

18. Ministering to the needy people

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Matthew 9 is a chapter containing several miracles of healing. It is essential to put Jesus' ministry of healing in proper perspective.

The Messiah's role as a healer in was clearly prophesied in passages like Isaiah 35:5-6. Jesus' miracles were a testimony not only to the fact that He was sent by God, but that He was the anticipated Messiah.

Isaiah 35:5-6 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert.

Jesus' miracles were not primarily calculated for crowd effect. Instead, they were primarily done to minister to the humble needs of humble people.

A. DR. JESUS WILL SEE YOU NOW

Matthew 9:1-2 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city (Capernaum). Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

Other Gospels (in Mark 2 and Luke 5) explain how the man was brought to Jesus. Palsy was a gradual paralysis. This man was unable to help himself, but fortunately he had four friends with love, faith, and hope. Because of the crowds, his friends lowered him down to Jesus through the roof.

They only thought of bringing him to Jesus for the healing of his body. They certainly didn't think that Jesus would forgive His sins. Was the man's physical condition the result of his sin? We do not know. But we do know that Jesus dealt with the sin problem first, for this is always the greatest need. Jesus is getting at the man's greater problem. As bad as it was to be paralyzed, it is infinitely worse to be bound and lost in one's sin.

The man didn't have faith in Jesus, but his friends who lowered him through a hole they made on the roof did.

Matthew 9:3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

The scribes correctly understand that Jesus is claiming to do something that only God can do. But they are incorrect in assuming that Jesus is not God Himself. If they had their Scripture knowledge in their hearts instead of their heads, they would have acknowledged Him as the Messiah.

Matthew 9:4-5 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Arise and walk"?

Knowing their thoughts should have been enough for Jesus to prove His deity to them. But He knew that it was not the time yet.

We might wonder why not just show and tell who Jesus really is to these snobby Pharisees with all of His majesty and power? Then that would be like displaying

God's raw power. God doesn't force any one to choose His side. He invites us with His everlasting patience and mercy.

Matthew 9:6-8 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Jesus answers His own question before the religious leaders. At the man's healing, the crowd properly gave God the glory for this miracle. Jesus obviously did not draw attention to Himself.

The Son of Man" - It is Jesus' favorite way to call Himself while He was on the earth.

B. FRONT CENTER, YOU IRS AGENT

Matthew 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

Last month Matthew just received "the extortioner of the year" award as Roman IRS agent. Now he is leaving his cushy and really good money making job and everything behind to follow Jesus.

The Jewish people rightly considered them traitors because they worked for the Roman government, and had the force of Roman soldiers behind them to make people pay taxes. They were the most visible Jewish collaborators with Rome.

When a Jew entered the customs service he was regarded as an outcast from society. He was disqualified as a judge or a witness in a court session, was excommunicated from the synagogue, and in the eyes of the community his disgrace extended to his family.

Understanding how almost everyone hated tax collectors, it is remarkable to see how Jesus loves, and calls, Matthew. Matthew responded to Jesus' invitation by leaving his tax collecting business and following Jesus - and eventually writing this same gospel account.

Matthew 9:10-13 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

We are fortunate that God calls sinners, not just "saints." Jesus came to benefit those who understood their inherent need for Him (those who are sick, the poor in spirit, Matthew 5:3), but the proud who see no need for Jesus (Those who are well) benefit nothing from Jesus.

It isn't our sin that keeps us from coming to Jesus, but our pride that refuses to acknowledge our need before Him.

Jesus is the friend of sinners. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

C. THE NEW AND OLD COVENANTS

Matthew 9:14-17 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

The Pharisees also fasted (often twice a week, according to Luke 18:12), but not out of humble repentance. They often fasted from a desire to impress themselves and others with their spirituality (Matthew 6:16-18).

Jesus' reference to the wineskins is His announcement that the present institutions of Judaism could not, and would not, contain His new wine. He would form a new institution, the church, which would bring Jew and Gentile together into a completely new body.

Ephesians 2:16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Jesus reminds us that what is old and stagnant often cannot be renewed. God will often look for new vessels to contain His new work, until those vessels make themselves unusable.

D. COMING FROM BOTH END OF THE SPECTRUM

Matthew 9:18-19 While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live." So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.

Note that this man worshiped Him, and Jesus received this worship - which would have been blasphemous if Jesus had not Himself been God.

Matthew 9:20-22 And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.

Even though her faith had elements of err and superstition, she believed in the healing power of Jesus, and the border of His garment served as a point of contact for that faith. There are many things that we could find wrong with this woman's faith. But more than anything, her faith was in Jesus, and the object of faith is much more important than the quality of faith.

Mark 5:26 informs us that this woman had tried many physicians, but none could help her. Imagine the despair and discouragement she felt. Her hopes were shattered. Because of this hemorrhage, the woman was ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:25), which only added to her hopelessness.

It is interesting that Jairus and this woman—two opposite people—met at the feet of Jesus. Jairus was a leading Jewish man, she was an anonymous woman with no prestige or resources. He was a synagogue leader, while her affliction kept her from worship. Jairus came pleading for his daughter, the woman came with a need of her own. The girl had been healthy for 12 years, and then died; the woman had been ill for 12 years and was now made whole. Jairus' need was public—all knew it; but the woman's need was private—only Jesus understood. Both Jairus and the woman trusted Christ, and He met their needs.

It doesn't matter which direction we are coming from. Jesus will meet us where we are coming from. If we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us.

Jairus may have resented the woman, because she kept Jesus from getting to his daughter before the girl died. But his real problem was not the woman, but himself: He needed faith in Christ. Jesus forced the woman to give her testimony both for her sake and for the sake of Jairus.

Matthew 9:23-26 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went out into all that land.

These were professional mourners, who in the custom of the day offered a loud and noisy display of mourning for a price, not out of sincere sorrow. You could find them from their ad "Mourners-R-Us" in the Jewish Yellow Pages. When we notice how quickly they moved from wailing to they ridiculed Him, it shows their lack of sincerity.

Why did not Jesus raise this girl from the dead in their presence? Because there were so much unbelief. Our attitude of unbelief can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. Not that the Holy Spirit can not overcome our unbelief, but He just let us have our stupid unbelief and live in it.

E. EYE OPENING EXPERIENCE

Matthew 9:27-31 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into 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." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it." But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.

I am sure that it was an eye opening experience for these two blind men.

Blindness is a picture of spiritual ignorance and unbelief. The sinner must be born again before he can see the things of God. And the believer must be careful to grow spiritually or he will damage his spiritual vision.

F. ANOTHER FALSE ACCUSATION OUT OF JEALOUSY

Matthew 9:32-34 As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!" But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."

In the Jewish understanding of demon possession, the rabbis thought that they could not cast out a demon until it told them its name. Obviously the demon that made a man mute could never be made to tell them its name. But Jesus had no problem, the demon was cast out and the mute spoke.

It was never seen like this in Israel! For this reason, this miracle was particularly amazing to the multitudes, and showed not only the complete authority of Jesus over the demonic realm, but also the weakness of the rabbis' traditions.

Out of their jealousy against Jesus, they attributed the work of Jesus as the power of satan.

G. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

Matthew 9:35-38 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

As Jesus encountered the depth of human need, He was moved with compassion for them. Jesus gives us an exact description of man in his lost state - that we are like sheep having no shepherd.

Jesus saw the greatness of human need as also an opportunity, as a harvest that was plentiful. But it was also a harvest that needed laborers. How much opportunity to meet human need passes because of the lack of willing laborers!

H. APPLICATIONS

1) We are His hands and feet to touch those who are hurting.

Someone who is wise said this to fellow pastors, "Preach to those who are hurting. You will never lack in congregation." That does not only apply to pastors, but also to everyone in this room. We are the ones who can be used by God to minister to others.

The first application brings this one automatically.

2) Don't expect someone to come up to you and reach out to you. Please you do that first.

The majority of people who come to church just come to sing a few songs and listen to sermon from pastor and leave. No personal contact.

Karen and I were visiting a church while we were on vacation, the pastor talked about this very subject in his sermon. After the service, out of over 100 people in the sanctuary including the pastor, no one came over to say hello to us. Before we left, we went over to the pastor and say hello to him.

After the closing song, as we leave this church, find someone you've never met before. Introduce yourself. Go out of your comfort zone and extend the love of Jesus to one another. Guess what, you might even like it.