

When the New Testament speaks of faith in the context of miracles, it’s not a human work, not something we do on our own. Faith is not a religious form of *try harder*. The ability to trust Jesus at any level is already a gift of God and sign the Spirit is at work. And at times people are given the extraordinary capacity to believe in spite of contrary evidence, as when a daughter is already dead, or when you’ve been bleeding every day for twelve years. What the ruler and the woman had in common was trust in Jesus based on what others told them about him. And what they said to him sounds absolutely crazy, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” Or, as the woman thought to herself, “If *perhaps* I only touch the fringes, I shall be made well.” One was denial of life’s end; the other borders on superstition. The ruler was high status; she was low. He came face to face; she snuck up behind. He was bold; she was timid. But Jesus does not operate within our hierarchies of status. An unimportant woman needs to know God hears her prayers and that she matters as much as the most important man in town. Faith

does not force God’s hand. Trust is essentially receptive: Am I willing to receive what a trustworthy God has to give? And in both these instances the answer is Yes.

What I want us to see is how super-sensitive Jesus was to the will of the Father and the guidance of the Spirit. He was always *tuned in*. It was by divine revelation that he turned just as she touched him and spoke her thoughts back to her, “Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well.” *How did he know to say that?* By revelation of the Spirit, the same mechanism by which we operate in the realm of spiritual giftings. You learn by listening and taking risks. Same when he arrived at the ruler’s home to the sound of dirges sung by hired mourners, “Depart, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” *How did Jesus know to say that?* By divine revelation of what the Father was about to do. And when he spoke the words he heard from above, the flute players took their instruments from their lips and the women stopped wailing. “And they laughed at him,” says Matthew, meaning they ridiculed him as a nut case, which he would indeed be if nothing happened in the next few minutes.

Jesus has a lot on the line; he’s never raised a dead person before. It’s a showdown and a face-off. Who is more in touch with Reality? Jesus in effect fired the paid mourners, walked in, and did the impossible, v.25: “...he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.” Who’s laughing now? Together the two intertwined stories demonstrate that Jesus participates in God’s authority over disease and death, two of our permanent enemies, and overcomes them. One day we get resurrection bodies which are beyond the reach of disease and death. Until then, every healing is a preview of the kingdom of God; they show what happens when God sets the world right at ground level. The *ministry report* is followed by a *publicity report* in verse 26, “And the report of this went through all that district.” Gossip is still the best marketing plan. If God did this in Greenwood, the whole city would be rattled.

Jesus was open to people and not offended by desperate interruptions. He followed the lead of the Spirit, even when it meant being laughed at. Jesus was what some have called *supernaturally natural*.¹⁵ Notice how calm he is when everyone around him is desperate and pulling at his clothes. Never in a hurry; always on time. His disciples follow and watch as events unfold; it was their school and always in

¹⁵ Gary Best, *Supernaturally Natural: God May Be Closer Than You Think* (Cape Town, SA: Vineyard International, 2008); Jordan Seng, *Miracle Work: A Down-To-Earth Guide To Supernatural Ministries* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2012).

session. It's a part of our own tradition we've all but lost touch with.¹⁶

2-3) vv.27-35 Healing Of Two Blind Men And The Dumb Démoniac.

It's clear from my study that, while the next two brief miracles are not intertwined with each other as the first two, Matthew put them together as a pair, perhaps based on a prophecy of Isaiah. Verse 4 of Isaiah 35 has echoes with the first two miracles:

“Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, fear not!’ Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

Verses 5 and 6 then echo the miracles of the two blind and one dumb man:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.”

What Isaiah foretold, Jesus fulfilled and Matthew arranged; he is the Jewish Messiah.

The impression we're left with by the publicity report of verse 26 is that Jesus' reputation often preceded him; his fame arrived before he did. This explains how two blind men were awaiting him, verse 27: “And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” Another desperate case: first a dead child, then a bleeding woman, now two blind men who will not shut up. Jesus does not say a word. While they plead, he keeps walking; their faith is being stretched with perseverance.

What is interesting here is the detail that— though they were following and crying out— Jesus did not deal with them immediately. He lived under the constraints of obedience and was not free to take every need as an immediate reason to act. In the invisible space between them and him was his submission to the Father's will and his cooperation with the Spirit's guidance. The prerogatives of deity were held in

¹⁶ For a minority report, see Frank Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism* (Lake Mary, FLA: Creation House Press, 2013); Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous, John Wesley's Idea of the Supernatural and the Identification of Methodists in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013).

reserve while he awaited the Father’s nod and the Spirit unction. None of Jesus’ actions were of independent origin. His free will was to cooperate, not to act on his own. As he revealed in John 5:19, and later in verse 30 of the same chapter:

“Truly... I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he *sees* the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.... I can do nothing on my own authority; as I *hear*, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

Under an open heaven, Jesus did what he saw and spoke what he heard, and here we speculate he was awaiting instructions. It was only later, *when he entered the house, and the blind men came to him* that Jesus questioned them, called forth their confession of faith, “Yes, Lord,” and met their need with a touch and a word of blessing. Then verse 30, “And their eyes were opened,” were opened *by God*. Can you imagine the joy? We all rejoice when a medical treatment is successful, particularly a dangerous surgery or a chemo that defeats the cancer. My mother called me weeping last week with news her whole body scan showed no cancer. I too was filled with emotion. It was a joyful moment, a new lease on life. But what medicine does to heal through science– and for which we are all grateful– God can do in a moment, and wherever Jesus went, the kingdom landed with joyful results.

There is also a symbolic meaning here worth exploring since it provides a link with the next story. Before Jesus touched them, the two blind men had *insight* but not *eye sight*. They saw who Jesus was, the Son of David, the Messianic healer of Isaiah. This *theological insight* and the perseverance that accompanied it was an initial gift of the Spirit that preceded the second work which was the restoration of *eye sight*. And though the Holy Spirit is never explicitly mentioned in these stories, he’s always just off stage giving instructions and filling Jesus with power. It is with the insights of the doctrine of the Trinity that we are best able to understand the actions of Jesus who was never a lone ranger. He was the visible hand, and the Holy Spirit the invisible, and when by the Father’s will they joined in touch, things happened.

This *insight and eye sight* issue is important because in the next scene the polarities reverse. The blind men have *insight but not eye sight*; the Pharisees, however, have *eye sight* but not *insight*. They see the dumb man restored, but they totally misread what it means. Jesus is not the Davidic Messiah; he’s an agent of the Evil One, seducing the nation with deceptive imitations, “He casts out demons by the

Prince of Demons.” And, if Jesus is indeed a false prophet, it’s a capital offense, meaning he ought to die. Opposition is mounting, which may help explain why Jesus commanded the two blind men to keep quiet, which they did not do. They had insight; now they have eyesight; what they do not yet have is an even greater gift, which is the self-control of obedience, which is a fruit of the Spirit that grows slowly over time. Miracles, in this sense, are easier to obtain than character.

Here is my point. The same Holy Spirit who generated faith in the father and faith in the woman and faith in the blind men and faith in the friends of the demonized man was also working to offer the Pharisees the same gift, which in the mystery of freedom they refused. And so, in an act of divine judgment, they confess their spiritual blindness, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” They call good evil in a great inversion. The blind see, and the sighted are blind. No one ever stays the same in the presence of Jesus. We grow either hard or soft, resistant or receptive. Neutrality is not an option. Repentance delayed is grace betrayed.

CONCLUSION

What does Jesus see when he looks over Greenwood? Golden grain, not enough people in the fields. He sees harassed and helpless sheep, vulnerable to attack, separated from the fold of his people, without a shepherd. What he feels is the deep, deep love of God in which he shares, the *compassion* he demonstrates for a daddy with the dead daughter and a woman with the flow of the blood and two blind men and a dumb demoniac, even for the Pharisees who got it backwards in their pride. And he asks of us two things: 1) that we join him and learn his ways together as followers, and 2) that we raise up our eyes to the fields and pray for more workers, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few....”

Only the power of God’s love can save a lost life. Sometimes– I am told by Matthew– it even takes an outright miracle. When I sit down with a chronic alcoholic, or a person with severe mental illness, or a soul that has grown hard from too much sin, I know that unless God shows up, nothing will happen. And as wonderful as it is to study and preach these amazing stories which I do with relish, we cannot make any of this stuff happen. But maybe, just maybe, if we followed Jesus as apprentices, and if we opened ourselves to the Spirit and his gifts, and if we took the risks of being interrupted by messy people and looking a bit foolish, we might find ourselves in a whole new world. I’ve seen glimpses, and I want more.
