

Matthew 9:18-34: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 9 verses 18 to 34 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.

And Jesus rose and followed him with his disciples. 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. For she said to herself, If I only touch his garment, I will be made well. Jesus turned, and seeing her, he said, Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well.

And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, Go away, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.

And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

[1:03] And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, Have mercy on us, son of David. 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. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done to you. And their eyes were opened, and Jesus sternly warned them, See that no one knows about it.

But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. 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. But the Pharisees said, He casts out demons by the prince of demons.

In this section of Matthew 9, we reach the conclusion of the series of ten miracles, or signs, that Jesus performs. Here we have a number of events hot on the heels of each other, one thing after another.

[2:06] And in the case of the woman with the issue of blood and the girl restored to life, mixed up together. Jesus has just been identified as the bridegroom. But now there is the healing of two women.

These are two entangled events, even more so in Luke, where not only has the woman been suffering from her condition for 12 years, a detail that we have here, but the girl is 12 years old too. That number suggests a connection between both characters and Israel. Now, both characters connected with Israel, being women, and Christ having just been identified as the bridegroom, it might suggest that there's something more going on here.

Christ is the one that comes to deliver the bride, and to raise daughter Jerusalem to new life. Jesus is asked by the ruler here to come and visit his daughter, and lay his hand on her so that she might be delivered from death.

This is a grand request. This is not something that Christ has been asked to do to this point, to deliver someone from death itself. This is a more climactic sign or action.

[3:10] Jesus is going to deliver Israel from its death, daughter Zion, raise her up to new life. But as he's going on the way, he's interrupted. And he's interrupted by a woman who suffered from this discharge of blood.

And she touches the hem of Jesus' garment. Now, the hem of the garment was an important part of the garment, because it was the part of the garment that had the tassels on. And those tassels had a symbolic significance given to them within the book of Numbers.

In chapter 15, verse 37, The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner.

And it shall be a tassel for you to look at, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

[4 : 16] I am the Lord your God. And this law connected the garments of Israel with the garments of the high priest, and the garments of the high priest were in turn connected with the tabernacle, as a sort of house as garment.

The high priest had these sorts of blue tassels on his garment, and now Israel also have those as well. And those tassels connect their garments to the meaning of the high priest, as one who represents Israel's holy status to the Lord.

And every Israelite was supposed to have that represented on their garments. Jesus' garments are significant. They represent his office. They represent his person. We can see this in the transfiguration, where there is a transfiguration of the garments, not just of Christ himself.

His garments are taken from him at the crucifixion. He's stripped of his garments. He's wrapped in linen clothes and laid in the tomb. He's wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger.

And in other occasions we read about his garments. His garments are clearly significant for representing what's happening to him, and who he is. Here, as life flows into the woman and heals her of her ailment, we see that Christ himself is the source of life.

[5 : 35] She has an issue of blood. He has an issue of life. Life flows out of him, and it gives life to others. You could maybe think about the blue tassels as like rivers out of Eden, like the rivers that are connected with the living water in the book of John.

Jesus is the one who gives life. Life flows from him. There's also the fact that within the Old Testament, the wing of the garment was connected with marriage. To take the woman under the wing was to take her as your wife.

And Jesus has the wing of his garment touched by this woman, which suggests again that the bridal themes that have been playing just beforehand have not ceased.

They're still important. There's something incongruous within this setting. We have the flute players. Now, why mention the flute players? They're not mentioned in the other Gospel accounts.

It's a strange detail to include. And the flute players seem to be out of keeping with the character of the event. They are playing this music that seems to be more appropriate for a dance than for a funeral.

[6 : 43] And Christ moves them away. A few chapters further in Matthew, I think we might have a clue to the meaning of this. In Matthew chapter 11 verse 16, Jesus says, But to watch till I compare this generation.

It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates. We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

Within that passage, we have many of the same themes that we've seen in this passage come up again. And again, there is this incongruity that's highlighted.

The flute that's being played and people not dancing. The dirge and people not mourning. And the flute here is connected with dancing, which seems a strange thing to have at a funeral.

[7 : 45] But in some sense, the incongruity is appropriate because Jesus is the bridegroom come to the scene. He's the bridegroom that's released the woman from her ailment when she touched his garment, the hem of his garment.

And now he's the one that's going to raise daughter Israel to life. So these wedding and dirge themes collide. The flute players are acting in a way that's out of keeping with what's taken place, the death of a young girl.

But there's a level of irony here because Jesus is acting in a way that actually is more appropriate to flute playing. Jesus is the one who's bringing in new life. He's the one who's the bridegroom that's come on the scene.

And at the end of this miracle, as in the other ones within this series of miracles, Jesus' fame spreads. People in the surrounding regions are starting to hear about who this man Jesus is and his fame and reputation is starting to spread.

Following this, Jesus heals two blind men. And once again, this involves persistent faith. Jesus does not heal straight away. He presents obstacles to these blind men to prove their faith.

[8 : 51] They stubbornly persist. And as they persist, they are healed. Their sight is restored. And even though they are instructed not to do so, they spread the fame of Jesus even further throughout that district.

Once again, there's a connection between this miracle and the miracle that immediately succeeds. The miracles come in rapid succession, one thing after another. And often, without one thing being finished, the next begins.

Jesus is acting in a way that has an urgency and a speed and a suddenness to it. And reading through this section, it's important that we have some sense of the urgency and the speed with which things are happening.

Things are happening with a rapidity that suggests something about the kingdom of God itself. And as he's going away, behold, a demon-possessed man whose mute is brought to him. Once again, this is someone who's being brought to him for healing.

We've seen a number of cases of this so far. Jesus is often requested to heal someone on behalf of someone else. This is a further reminder that Jesus works with groups of people, not just isolated individuals, each having faith for themselves.

[9 : 57] Jesus is healing and delivering people as they are brought by others to him. Pray for your friends. Pray for people in your family. Pray for people in your neighborhood. Pray for people who may not be able to come to Christ themselves.

Because Christ works through other people bringing people to him. The condition of the demon-possessed man could perhaps be compared to that of Israel. Israel, wherever Jesus goes, he sees Israel oppressed by demons, even in the synagogues themselves.

You could maybe think back to the story of David and Saul. David is anointed by the Spirit and an evil spirit troubles and oppresses Saul. But then David goes to Saul and brings him relief as he plays for him.

Jesus is going throughout Israel and he is bringing relief as the man of the Spirit, as the son of David, to a nation that is suppressed by Satan. The Pharisees, however, accuse Jesus, accusing him of one of the worst things of all.

They say that he is acting by the power of Satan. An accusation that aligns Christ with the one whose very works he is going to give everything to destroy. This is an accusation beyond all accusations.

[11 : 08] It's an accusation that declares Christ to be the absolute opposite of what he actually is. A question to consider. In chapters 8 and 9 of the book of Matthew, Jesus is going through a series of actions.

Actions and healings, exorcisms and miracles. And these actions, as they occur, serve to highlight who Jesus is. They serve to illustrate the character of the kingdom.

They serve to describe the spread of Christ's reputation. And they also serve to highlight the opposition that Jesus is facing. And the accusation that arises at the end of it highlights just how sharp the division between Christ and the Pharisees has become.

Exploring this series of actions on these different fronts, What are some of the things that most stand out to you about the development that Matthew has highlighted between the end of the Sermon on the Mount and the beginning of the sending out of the twelve disciples?

