

Introduction

Today and next week, I want to discuss Matthew 9.18-35. My goal is to preach a regular sermon on this text today and to preach a communion sermon on this text next week when we celebrate Communion, the Christian Passover Meal. Approaching the text in this dual way has been enriching for me and I trust it will be that for you as well.

Much is the same in these two messages, but there is a difference in accent. The two messages have virtually the same title, the difference comes out in what I emphasize (put in italics): we have first “The *Gospel of Jesus in His Miracles*” and then second, “The Gospel of *Jesus in His Miracles*.” In the former, the accent is on the gospel that the Lord Jesus gave us through His miracles. In the latter, accent is on the Lord Jesus who gave us this gospel through His miracles. In the first, we will think about our duties to which Jesus points us by these accounts. In the second, we will think about the Lord Jesus Himself in a distinct way (of course, duties flow from this fountain). Special focus on our Lord appropriately goes with communion celebration because the bridegroom is present with us in a distinct way (cf. Mat 9.15). Today we take up the Gospel in the Miracles exemplified (9.18-34) and summarized (9.35).

1A. The Gospel of Jesus in His Miracles Exemplified (9.18-34)

There are four miracles recorded in this section: 1) the healing of a woman with a blood disease, 2) the raising of a young girl from the dead, 3) the giving of sight to two blind men, and 4) the loosening of the tongue of a man made mute by demon oppression. We have good reason to lump them together because they occur successively in a single day (per the transitional phrases, v. 18, while he was saying these things...the ruler; vs. 19-20, Jesus rose...and behold a woman; v. 27, as they passed on from there, two blind men; v. 32, as they were going...a mute).

These miracles have an interesting introduction. They are introduced in verse 18 against the backdrop of the announcement of new wine and new wineskins, as if Matthew were saying, “come now and have a taste of the new wine, here is a sample, here is another sample, another, and another.” After we have time to sample them, Matthew will then give us a summary of how the new wine of fulfillment brings the gospel to realization (v. 35).

Let’s consider some distinct principles that emerge from each account.

1B. First, we learn that salvation is by faith (we learn about the gospel of salvation)

Literally, Jesus says to the woman with a blood disease, “Your faith saved you” (v.22).

Note the context. A synagogue official came to Jesus with a request for the life of his daughter who just died. Incredible as it may seem, he is requesting her *resurrection*: “come and lay your hand on her and she will live” (v. 18). The man looks past the ceremonial law regarding touching a dead person because of his singular focus on his daughter. Upon hearing the request, Jesus and his disciples went with the man to his home. As they walked along, a woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind the Lord and touched the fringe of His cloak. Her actions were surprising, unexpected, and notable, thus, Matthew says, “Behold, look, take note” (v. 20). In her mind, she reasoned, “if I only touch His garment, I will be made well” (v. 21). Jesus then spoke to her and healed her (v. 22). Interestingly, we have a narrative inside of a narrative as things unfold in quick succession over the course of a miracle working day in the life of our Lord. He performs one miracle while on His way to perform another.

What a marvelous picture. This woman had a blood disease, which left her continuously in a weakened state of health. The other Gospels tell us that the physicians could not help. She had spent all her money only to find herself in worse health and in poverty to boot.

Healing her, Jesus saved her literally and physically and Jesus comments on how she was saved, by faith: “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well” (9.22).

Thus, her faith was genuine though misinformed.

Do you sense the contrast between her thoughts and Jesus’ interpretation of her deliverance? Like the synagogue ruler, she looks past the ceremonial law, which indicates that discharges of blood resulted in uncleanness, and a person who touches the unclean becomes unclean (Lev 15.15; this verse surely applied to either a man or a woman with some kind of disease or wound that hemorrhaged; a woman’s natural menstrual cycle also resulted in ceremonial uncleanness, v. 19f). Furthermore, there is a superstitious element in her perspective, “If I only touch his garment.” But Jesus says, “Even though you have crossed the line from the unclean to the clean, your faith, not a superstitious touch, has saved you.” The nature of her faith brings up something both interesting and comforting. Here is a misinformed faith, yet it is a sincere faith. I suppose what we need to do is emphasize the reference to Christ in her thoughts, “If I only touch *his* garment.” Sincerity does go a long way when directed in simple trust to the Lord Jesus Himself.

Consequently, Jesus encourages her in both word and deed. He healed her despite the confusion, and He spoke to her as a covenant child: “Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well” (has saved you). Although in need of correction, her faith has nevertheless saved her.

Now consider how this account presents the gospel. She is unclean and thus stands in need of sacrifice that represents cleansing from sin (Lev 15. 14-15, a sin offering... and ...atonement; cf. vs. 29-30). Although her touch is quite bold in that she unwittingly includes Jesus in her uncleanness, the great Physician nonetheless declares that she is cleansed by faith. Two things are at work at once: salvation is shown to be by the simplicity of faith and salvation is shown to be by the sacrifice of Christ that is necessary for cleansing.

Thus, we have redemption both accomplished and applied. We learn how salvation is secured, namely, by the sacrifice of Christ in which He took our uncleanness (He became unclean!), and suffered its punishment in order to save us from that very punishment. We also learn how Jesus applies salvation to His covenant children, namely, by faith. If you trust the Lord Jesus, trust Him, entrust yourself to Him, then it can be correctly said of you, “your faith has made you whole” (you are whole now and not yet, you have it now in part with a guarantee of the fullness yet to come, and you have this wholeness by faith).

2B. Second, death is marvelously overcome for the Christian

This victory over death is an awesome and marvelous result of the coming of the new wine (vs. 23-26). Nevertheless, and surprisingly, there is cruel opposition.

After the record of this woman’s healing, the larger narrative regarding the dead girl picks up again. Then Jesus went on to the synagogue official’s house where He found “the flute players and the crowd making a commotion” (v. 23). Included among these people, no doubt, were “professional” mourners who came in large numbers because of the prominence of the synagogue ruler.

Tension emerged immediately between Jesus and these mourners when He told them (sternly, even angrily) to “go away” because “the girl is not dead but sleeping.” Should we take this in a literal or figurative way? Jesus is speaking figuratively for we know that the girl had died. Death is real and it is described figuratively by analogy with sleep (cf. Jn 11.11-14).

Thus, death is overcome in the era of the new wine and the accomplishment of salvation by the coming of Christ. The language of sleep is not intended to teach the state of man in death. It is not an argument for the unconsciousness of the intermediate state as some kind of soul sleep until the resurrection. Rather, what we have here is a distinct way of viewing death that results from linking it with resurrection. Death is sleep when viewed in relation to the resurrection. That is, death, in light of the new wine Christ came to secure, is not the end as something final; the state of death is not permanent. For those who are the objects of Christ’s covenant love, death,

though real and unnatural, is like sleep. The believer's death is a sleep-like death in Jesus' hands and under His loving care (the body looks like it is sleeping and it is sleeping because it will wake up at the resurrection).

Immortality has come to light in the coming of the kingdom. This is an accent that has the tasty flavor of new wine. Without describing the state of death itself, this language reeks with the warm overtones and comforts of putting a child to bed. With a hug, a kiss, a tucking in, and a "good, night" we say the precious words, "I will see you in the morning." Death has comforting overtones. This is another look at death. Jesus raised this child from the dead, and His language associated with the deed gives a unique definition of death for the people of God. *Death is a temporary state, like sleep. It is a time of rest with the Lord until resurrection morning.* This perspective on death gave me my answer to my mother on her deathbed when she asked painfully, "What is going to happen to me." The only words I could find were, "it is time, Mom, for you to enter into rest with the Lord." To be with the Lord with your body resting in the grave is another foretaste of eternal Sabbath rest (though the loss of the body is unnatural, it is still better to be with the Lord waiting to be clothed upon with immortality, 2 Co 5.1-5).

Those who rely on what they can see and touch and who vie for eating, drinking, and "merry-making today for tomorrow we die," wrestle in a hopeless struggle for survival that ends without fail in death. They live and die with no hope as they try somehow to make death something natural in the regular and normal course of things in a purely naturalistic universe. Consistently and in utter futility of thought, they must make death something natural, and evil something good when man, in his inhumanity to man, purges the human race in the "necessary" survival of the fittest by genocide. This is a repugnant philosophy; it is repugnant myth making where people bury their heads in the sand while waiting for others bury their bodies in the grave.

However, the Christian does not hide his head in the sand. He faces the pain and unnaturalness of death squarely (with its indignity). He knows the Creator and redeemer, Jesus of Nazareth, who holds in His hand the keys of death and hell. Because of the work of Christ, death is a passage to glory, an entrance into rest with Christ to await the Day of Judgment and resurrection. It is like sleep, the death of the body is temporary until Jesus grants resurrection glory to the whole man. Thus, He that believes in Christ shall live, even if he dies; everyone who believes in Christ shall live and never die (cf. Jn 11.25-26).

Returning to the narrative, we find that the reaction to Jesus is surprising, crude, and even cruel. The professional mourners laughed at Jesus in a very strong manner: they laughed Him down, laughed Him to scorn (Mat 9.24). From their perspective, profession, and experience, Jesus' comments were so far fetched, so far a field, and ridiculous as to render them laughable. This is quite an ugly picture, mourning turns to spiteful laughter. Perhaps, they despise the fact that they are losing money as mourners for hire (cf. Ridderbos, Matthew, 189, "They earned their keep by bewailing the power and the irreversibility of death."). What a reflection on the ambivalence of human nature for what *true* mourning over death turns so quickly to laughing scorn? Like empiricists today (see and touch people that only believe what they see, touch, weigh, and measure), they laugh with haughty and condescending laughter at the idea of resurrection because it is not something they have observed.

But Jesus was forceful in His words and His actions (Go away...they were put out). He insisted that they all leave the house. When they left, He took the girl by the hand and she arose from the dead and the news spread "through all that district" (Mat 9.26). What can we say about this? We can only bow our heads and try to take in the astounding event: she arose from the dead. This fact, by this Savior, reeks with gospel-good-news by His death and resurrection.

3B. Third, the eyes of faith see the real world.

As they passed on from the ruler's house, two blind men cried out to the Lord Jesus for mercy. They followed Him into another house and Jesus asked them to confess their faith after which He healed them:

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." ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened (Mat 9.38-30a).

Through their faith, Jesus opened their eyes so that they could see the real world. Man in his fallen state does not see reality. When a Christian and a non-Christian look at the world, they do not see the same things; notably, even those who see with their physical eyes are blind. Without faith in Christ, the natural man lives an illusion. He dreams that things will all work out in the end for his good. He worships the creature instead of the Creator; he commits idolatry by fixing his hope and all his priorities on earthly things. A beautiful sunset gives him a sense of awe, but he does not give praise to the Lord Jesus. In contrast, the Christian has restoration in the image and likeness of God. He sees the real world as God structured and defines it. He thinks God's thoughts after Him in forming his vision of the world. He reasons as the analogue of God instead of autonomously (analogically not autonomously). He sees a hummingbird and gives praise to the Lord Jesus.

Interestingly, the blind men disobeyed the Lord immediately after He healed them. He instructed them to tell no one and they went about telling everyone! Some comments are in order. First, Jesus instructs people to maintain silence in order to manage the crowds and the reactions of His murderous opponents. Second, it is striking to read in one line about the Lord's command and in the next line about man's disobedience to it. There is a subtle picture of us all here. All too often, we hear His commands and then we walk away and forget them. This picture is a gracious warning to us, to hear what we read, that is, to obey. Again, true discipleship is active in the determined pursuit of obedience.

4B. Fourth, genuine speech is a triumph of grace

In verses 32-34, we have the case of a mute person who is demon possessed. His inability to speak arises from satanic power, from antichrist, from the deception of spiritual wickedness in high places. Nonetheless, and wondrously, by the power of Christ, he spoke.

Genuine speech, actual speech, true speech, the ability to speak in our fallen world with all the demonic deception that surrounds us is a triumph of God's grace in Christ.

However, His opponents attribute His work to the prince of demons! (9.34). Amazingly, Jesus is laughed to scorn and called demonic for the good that He did, the astounding saving good that He did.

Thus, the four examples give us a cross section of Christ's miraculous saving work: salvation is by faith, death is overcome, and his people are enabled to see the real world and to speak about it in truth.

2A. The Gospel of Jesus Summarized (v. 35)

Verse 35 frames and summarizes the miraculous saving work of Christ (it actually reaches back to 4.23 and takes the Sermon on the Mount into its perspective; 4.23 and 9.35 form a literary framing of the things reported in between; this is a reading cue).

The phrases in this verse define, explain, and thus "exegete" each other (from exegesis, which means to bring out the meaning). Teaching in the synagogues involves gospel proclamation, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. Furthermore, teaching/preaching the gospel involves healing people of every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. In His teaching/preaching/healing, Jesus gave us the gospel message, and He gave it in word and deed (cf. Jn 12.37-38; Mat 11.4-5). Miracles give definition to the gospel. They embody it. The gospel of the kingdom is earthy and earthly; it is real world oriented. The gospel pertains to flesh and blood, sickness and disease, sin and the unnatural humiliation of man in death. By the miracles of Christ, we see ever so clearly that *the salvation of the kingdom that He came to secure by His death and resurrection concerns the saving of the whole man. It concerns the saving of man in his wholeness by restoration from all the effects of the fall.*

Thus, the miracles define, embody, and flesh out the gospel of salvation in Christ. They teach and preach. They give rich, diverse, and penetrating illustration of the content of the gospel message. They not only show us the power of Jesus to save, but they also show us the nature of the salvation that He came with astounding power to give to His bride (cf. 9.15).

Gospel promise surfaces throughout the miraculous narratives. Those who trust in Jesus have light and life, wholeness, salvation, perception of the real world, and genuine speech that praises and glorifies God. Believers in Christ have the sure promise of the redemption of the body and the freedom of glory as the covenant children of Christ.

What we have in effect is a time-released stage by stage and point by point *a fortiori* argument (the much more argument). If Jesus in His state of humiliation can do these miracles that save the whole man, how much more is He able to do what these miracles promise in the time of His exaltation. If Jesus could do these things before the accomplishment of salvation, how much more must He be able to do them after His accomplishment of salvation. In Paul, this becomes this argument, “If we are saved by His death, how much more is it certain that we will be saved by His resurrection life” (Rom 5.9-10). Thus, if Jesus has brought you out from a leprous death and the paralyzing effects of sin, then He will accomplish all that this promises for the rest of your journey on this earth and beyond it into the glory of heaven. If He defeated the schemes of demons, then the gates of hell will not stand in your way of entry to glory (you will smash through them, they will not stand!).

Here is the marvelous good news in the teaching-preaching-healing work of Christ: each miracle proclaims the certainty and glory of your salvation. The healing of Peter’s mother in law promises your entry to glory, your rising up from weakness to full strength. The giving of sight to the blind and speech to the mute promises you many blessings per the Sermon on the Mount (per the framing of 4.23-9.35), that you will see God, and that you will find the words to praise and glorify Him according to His worthiness (cf. Mat 5.16). The healing of blood diseases promises restoration from the deadly crippling and the defiling effects of sin. Healing those with severe pain promises the coming of the time when all tears will be wiped away and there will be no more suffering, dying, and death. The raising of a youth from the dead promises your resurrection from the dead for eternal Sabbath rest with Christ your Sabbath king. Again, as Paul put it, the body is subject to dying and death because of sin but the Holy Spirit will give us resurrection life because of the righteousness of Christ (Rom 8.10 puts Mat 9.18-34, resurrection and all, into a single verse).

Conclusion

What can we do per these astounding events recorded in Matthew 9? We must entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. We must seek to inform our faith (without superstition), pursue obedience with passion (not hearing then forgetting; applying the Sermon on the Mount), live as people who know that they are alive from the dead, and speak His praise for the cleansing and forgiveness that He secured by His death and resurrection in our place.