

Teach -In No. 7 The Gospel of Matthew

In our last teach-in we looked at how overwhelmingly willing Jesus is to meet our needs. Also we saw how He wanted always to be under the authority of His Father's word, we are encouraged to do the same. In chapter 9 of Matthew's gospel we shall see how Jesus honours the faith of the believers and also how He dealt with His critics.

To begin with, though, we will look at the last part of Matthew 8, Jesus' response to demons and how He acted towards an unwelcoming people.

Matthew 8 v 28 -34

When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. The demons began to entreat Him, saying, "If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

Jesus meets the violent men head on; He was and still is confrontational. He is a torment and a stumbling block to all those who oppose Him, which is seen again and again in Chapter 9. The demons are cast into the sea and the local people, having lost their livestock, entreat Jesus to leave.

Matthew 9 v 1

Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city.

This was not Nazareth, the place where he grew up, but Capernaum the city that had received him so well, the place in which he had settled.

Matthew 4 v 12-13

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

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Matthew 13 v 53-58

When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

We can see also that even He was unable to perform many miracles in Nazareth because of their scepticism. Who is the Prophet that Jesus is referring to here? First and foremost it is Jesus himself; it also applies to those who are in authority, at home, at work, the government and those who are called to lead God's people. The authority of Jesus may be removed from individuals and corporate bodies alike if He and His commandments are not received and practiced.

Matthew 9 v 2-8

And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

The paralytic came for the healing of his body; he also received the forgiveness for his sins. This immediately brings criticism from the Scribes, it was not a verbal criticism yet it was in their minds because Jesus was not trusted and He did not give them what they wanted, but what was needed. He confronts the spirit of these men. Church leaders have also to do this sometimes, because this kind of attitude will oppose the flow of the Holy Spirit in some situations.

Who were the Scribes, do we have them in our midst today? There are those today who are experts or professionals. Some genuinely have a spiritual understanding, experience and more importantly, the call of God on their lives. But not all those with knowledge receive Jesus, not all who call Him Lord live under the authority of His word. The Scribes of Jesus' day were a sect and experts in religious and legal matters of the Law, but they could not accept Jesus as the Christ, or His teachings and His demonstration of the Kingdom of Heaven.

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Going back to the paralytic and his friends, Jesus saw in them three aspects of faith:

1. They had a strong faith. They believed and trusted Jesus as Saviour and Lord.
 2. They had a humble faith. They didn't call for Christ to come to them; they took the needy one to Him.
 3. They had an active faith. They physically carried the paralytic to where Jesus was.
- Jesus always responds to this kind of faith as we shall see later on in this chapter. There was an obstacle, a hindrance to the flow of the Spirit and after Jesus heals the paralytic, He tells the man to take up his bed and go home, and then He went home Himself. No doubt to a place that would warmly receive Him. As we invite Jesus into our lives, this temple, He will confront all unrighteousness and may make our lives a little uncomfortable at times.

Some years ago the Lord told me that now there were two of us living in the same house, one of us would have to change and He said *I change not!* Then He said that I needed to realise that all the successes in my life were His but that I was responsible for all the failures. These statements are very humbling and of course and from time to time He reminds me of these two gems! Yes, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, His word confronts all my unrighteousness and I have to constantly ask Him to forgive me.

I have discovered that it is easier to live in the shadow of Christ rather than having the substance. The shadow is one place or one person removed from the real thing. I can know all about Him and His ways, yet never enter into the fullness of His life. In the same way the devil can only bring shadows of doubt and fears, death is only a shadow of actual death, to the believer that is. Christ has set me free from the law of sin and death and I live my life in Him and His life lives out His way in me.

Matthew 9 continues with Jesus visiting the Tax Office, of which some of us have had dealings!

Matthew 9 v 9-13

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

He calls Matthew to follow Him and Matthew is quick to rise to the occasion and joins Jesus. Again we see the critical attitude of the Pharisees, who were the religious men of the day. They and their attitude towards Jesus are portrayed elsewhere in Matthew's gospel.

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Matthew 23 v 1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The Scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

The Pharisees said it was wrong of Jesus to eat with sinners; He had quite a radical attitude to this, he hated the sin but loved the sinner and He still does. He said He came to heal the sick, not those who are healthy. He was referring not just to the physically sick, but the condition of the sinner's soul. When Jesus speaks of the sick in verse 12 of Matthew 9, He is not referring to those who are physically sick, but those who are ailing in their souls. The Greek word used here is *Kakos*, meaning evil, evil men or evil things. There was a need, then for the Scribes and Pharisees to be transformed, as indeed we had to be.

He instructs the Pharisees and us too, to go and learn what the meaning of *verse 13 is - I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.* Those who are chosen of God, born again by the Holy Spirit, have been shown compassion by Jesus Himself and the compassion that we have been given, we are to give away to others. We are to be sensitive to those who do not know Him. Matthew Chapter 9 precedes the sending out of the disciples. They were to have compassion on the sinners. This attitude of heart was and is essential if we are to be true witnesses for Christ. Religions that stress only some external or ceremonial kind of purity contradicts the very substance of true Christianity.

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Matthew 9 v 14-15

Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Jesus goes on to speak of the wrong kind of fasting, the *mechanical* kind. The disciples of John thought that His true disciples would fast and pray as they did. His explanation was sound; His disciples had no need to fast whilst Jesus was still with them. He instructed them directly, but after His resurrection they would need to fast and pray in the manner that He taught them.

Matthew 6 v 9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 'Give us this day our daily bread. 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'

Jesus says four important things about fasting.

1. He rejects the authority of the current traditions. Frequent fasting was not commanded according to the Mosaic Law (the Law of Moses.) Jesus rejected the oral tradition that prescribed or demanded it.
2. The form of religious worship and the observance should fit the actual situation, fasting would be out of place when the dominating theme of the gathering is grateful joy.
3. Jesus and His disciples lived in a spirit of joy. The power of the Kingdom was already manifesting itself; the word was being received by many. People were being healed in spirit and soul and body, Jesus was demonstration God's true fast as described in Isaiah 58.
4. Jesus did not have shadow faith, but total faith. He expected no easy triumph, but quietly faced the opposition and the rejection of the truth that He brought into focus.

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Matthew 9 v 16-17

But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.

Jesus then goes on to warn the Jewish tradition that its old form shall be unable to contain the new movement of God; if an old garment has a hole in it and you sew an unshrunk piece of cloth on to it, that patch will shrink once the garment is washed and it will pull out the old threads on the original garment and the result is an even larger hole than before. As old animal skins, which have received fresh wine stretched as the fresh wine fermented and then hardened, are filled again with fresh wine, the hardened skins will burst. Neither Judaism, or any other tradition, cannot grow or be made adequate by patchwork alone, by trying to instil new life into old rigid forms. The new must find fresh practices that can express the vitality of the new nature.

Matthew 5 v 17

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Jesus did not despise the Law; after all He came to bring the Law to fruition. He did, however, confront many of the practices carried out by the religious leaders of the day. He will do the same today. We also need to ensure that our traditions do not become a hindrance to the work of the Kingdom.

Matthew 9 v 18-22

While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did His disciples. And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well." But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well.

We then come to another series of healings by the Lord; signs following His word. The synagogue official humbled himself before the Lord. He spoke to Jesus with respect and with a strong faith. Jesus follows the man home and on the way a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years decides to simply touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak as she knew and believed that she would be healed. Jesus felt her touch in His spirit and turned to her and declared her healed through her own faith.

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Matthew 9 v 23-31

When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him. But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. This news spread throughout all that land. As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When He entered the house, the blind men came up 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, "It shall be done to you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows about this!" But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land.

As Jesus came to the synagogue officials house He prophecies that the girl is not dead but alive and the unruly crowd laugh at Him. They are put out of the house, Jesus could do nothing until He got rid of the unbelief. He then took the girl by the hand and she got up. He went on to meet with two blind men, they pleaded for mercy and Jesus asked them if they believed that He was able to do this. Did He mean have mercy or to heal them of blindness? They answered *yes Lord*. He was able to save them and heal them as well and their eyes were opened, was it their spiritual eyes or their physical eyes?

The healings continued.

Matthew 9 v 32-34

As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him. After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."

Next He again casts out a demon from the mute man. Here we see that evil spirits are again at the root of the problem, the healing was preceded by the casting out of a demon. Jesus had discernment, He was teaching His disciples to find the root cause and not just deal with the symptoms. This is why we need the gift of distinguishing between good and evil, truth and lies.

Philippians 1 v 8-10

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ...

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Matthew 9 v 35-38

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

The chapter ends with an account of Jesus teaching and preaching, healing the sick and proclaiming the good news of salvation and the Kingdom.

We are called to follow Him. The starting place is in the last verse of Matthew 9, how do you respond to His request? He found twelve willing men in the next chapter, Matthew 10. He is still looking for more disciples today!

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