

Introduction

Last week my goal was to preach a regular sermon on Matthew 9.18-35. Today my goal is to preach a communion sermon on this text as we celebrate the Christian Passover feast. Approaching the text in this dual way has been both challenging and profitable for me and I trust it will be that for you as well.

The emphasis last time was on the gospel that the Lord Jesus gave us through His miracles, so I called it, “The *Gospel of Jesus in His Miracles*.” Today, accent is on the Lord Jesus who gave us this gospel through His miracles, and here the emphasis is on “The Gospel of *Jesus in His Miracles*.” We are here today to think about the Lord Jesus Himself in a distinct way that appropriately goes with communion as celebration because the bridegroom is present with us in a distinct way. He is working for our good through this means of grace in a distinct way.

If we concentrate on the Lord Jesus in the unfolding of the passage, we get glimpses of His compassion that runs through the narrative like an underground spring; it is there all along, but suddenly erupts in ways that call for special comment (this is how I read Matthew’s comment about the compassion of Jesus, 9.36). If we connect His compassion with His work of preaching-teaching-healing, then our focus for today becomes, “Jesus, Our Compassionate Teacher.” He loves by teaching. He teaches with love. Thus, we can consider the display of His teaching love in each miracle with the goal of remembering *Him*.

1A. His teaching love in healing the woman with a blood disease

In a fascinating account (9.20-22), a woman came to Jesus in her suffering and tried to receive His blessing without anyone knowing it (in a “mute” way), including Christ. She had a very misinformed perspective, a misinformed faith. Her view verged on the magical as she thought to receive healing by touching the edge of His garment. This view is not in line with the coming of the new garment in the coming of the unshrunk cloth (Mat 9.16). Her action crossed the line from the unclean to the clean in a way that would make Jesus unclean. She involved Him, no doubt unwittingly, in her uncleanness.

How does Jesus respond to her ignorance, even her shy stupidity? Does He rebuke her? How does He deal with the fact that, though unnoticed by those around Him, she brought Him into the realm of the unclean? He shows some anger this context, so does He respond to her with weary anger that puts her in her place as some kind of foolish woman? (Like why did you not come to me directly and ask, seek, and knock?) If Jesus did not have love in His heart, then He would have responded to her with wearisome sharpness. Instead, He showed compassion. He did so by being gentle, patient and kind in His dealings with her. Lovingly, He informed her faith (His teaching is corrective; correcting is loving). He encouraged her, by saying, “**take heart**” (9.22), by calling her a covenant child (daughter), and by; healing her. He could have “chewed her out” just as He could “chew us out” for our ignorance. Like this woman, we trust Him, but we mix this faith with some superstitious act like touching a garment (or worse, like wearing crosses and placing statues of dead saints on our dashboards as a good luck charms, or giving to a TV ministry or to a church with a lottery mentality). Contrary to what we might expect, Jesus gives comfort to those who trust Him, even though their faith may be very weak and wrongly informed. Despite her embarrassment, weakness, poverty, and poor theology, He told her to take heart He called her daughter. This is His teaching love for a covenant child.

2A. His teaching love in the resurrection event

With regard to the girl that died, Jesus followed the ruler, sternly dismissed the mourners, and raised the girl from the dead. He teaches in three ways here.

1B. He teaches by silent following love

The way Jesus approached death is telling and thus instructive. In silence (per the record), Jesus went with the man following him until He got to the heart of the man's need. By this action, we learn that Jesus lovingly listens and follows our thoughts to where they take Him, to our deepest needs and concerns. Silent following love surrounds His teaching (He is attentive, following, and listening as a teacher, in meeting needs as our compassionate teacher).

2B. He teaches by angry questioning love

At the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus asked an unusual question, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping?" The Lord uses questions often in relating to people; this is teaching love though it often causes more of a commotion.

Here, Jesus asks a question that seems odd because it has an overwhelmingly obvious answer. He voiced this striking inquiry and had it recorded for good reason. The "odd" question reveals (teaches) a radical contrast between Jesus and the mourners in attitude and thought regarding death. They weep because of death and Jesus refuses to mourn (He is the bridegroom), they ridicule His claim that this girl's death is temporary, as if she is sleeping. The oddness of the question and the harsh reaction of the mourners accents and highlights the prophetic office of Christ.

To be sure, His question draws attention to the fact of the girl's death. The reality of her death is what makes the question of Jesus sound odd, and it is the fact that drives the mourners who know by experience the pain, the finality, the indignity and the irreversibility of death.

However, by this question, He sends us back to the OT because what makes this question seem odd is that these Jews do not know their Bibles. If you know the Hebrew Bible, then you know that God is not God of the dead but of the living. You know what Job knew that His redeemer lives and that, though worms in the grave eat his body, still, in his flesh he shall see God, you know that Daniel associated sleep with death because of the resurrection, and most of all in this example, you know that Jesus is Elisha. As we will see in a couple of weeks in the OT study, Elijah and Elisha represent John the Baptist and Jesus respectively (John is Elijah in spirit and power, Lk 1.17, preparing the way for Jesus). Of the many miracles Elisha performed, one that stands out is the raising of the Shunammite widow's son from the dead (2 Ki 4). Some unusual actions occur in the account, but one thing is for sure, the Lord's prophets look death in the eyes, literally, eyeball to eyeball! In the spirit and power of Elisha, Jesus looks death in the eyes.

Now we are ready to focus on His anger with regard to the flute players. It is not that He dislikes their music. He may be angry at the commercialization of death as He was angry at the commercialization of the temple. However, it is more reasonable to take the anger in this account in a way that is similar to His anger at the grave of Lazarus. Jesus is showing us a side of His person, a tendency to become angry, that is a most comforting anger. It is comforting to know about His anger because *He becomes passionately angry at sin and death*. The fact of death, its reality and what it causes in the pain, suffering, confusion, turmoil, sorrow, grief, and mourning angers our Lord. His anger moves Him to act on our behalf and identify with our diseases and defilements. When we are overwhelmed by the noisy confusion caused by death, it is good to know that Jesus gets angry about it and His anger stirs Him up to do what is necessary to save us from the sting of death. Like the Lazarus context, Jesus shows Himself to be a conquering warrior whose strength of emotion matches His power of will. If He has such passion, such angry love, then it is "for sure" that you and I will win the war against sin and death because Jesus did not come to save souls; He came to save sinners, body and soul.

3B. He teaches by messy self-sacrificing love

The way Jesus healed the girl is telling. How He healed is teaching. He took her by the hand. As with the leper, Jesus crossed the line from the clean to the unclean, from the living to the dead, to give cleansing and life. Remarkably, lovingly, Jesus attaches Himself, literally, physically, bodily, and ceremonially to the unclean and the dead. That is how He saves. He does

not save from a distance, not in a way that keeps His hands clean. Saving sinners is messy. This is dirty business; it is bloody business. Jesus has such love that He gets into the mess with us in order to bring us out from death to life. Physical death is an uncleanness of maximal intensity because it is the ultimate consequence of sin on the human body. In saving us from our sin, Jesus saves us from physical death as well. He does it by covenant love, self-sacrificing love, “getting involved” and messy love. This is the saving teaching love of Jesus! The compassion He showed the crowds is the compassion He showed case by case. His *self-sacrificing love* reaches across the centuries to you and me as His covenant children. He taught that gospel for us.

3A. His teaching love: making the blind men wait (9.27-31)

It is love that makes the blind men wait for His healing touch. When you try to step back and get into the shoes of these blind men, it might seem that Jesus is unfeeling and cold toward them. They cry out aloud for mercy, no doubt for the mercy of healing: they followed, cried aloud, petitioned for mercy, and identified Him as the Son of David. Some time passed as Jesus “passed on from there” with the two blind men following Him, until He finally reached another house, which He entered. That the blind men continued to follow suggests a picture of two people tagging along just able to keep up (perhaps with someone’s help). Thus, they came to Him in the house. Then Jesus spoke to them. What He did was call for a confession of faith upon which He granted them healing that was “according to” their faith.

What do we learn from the delay of Jesus in responding to the blind men? He reveals Himself as our teacher again by questioning them to elicit their confession of faith. This call for confession and profession helps us understand the delay. We get a picture here of Jesus nurturing us along in our faith. We can infer that they expressed faith when they sought mercy from Him as the Son of David, but Jesus more or less ignored them. It is as if He did not acknowledge their faith, but by making their following more difficult and making them confess their faith before healing them, tested, developed, and grew their faith. In other words, Jesus as our teacher nurtures our faith; He nurtures us in the OT, He nurtures us in our experiences including how He delays to grant us the enlightenment of the eyes of our hearts (He is sovereign, Sabbath Lord).

4A. His teaching love in freeing the tongue of the mute (9.32-34)

Without much elaboration, the account shows us that our teacher corrects demonic distortion and sinful silence.

There is the literal loosening of the tongue, but the action is symbolic and instructive. The state of being mute symbolizes the blocking of truth that occurs in our fallen world through demonic deception. Thus, it symbolizes the sinful silence of the human family in not giving praise and honor to Jesus Christ the Lord of glory. While silent regarding the glory of God, people still speak, but it is muted speech (“mute-speech”) because they do so in a way that is consistent with their idolatry. Again, unbelievers do not praise Jesus when a hummingbird fascinates them. Hence, all their talk reflects how consumed they are with treasures on earth.

Therefore, as our prophet of prophets, Jesus frees us for speaking, for voicing our praise with one another and to the Lord. He frees us to glorify God because that is His supreme goal.

Finally, we get a glimpse *at Christ* by the opposition of the Pharisees who attributed His miracles to “the prince of demons” (9.34). *Consider what this shows us about our Savior.* It reveals our Lord’s commitment and resolve in fulfilling His mission on earth. He is a determined Savior; through thick and thin, He presses forward doing the will of the Father in the saving of sinners. Regardless of the attitudes of the crowds and religious leaders, Jesus shows determination, boldness, courage, and focus.

Conclusion

Who then is Jesus? What does Matthew tell us about Him in this text? He is the promised prophet. He is Elisha. He is the Savior who crosses the line between the clean and the unclean,

between the living and the dead to cleanse us and make us alive from the dead at the resurrection.

He is the self-sacrificing Savior of sinners.

Jesus is unmoved by ridicule and willing to endure our shame in order to give us honor. He is determined, bold, courageous, and focused on doing the will of God in the saving of sinners (for the glory of God!).

He is willing to die for us to give us life. He is willing to die. Can I say the words? The Lord of glory, son of David, David's greater son, and David's Lord is willing to die! These contrary words give the sound of marvelous music in our ears. Furthermore, He is willing to die in our place by becoming unclean in order to endure the punishment that sin deserves. He attaches Himself to our shame, uncleanness, and death. Thus, His self-sacrificing love shines in our eyes because the gospel that He grants us by His teaching love is a salvation that can only come to us through His death and resurrection. He attached Himself to our uncleanness to endure the punishment of our sins (your sins and my sins!). He can only save us from our weakness, dumbness, blindness, darkness, and death by conquering death in our place in His resurrection. *Thus, in doing these miracles and doing so in the way that He did them Jesus lovingly taught the gospel in word and deed. Thus, He showed, revealed, and taught His loving commitment to save us, His covenant people, from all the consequences of our sins.*

What can we then say to these things?

In a word, we must use our loosened tongues to say, "Thank you Jesus for all you've done, thank you Lord."

Thank you Jesus for teaching me, thank you Lord

For thy love and tender care

For thy word and answered prayer

Thank you Jesus for teaching me, thank you Lord

The songwriter gets close to capturing the sacrificial death of Christ that is due to the greatness of our sins when he says, "How can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me."

Thus, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom as our great teacher. He preached and taught the gospel in both words and deeds by comforting us in our confusion, by asking questions that sound odd, by testing our faith and growing it, by healing the mute, the demon oppressed, the blind, the woman weakened by a blood disease, and the young girl that died.

This is part of owning the Lord's family as our brothers and sisters. Speaking up takes spiritual discipline. It is something that we ought to cultivate at home and at church in the family of God. We ought not to remain mute regarding the things of God if we have been made whole by faith.

Therefore, as our prophet of prophets, Jesus frees us for speaking, for voicing our praise with one another and to the Lord. In this way, He teaches us about audible family prayer both at home and at church. We make a big mistake if we are mute in our homes regarding prayer and the things of the sixty-six books of the Bible. On a daily basis, we ought to voice our hearts together in conversation about the things of God. It is to our shame, if we are mute in this regard at home and at church.

We must say that He is our life (He is my life) and all I have and hope to be is bound up with Him. He is the center of my attraction; He is my all in all. To Him we offer the praise of our lips as sacrifices along with the sacrifice of our very selves. How I love thee! We may say this weakly and with recognition of that weakness, but we must say it nonetheless: Thou art the center of my attraction, thou art my all in all; the realization of my ambition is in thee my Lord divine; o How I love thee, how I adore thee O savior thou are mine.