

Text: Matthew 8:1-34

Title: Divine Power Manifested

Truth: Jesus displayed divine power

Date/Location: September 8, 12 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Please notice the big picture of the gospel of Matthew in terms of the major events that it covers:

1. The birth of Christ.
2. John the Baptist's ministry of repentance.
3. Jesus' baptism, temptation and opening preaching ministry.
4. Jesus calls some disciples and preaches the gospel of the kingdom.
5. Sermon on the Mount. People see that Jesus teaches with authority.
6. Chapter 8 records the healing of a leper, centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, demon-possession, various sicknesses, calming of a storm, and casts demon into swine. These events gathered a large following for Jesus, but true discipleship required more than following because of sensationalism or novelty. Rather than encouraging people to follow Him, He described the difficulties associated with following Him.
7. Chapter 9 continues with forgiving the sins of a paralyzed man, and healing him on top of that, the call of more disciples, the novel way Jesus ministered (to sinners!), more healing, resurrection from the dead, and the healing of sight for two blind men, and opening the speech of a demon-possessed mute man.

This is the section that we find ourselves in these notes. The miracles are certainly interesting in and of themselves as displays of divine power over common and rare diseases, weather phenomenon, and the realm of demons. These are expressions of the infinite power of Christ that even includes raising the dead, of which He Himself was partaker within a two or three years of these events.

But the miracles are far more than interesting displays of God's power. They serve to elicit faith, strengthen and reward faith, and even moreso, to authenticate Jesus' authority as divine teacher.

I. Cleansing the Leper, 8:1-4

A. Desire and faith for cleansing. This amounts to a desire for healing, but notice that *cleansing* does more than *healing*. It provides someone a way back into society and to the temple to worship God. To be permanently unclean was basically to be un-human. To be cleansed was to be brought back to life, in essence, to family and friends and society.

Notice also the faith of the leper. He said if you are willing—and that was in some level of question—but what was not questioned is this: “You are able to make me clean.” The leper knew that Jesus was powerful enough to fix his problem. That is amazing. He must have heard of the power of Jesus prior to this (4:23-25).

For our day, I'm not going to suggest that Jesus will heal your physical afflictions right now, because the Lord is not here, nor is any other miracle-worker present, to heal them. The Lord did these miracles to authenticate his teaching, to show that He is indeed the Son of God with power. That is no longer necessary, so it no longer happens in this age. But do you want to be “healed” of whatever afflicts you—some torment, worry, sin, addiction, etc.? Do you really want it—and do you have the faith that God can fix the problem? You know you cannot on your own fix your own leper's spots, right (Jer. 13:23).

B. Willingness to heal. Jesus was willing to heal the man and cleanse Him, and He straight-away did so. This was no medical healing or sleight of hand—it was a miracle. God intervened in an unusual way against the bacteria in this man's body and killed them, and restored damaged flesh and nerves.

C. Post-healing instructions. Jesus told the man to do two things:

1. Keep his mouth shut. Mark 1:45 records that the man disobeyed Jesus. This led to Jesus being hindered in his ministry in urban areas because the crowds were too big and unwieldy to be able to minister effectively. Thus why Jesus told him to keep mum, so

that Jesus would not be mobbed with people wanting more sensational healings and fishes and loaves instead of mobbing him for his teaching. Human nature being what it is, we should not be surprised that people would want the healings and food, and we should not be surprised that the former leper disobeyed. We can be sympathetic: he was healed of a probably years-long affliction that was totally debilitating and probably left him as a beggar. Now he could live again! He was excited. Would to God that we were so excited about our faith that someone had to tell us to keep our mouths shut!

2. Follow the prescriptions in Lev. 14:1-8 (and down through 14:32). Notice that Jesus commanded the man to follow the Law of Moses. This is because they were still living under the regime of the Law, and as men they were obligated to keep it. The purpose of doing this was to be a testimony to the priest(s). He could tell the priests that he had been healed, but combined with the previous phrase “see that you tell no one” I would have to err on the side of caution and say that the man was not to tell even the priests about Jesus’ role in the healing. The testimony would be to the work of God generally (not Christ specifically) in the life of the leper.

II. Curing a Centurion’s Servant, 8:5-13 9/12/2021

- A. Desire for healing. Again, another person wants Jesus to come and heal a very sick person—someone who is paralyzed and dreadfully tormented. During those days, they knew suffering and torment. For him to say that this person was *dreadfully* tormented is very bad. He may have had pain at a 10 out of 10. He was unable to move. It was an unbearable situation to be in, and unbearable to watch someone suffer so. Note that the human suffering that we observe is not lost on the Lord.

The centurion was pleading. We do not know for sure all of the man’s motivations, just like we don’t know that the leper was perfectly motivated out of faith and love for God. But we cannot criticize him given what we know at this point.

There is a big assumption here, and that is that Jesus could in fact heal servant. There is another fact underlying this, namely that the centurion cared for his servant. He was not a heartless Roman soldier whose slaves were mere property that could be disposed of without consequence. This guy is a “good master” relatively speaking. We have to keep in mind that he was a man of his time. Having servants was as natural as it is today in India to have servants.

- B. When Jesus offered to come to heal the servant, the centurion did not want Jesus to come to his home. He was not worthy—for sure true. He was humble enough to know that. Good start. Perhaps he is not far from the kingdom of God.
- C. What the centurion suggested was that Jesus simply speak a word and it would be done. He had such confidence in the power and authority of Jesus that he figured Jesus could simply speak—again true. His reference point was the authority that he himself had, being able to speak a command and it was done by those under him. This reminds me of God, who spoke the creation into existence (Psalm 33:9).
- D. This utter confidence in Jesus, He labels as faith. That is trust—Jesus can do it. This kind of faith He did not even find in Israel, but he found it in a Gentile Roman soldier, someone almost as bad as a Samaritan in the eyes of the Jewish culture.
- E. This prompted Jesus to explain that many Gentiles would come into the kingdom of God, but Israelites (“sons of the kingdom,” meaning those to whom the kingdom was supposed to belong) would be thrown out into everlasting punishment.

Please do be careful when you read this that “sons of the kingdom” does not become in your mind “people who will actually end up in the kingdom of God.” They will not. Being cast out into outer darkness is a clear statement of divine wrath against their unbelief. They are NOT saved people. The word “son” does not mean born again here; it means someone associated with and who was called to be and supposed to be in the kingdom, but is not because of a lack of faith. They were physical sons of Abraham but

not spiritual sons of Abraham. See Hebrews 3:19 regarding them, and 3:14 about ourselves.

F. Jesus closed this interaction with a command to the centurion to go; his request had been done. The servant was healed. Torment was gone, paralysis was gone, pain gone, whatever the underlying cause was—gone. The centurion was right that Jesus could speak a word and it would be done.

III. Healing Peter’s Mother-in-Law, 8:14-15

A. Jesus has power over not only bacterial infections and grievous illnesses, but also other things like fevers (and mothers-in-law!).

B. Peter had a mother-in-law. That means he had a wife. That means the apostles were not celibate because even the “chief apostle” was not.¹ That reminds us that OT priests were not celibate either (Lev. 21:7, 13). All of this means that New Testament pastors are not required to be celibate. It is also not wise for most pastors to be celibate. It is required that they rule their own households well, so therefore they must have a household to rule (1 Timothy 3:4-5), therefore typically they should be married, not unmarried!

C. She was sick with a fever. She may have had a short-term fever due to a bacteria or viral infection, or been sick with a cancer or other serious disease. In any case, she was lying down, which means it was a bad fever.

D. The Lord touched the woman’s hand in order to heal her. He did the same to the leper in 8:3, but he only spoke a word in 8:13 to accomplish the miracle there.

E. The healing was so immediate and thorough that she got up and began to play the role of hostess, likely helping her daughter prepare dinner for the special guest that had just arrived at their home.

¹ Peter did not see himself as over the other apostles. He naturally rises to prominence in the gospels because he often speaks for the others, too often impetuously. And God used that character trait, but it was not cause to elevate Peter to some place of prominence in church history. “I myself am also a man,” he would reiterate (Acts 10:26).

F. The whole episode, which would have been forever remembered in the lives of the people impacted, is recorded in a mere two verses of Scripture. It is stated so matter-of-factly and without sensationalism that it was like a normal thing that Jesus did. No surprise, but we should be.

IV. Casting Out Demons and Healing Many Sick People, 8:16-

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- A. After the evening meal, the village came to life with people who came to the house seeking help from the mysterious man who could heal. They had heard of Jesus's miracles and wanted to receive some benefit from Him. So they brought folks who needed help.
- B. Evil spirits were removed with a word. They could not be touched or "yanked out" of a person, so only a word was used. That is power.
- C. He healed all the sick there. These were probably mostly people with long-term illnesses because there would be fewer temporary illnesses at any given time.
- D. Matthew now offers a quotation of Isaiah 53:4 saying that these words were fulfilled in Jesus's ministry. This is mis-used as the basis for healing ministries today, either purported miraculous ministries or medical missions whose ministry philosophy is off Bible center. The problem with a simplistic interpretation of this verse is that it hurries over the matters that are at the heart of the atonement and rushes to an endpoint that is a secondary result of Christ's work, not the primary result.

Here is what I mean. Christ death on the cross was for sinners and their sin. That sin (imputed, inherited, and committed) caused not only separation from God spiritually, but it caused physical consequences as well which lead to physical death. Christ's work solves *all* those problems and won victory over death. All the effects of sin in the life of God's people will eventually be dispatched because of what Christ did. Jesus's miracles showed that He had such power. He was the Man who would take away

sins because He took away all these diseases. It never happened like this before. But it is not until the end of life (and the end of all things, ultimately) when the effects of death are completely eliminated.

So, is there healing in the atonement? Certainly yes, but it is *not immediate*. In this pre-cross situation, the Lord was pre-figuring what His kingdom would look like (massive increase in physical well-being) and authenticating that He was the messenger of the good news of that kingdom.

Focus for a second on 1 Peter 2:24. Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree. That is *how* He bore out infirmities and sicknesses, our griefs and sorrows. All of them are caused by sin, and the sin underlying them is what he bore. The consequences of sin are addressed each in turn at the appropriate time—spiritual separation from God is immediately solved at regeneration and reconciliation; physical separation of the body and spirit are solved at the resurrection; death itself is finished off when the kingdom ends and the new heaven and earth begin; all illness goes the way of death, into the junkyard of history.

V. Discipleship, 8:18-22

- A. If you are in tune with Jesus' ministry, you could not imagine Him just doing some healing but not at the same time doing teaching (Luke 4:43-44). Verses 18-22 justify your expectation that Jesus was teaching while he was healing. What did he teach?
- B. The keyword is "follow." "I will follow You wherever You go." And "Follow Me..." The parallel passage is in Luke 9:57-62 and it adds one more person asking a similar question, and it uses the word "follow" three times. Their notion of "following" was kind of a big thing. It was something like, "I will join the team. I will travel with you. I will be a partner, helper, etc. I will leave behind what I am doing and come with you." It entailed quite a radical change in their lifestyles, outlook, mindset, desires, etc. The thorough-going nature of this change may have been lost on them and Jesus had to inform them of some difficulties associated with this choice.

C. There are internal difficulties to following the Lord, and external difficulties as well. John 6:66 records how many of the disciples of the Lord went back and walked with Him no more. This means simply that they stopped following Him. They were no longer considered followers of Christ, either by themselves or others. In other words, they were not believers. They rejected Jesus and His ways. They could not accept his teaching that they had to partake of HIM—under the figure of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They either could not get past the “cannibalism” idea, or if they did understand that he was speaking of wholehearted belief in Him, they did not accept that exclusivity of salvation. Either way, they give evidence that they were fair-weather friends and not true believers = not true disciples = not true followers.

Some interpreters deny that following is required of Christians, i.e. entailed by believing. We affirm that to believe implies to follow, that is, that they are either both true (true believers) or both false (unbelievers or false believers). Many say that following *should* happen but it does not necessarily happen. We believe we are making disciples which = followers, not just “believers.” What “belief” means in the case of no-following-belief is “belief of the essential facts of the gospel, including that one is a sinner and needs the crucified and risen Christ to solve the sin problem.” But such mental belief, though necessary, is not the full picture of what “believing into Christ” means. Real belief is mind and will and desire, not just mind.

How do we know that following and believing are so interwoven? Look back at 6:64-65. There, Jesus responds to those who were complaining (6:60), “there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew who did not believe, as well as the one who would betray him, because His human nature was able to access that portion of the omniscience of the divine Logos, that is, Christ’s divine nature. The ones who do not believe are the ones who are going to depart from walking with Jesus. They were fair-weather-followers, not real followers. This is just like there are Israelites, and then there are Israelites who are regenerate. It is just like there are descendants of Abraham, and then there are

descendants of Abraham who share the faith of Abraham (Romans 9:6-7).

No one comes to Jesus unless the Father grants it and draws him (6:65, 44). The Father does not grant or draw people to believe only and not follow. That's not at all how Scripture presents Christ. And we know *that* because we can look at 6:67 and after, and see that the 12 apostles (except one, of course), did not go away because they understood that the Lord was speaking words of eternal life. They came to believe and know that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied that He had chosen them, and God's intended end for them was to believe, follow, and be like Christ.

- D. Back to Matthew 8, we see that some among the crowd wanted to begin to follow Jesus. They asked about it, with the first one claiming he would go wherever the Lord went. Jesus told them that it was not going to be easy because there were difficulties external to the person who follows. To the first one He said that He has no place to live. In this particular case, there would be significant inconvenience. That is not always the case, but in this case it was because of the itinerant lifestyle of the Lord. The man had not counted this cost.
- E. The second man implied that he would follow the Lord, but first had some family business to finish. His father was almost certainly not dead yet, because in that culture, when a loved one died, it probably was same-day burial or at the latest the next day. If his dad had died that day, he would not be talking to Jesus at this point unless the funeral was already over. What he was saying is that he had an elderly father who he had to care for until he was dead and buried, and he had received his portion of the inheritance, and *then* he could serve the Lord. This is another external cost of following the Lord: you may not be able to attend all your family's functions or needs. Family comes in second place after following Christ. The Lord says that the (spiritually) dead can bury their own (physically) dead. That is a matter that is not worth

holding yourself back from service to God. On this, see Luke 14:28 and a blog post I wrote in 2020.²

F. By the way, let us be careful when reading not to confuse two kinds of “following.” There is the **following of being a disciple**, what we are trying to encourage and what we experience in our own lives. Then there is the **following of walking with Jesus during the time of his earthly ministry**. All true believers = disciples are followers of Jesus in the first sense. Of course we cannot walk with Jesus in his earthly ministry because that is past history. But during the work of Christ on earth, there were walk-with-Jesus-followers and there were real disciple-followers. So do not confuse physical walking following with spiritual following. Just because someone was walking around with Jesus during his ministry on earth does not mean he was a real follower of Jesus.

Same with “son” in the parable of the prodigal. It means physical son, not spiritual son. Same with leaven—it does not always refer to sin!

G. This does not mean Christians or missionaries abandon their families, but in this particular situation following the Lord Jesus meant that sort of cost. For people in Muslim or communist countries today, or strong Jewish families, following Christ may indeed mean that the family abandons you and you therefore are cut off. A decision to follow Christ is basically a decision to abandon unbelieving family. Your life and livelihood may be at risk.

For missionaries, there is also an element of leaving the family behind that is involved in their work—missing family functions, grandkids separated from grandparents, etc. Each situation is a bit different. If a missionary has parents who need his or her help, then it is appropriate to return from the field and do that. If there are other local siblings, they may be able to care for such needs.

² <https://www.fbcaa.org/MattPostiffBlog/2020/04/Terminology-Cost-of-Discipleship-or-Difficulty-of-Discipleship>

VI. Power over Nature, 8:23-27

- A. The Lord led the disciples to return to the other side of the lake. They followed Him. But in following, they found themselves in one of those seemingly “costly” situations that we thought about as we studied the prior section, 8:18-22. Following Christ may lead some of our brothers and sisters into difficult straits of various sorts. Their faith now would be tested as to whether they would believe this Man—who cleanses lepers, cures paralyzed tormented folk, heals fevers, and casts out demons—could also save them from the raging sea.
- B. The situation suddenly became dire. A thunderstorm popped up, or perhaps a wind-storm. It kicked up some high waves. The waves were swamping the boat. For those of us who are landlubbers³ we would expect this to be terrifying. For some of the disciples who were on the lake all the time, they may have been experienced enough to know they were in serious danger, or that maybe they should not have been on the lake at this time of (day/night/month) or with the prevailing weather conditions and thus they are not as experienced in this boat with that kind of weather.

There are geographical reasons for this kind of weather, including that Sea of Galilee sits at a low altitude (695 feet below sea level). Nearby Mt. Hermon, which is the source of the Jordan River, rises to 9232 feet above sea level. The mountain is 43 miles to the north, but you can imagine from the cold mountain heights to the lake there is quite a temperature differential. Air moves dramatically in such situations.

Whatever explanation we speculate, the point is that the disciples thought they were going to die.

- C. Meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping. I think He was sleeping because He was tired. John 4:6 explains that this happened to the Lord because He is a real-live human being. He was not faking it to just make an object lesson for the disciples!

³ A *lubber* was a clumsy oaf and someone who was bad at sailing; the word basically refers to an inexperienced seaman.

D. The disciples appealed to the right Man for the job. They felt that Jesus could help them, but their faith was weak. It was a *little* faith, not a big faith. We talk about having a mustard seed of faith, as long as it is in the right object, because of Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6. But in this context, “little” faith is “too little.” It is not commendable. Here is a test-case for the “little faith” rebuke of Matt. 6:30.

They knew they needed saving and they knew they were going to die. It seems *that* knowledge in them was stronger than the knowledge that Jesus would keep them and that in fact that there was no reason to panic.

E. The Lord stood up and told the winds and waves to stop. And it happened. This is quite an opposite of what happened with Jonah who was also asleep in a boat and was awakened in a storm, but he had to be thrown overboard to satisfy God’s wrath against his disobedience.

The men in the boat knew that this was not a lucky coincidence. They were convinced that the forces of nature had listened to Jesus and obeyed. That was most definitely not normal. The supernatural power that was possessed by this Man was beyond description. How is this even possible? How could the word of a Man affect the wind energy, air motion, temperature, sloshing water, and over a many square miles area?

F. One application of this passage is that Jesus has full authority over the powers of nature. The imaginary Greek gods such as Triton and Poseidon cannot really control the oceans waves, but Jesus Christ did in fact do so. An eyewitness account is herein recorded!

G. The disciples asked a question that is given no answer in the text. I wonder if we might deduce the correct answer from some other passages of Scripture. For example: Psalm 65:5-7, 89:8-9, 107:23-30; Job 38:8-11. By Matthew 14:33 the disciples are more cognizant of just exactly Who they are following. Indeed, they were learning that He is “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

VII. Exorcism of Many Demons, 8:28-34

- A. All the parts of this chapter show plain-old miraculous activity from our Lord Jesus Christ. The prior shows His supernatural power over the *natural* realm. The next account shows His supernatural power over the *supernatural* realm, even powerful forces in that realm. The account is a straightforward report of the Lord's speaking and demons obeying His command.
- B. Demon-possession was and still today is real. I do not look around for evidence of this online or in person, but I have heard short accounts from people that demon possession and devil worship exist in our culture as well as many around the globe. The sick things that go on in the world are largely explainable by human depravity by itself, but there are just somethings that are so systematic, so deep, so debauched, so wicked, that it seems like more has to be going on behind the curtains.
- C. This account is a fairly straightforward report about the Lord's miraculous work. Similar events were surrounded by controversy. For example, the Lord sometimes healed on the Sabbath and incurred the wrath of the Pharisees for so doing. In Matt. 9:32-33, the Lord removed a demon from a man and the Pharisees criticized by saying He was removing demons by the power of the Devil (see also 12:22-24). In Matthew 15:21-28 the Jew/Gentile issue comes to the forefront. The last example of an exorcism in Matthew is in 17:14-20. There, the disciples could not complete the healing because prayer and fasting was required. Two particularly poignant accounts are the ones in 15:21 and 17:14, where a daughter and a son are the subjects in need of the Lord's help.
- D. Jesus faces a host of demons inside of two men. He permitted the demons to enter a herd of pigs. Mark 5:13 (5:2-20) tells us there were 2,000 swine in the herd, perhaps indicating 2,000 demons. Their name was Legion, for they were many. Afterward, the men were restored to normal health and mental function. But notice that you have here a Man, Christ Jesus, taking on thousands of demons in one swoop, with no apparent effort. This is powerful.

- E. The text is not explicit, but it seems that the demons preferred the death of the swine to being cast into judgment/torment which they knew Jesus could command them and they would be forced to obey. They indicated that the timing was somewhat premature for that, meaning that they knew that a time was coming in which they would be judged severely for their rebellion against God. Meanwhile they preferred some measure of freedom. Perhaps by killing the pigs, the demons could be freed from the bodies of those pigs and could go back to their own normal realm.
- F. The residents of that region were not friendly to Jesus. Either they were upset at suffering the loss of a huge herd of swine and the associated profit, or they were fearful of a Man who had this kind of authority. They did not want to be accountable to Him. The herd of swine indicates that there were many Gentiles in this region, or Jews who were not keeping to the dietary laws of Moses.
- G. Christians should not at all be fearful that they can be indwelt or overpowered by demons. Christ has so much more authority that not even 2,000 demons can keep you from Christ!

Conclusion

When I read passages like this, I sometimes reflect on the truth that with this kind of power, the Lord can help us in any circumstances in which we find ourselves. In fact, He may help us IN the circumstances, or OUT of them. The former may be in fact harder than the latter! But He can do that. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that God will now permit us to be tempted beyond what we are able to endure, and will provide a way of escape. He is sympathetic to us, having been tempted Himself (Heb. 2:18, 4:15).

Jesus has the kind of power need to help you and He is ready to use it in your behalf. He arose from the dead. He will raise up all the dead. He is at the right hand of God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He is the sovereign potentate of the Universe, and He rules over everything. Why do we not believe in Him in the stormy seas that we experience? Often our troubles are very gentle waves and small difficulties, and we still do not have peace! Are we also of little faith?

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