

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL APPROACH (Matthew 9:27-34)

6.27.21

Description: *Jesus presents two more healings — one physical and one spiritual — that raise both the excitement of the crowd and the opposition of the religious leaders.*

INTRODUCTION

Today we see more examples of the power of Jesus to heal people — both physically and, most importantly, spiritually. And while that certainly is part of this week’s story, trust me, there is so much more to see here. But before we start looking, let’s begin our time of learning with a **time of prayer**.

TEXT (Matthew 9:27-34)

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” — Matthew 9:27.

Just to have a bit of context, this is following all the amazing things we talked about last week: the healing of the woman with the bleeding condition, and the raising from the dead of the synagogue leader Jairus’ daughter. Now, on the surface, this appears to be just another moment of Christ’s glorious and gracious mercy poured out through His power, in this case restoring the sight of two blind men.

But notice the wording these men use to get Christ’s attention: “Have mercy on us, ‘Son of David.’” That is not your normal everyday “howdy,” but rather a specific acknowledgment of who Jesus of Nazareth truly was — the Messiah. It was commonly understood by most everybody — including the religious establishment — that the Messiah would be from the lineage of David. But while the leadership refused to believe Jesus to be of that line, these blind guys, understanding His complete authority and power over everything that came His way, concluded that Jesus was far more than just a rabbi (even a radical one) or a prophet or a magician or anything else. He was God’s long-promised Messiah. For one thing, there was no record in the Old Testament of anybody being healed from blind-ness — exactly the healing for which these two are begging — yet the Messiah prophesied throughout the Hebrew Scriptures was predicted to have precisely that power — among obviously many others: Psalm 146:8a; Isaiah 29:18, 35:5a, 42:6-7a. And now He was right here, right now, the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s long-anticipated promises. It’s funny how clear-sighted these blind guys were.

When He had gone indoors, the blind men came to Him, and He asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they replied — Matthew 9:28.

When Jesus asks these guys, “Do you believe that I can do this,” He is asking them if they are entrusting themselves, entrusting their lives, into His care at this moment, that they have no doubt that Jesus, and not anybody else but Jesus, can accomplish this task. And their answer, “Yes, Lord,” is applying the Greek word “kurios,” which is a bow to Christ’s power and authority by addressing Him as Lord. They are respecting Him and bowing to Him as Lord by acknowledging His power, His authority, and their belief that He alone can do this thing.

Then He touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you”; and their sight was restored — Matthew 9:29-30a.

As they are expressing a complete faith in Him, and a complete confidence in what He can do, so He is completely restoring their sight.

And then of course, as had happened many times before, ***Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” But they went out and spread the news about Him all over that region — Matthew 9:30b-31.***

We talked about this last week, that the purpose in Christ’s miracles was not merely to be a healer of people’s physical problems but rather to underscore the power of His words. Jesus came to be a healer of souls far more than bodies. The focus on His miracles would distract from His ultimate purpose. In addition, spreading the news of His power of demons and disease could potentially feed into a popular notion that had grown over time that the messiah would be this all-powerful warrior who, just as He conquered everything physical and spiritual that was presented to Him, so that same power would be turned loose on the hated Roman legions who occupied their land. The people might place their hope on Christ as an earthly freedom fighter that would restore Israel to the glories of David and Solomon rather than as a spiritual freedom fighter seeking to free man from sin. And if their ideas about Christ’s purpose gained momentum, His ministry of outreach for the kingdom of heaven would become that much more difficult. Get rid of the Romans? Yeah, Jesus; He’s our man. Get rid of sin? Oh, I’m doing OK; I’m a member of God’s chosen people; God loves me so I don’t need a Savior.

And then, right after healing the blind men, another opportunity comes His way: ***While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus — Matthew 9:32.***

Now this was a different scenario for Christ. With the two blind men, they could be asked questions regarding their faith and trust in Him. But for somebody demon-possessed, no faith questions would be relevant, due to this case to the inability of the possessed one to answer and, in general for the demon itself to have any reason to speak up because obviously faith questions to a demon were irrelevant. This was simply another platform to show Christ’s total power and authority over sickness and sin — over physical issues and spiritual ones — and also to once again confirm His identity as the promised Messiah by the words of Hebrew Scriptures:

- 1) ***The Lord looked down from His sanctuary on high, from heaven He viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death — Psalm 102:19-20.***
- 2) ***The Lord sets prisoners free — Psalm 146:7a.***
- 3) ***The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners — Isaiah 61:1.***

And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke — Matthew 9:33a.
Now clearly whatever precedence there had been with exorcisms in the past, the people making up this crowd had never seen such an overwhelming power displayed before. Whether illness, injury or disability, Jesus always reigned supreme. And whatever the spiritual, even

demonic, opposition, Jesus, again, always reigned supreme — and that kind of complete authority had never been witnessed before.

The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel” — Matthew 9:33b.

Now while the crowd was amazed, the Pharisees most certainly were not. In fact, they were likely getting more and more nervous and concerned about this Radical Rabbi with each passing day. There had already been several times that a crowd’s reaction to something that Jesus did or said had ended with the same reaction: amazement, astonishment, literally being besides themselves in awe. And remember that an actual member of the Sanhedrin — Nicodemus — in meeting with Jesus had already come to his own conclusion about this Nazarene; the gospel of John tells us that Nicodemus ***came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God.*** How did they know that? As Nicodemus explained: ***[N]o one could perform the signs You are doing if God were not with Him” — John 3:2.*** There was a great fear building in the leadership that the longer Jesus’ ministry continued, and as these kinds of public displays kept occurring, people would start “putting the dots together” regarding all they were seeing and hearing through this guy and come to, at least for the Pharisees and their colleagues, what would have been a terrifying determination. They had to act fast; they had to do or so say something that could punch a hole in this rising tide of Christ’s popularity. So, they brought out an old standby.

But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that He drives out demons” — Matthew 9:34.

Of course, the Pharisees could not let Jesus just go on without a response. But their response was an old, tired one — which Jesus had already shot down. Indeed, His response must have been a profoundly disturbing one to the leadership: That if Jesus really was the Messiah, then His disposal of all demonic powers gave clear evidence that, as He had told them previously, ***“the kingdom of God has come upon you” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:28b,*** a proposition that the Pharisees and their allies were in no way going to accept. They would have to find some other way to get rid of Him.

APPLICATION

There are three basic takeaways from this week’s story:

- 1) We serve an all-powerful God, our Father, due to an all-powerful Son, who has filled us with an all-powerful Spirit. Jeremiah said it so well: ***“Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You” — a prayer of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 32:17,*** literally meaning that there is nothing in existence that challenges the power of God and renders Him unable. Because of the absolute truth of the power of God, Paul would write centuries later: ***[B]e strong in the Lord and in His mighty power — Paul, Ephesians 6:10.*** There is no opposition that can defeat us when we remain anchored to the power of God. And it was His equally all-powerful Son who showed us through His words and His works, such as these we saw today, what that power made available to us looks like. That’s why Jesus could say: ***“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can***

snatch them out of My Father's hand" — Jesus Christ, John 10:27-29. And that's precisely why Paul would write: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* — concluding with some of the most triumphant words in all of Scripture: *For I am convinced that [nothing] in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord — Paul, Romans 8:31, 39b.*

- 2) The truth of who Jesus is and what He came to do continues to be denied — both because His word is not believed, and because of the ramifications if who He is and what He did is true. What He said to the disciples in the upper room has profound meaning: *"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.* A huge percentage of people say that believe in "God." But when the question turns to what to do about Jesus Christ, the response is much less enthusiastic. Why? Because Jesus Christ made God tangible — and specific. We can't form Jesus to be like we think He should be. He came and lived the life He was supposed to live, the only life He could live, to create a salvation opportunity for all who would believe. It is because of the specific life He lived that He could say: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" — Jesus Christ, John 14:6.* The complete uniqueness of His life can be denied, but nothing makes the life of Christ any less true.
- 3) Satan's tricks are old and worn. He only has one card to play: Lies. The Pharisees' response to Christ is a great example of this. You want another one? How about worry? We all do it to one degree or another. But worry is like an alarm going off; it is meant to drive us to our knees and give away that worry to God, for Him to own and for Him to do to His good and perfect pleasure. Worry held onto is buying one of Satan's lies — that God is not all-powerful, that I had better take care of this myself, with my own ideas, with my own strength, that ultimately God cannot take care of me (even if He said He could). The fact is, none of Satan's lies are new. But they work because we believe them quicker than what we believe God can do.

CONCLUSION

When I was in boot camp, the drill instructors would have us practice any of a large number of things — close order drill, hand-to-hand combat, whatever — over and over and over again. The idea wasn't simply filling time, but rather to get us to the point that the proper response became instinctive; we didn't even have to think about it. In certain combat situations, being able to respond instinctively, without even having to think about it, could be the difference between life and death.

That's why we keep talking as much about Christ's works as about His words — that being reminded of His great power in all situations would become instinctive, without even having to think about it. Take Jesus with you — 24/7. Study Him, talk with Him, reflect on Him, over and over and over again. He wants to be our default response; He wants to be our instinct. This side of heaven, there will never be a better way to live. Let's pray!