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# The Authority of Jesus over Expansion

Matthew 9:18-35

*Russ Kennedy*

When we lived in the Germany, one of the delights was the traveling circus that came to town each summer. The first year they set up in the parking lot of the building that served as our church and school. The kids loved it. It was strange, exotic, rough, and raw. It was pretty inexpensive. And it drew a crowd. People from our neighborhoods walked down the hill and from all around to go see it. The spectacle was designed to be different. It was quite the show. The crowds of people who attended on that weekend were amazing.

So often I think about that when I read texts like ours this morning. All these crowds. All this news and fame and fantastic stories. How many were there for the spectacle? No matter what the reason, among the crowds were needy people reaching out to Jesus in faith.

This text is a journey. It is moving us from a focus on the role of faith to a focus on the role of expansion. How will God's kingdom expand? How will the power of Jesus expand His kingdom?

## **The Compassion of Jesus (v.18-26)**

Jesus demonstrates His power over death and disease.

<sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." <sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup> And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup> he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. <sup>26</sup> And the report of this went through all that district.

## **In Going to the Needy (v.18-19)**

Pay attention to this, Matthew says. With the word, "Behold", he spotlights this humbled man. This kneeling man takes the place of a supplicant. Why is that significant?

This man is a ruler, a person of prominence and position in the Jewish community. The sparseness of Matthew's account is intentional. Without a name, we

know him by his standing in the community. And yet, he comes, himself a ruler and bows before Jesus.

This humbled ruler has come to Jesus believing Jesus will raise his daughter. Now we want to be very careful contrasting the faith of this ruler with the faith of the centurion in an earlier chapter. The expectation and expression of the ruler's faith may be different, but it is not deficient. Jesus' response is immediate. Jesus doesn't say anything. He just gets up and begins to follow the ruler to his.

### **In Responding to the Believing (v.20-22)**

Pay attention to this, Matthew says. With the word, "Behold", he spotlights an afflicted woman. She has slipped through the crowd. She has come near enough in the press of the throng. She has expressed faith in her heart but possibly not with her mouth. What she believes causes her to reach out and just touch the hem of his garment, the tassel that would have hung down from the four corners of Jesus' robe.

Why is she now spotlighted? She has been sick for a very long time. The implication here is that she has had menstrual bleeding for 12 years. Certainly, the medicine of the day would not have been able to solve what possibly was a cyst. She had spent all her money looking for help. According to the Mosaic Law, because of her issue of blood, she would have been barred from the temple to sacrifice and worship.

Her faith is great and genuine. She is not looking for Jesus to even acknowledge or respond to her. She just simply believes that touching Jesus will heal her. It might be easy to wonder if what she thought really was that Jesus was sort of talisman. Some commentators have wondered about the deficiencies in her faith.

Jesus' response to her does not support that. He sees her. He responds to her with words of encouragement and affirmation of her faith. Jesus heals her in accordance with she believed. God is doing the healing. But faith, believing in Jesus' power is the conduit, the means by which the healing is accomplished. Instantly, upon Jesus' words, she was healed.

### **In Raising the Dead (v.23-26)**

They arrive at the house to find it full of professional mourners. It was normal in their cultures to hire them. This might sound strange to us. But there was a thriving business of professional mourning companies. For a fee they would come, play funeral music, weep, wear sackcloth and pour ashes on themselves if you so desired. I suspect that this was without the father's consent. Why would he spend the money and hire the mourners when he had gone to get Jesus in faith that Jesus would raise her from the dead.

You can hear the irritation in Jesus' actions and words. He dismisses them and effectively throws them out. "Why are you doing this? Don't you believe? I am here to wake the dead!". What does Jesus' assertion mean? Why does Jesus often refer to death as sleep? Time nor space will allow me to address that question.

Just simply to say that Jesus and the New Testament as whole, views death through a different lens than we tend to. Statements like this have been taken literally to prove a false idea that when we die, we enter into an unconscious state similar to sleep. The Bible tells us in many places that after a person dies, the soul is immediately “somewhere” and is awake and aware.

This has led to the question, “Well maybe the daughter was just in a coma.” But the response of the people all confirm that she is actually dead. The Jewish people knew how to determine if someone was dead.

Once the crowd were moved outside the room and the house, Jesus goes back into the room He simply takes her by the hand and raises her from the dead. It is just best to take Matthew’s word for it. While he may not have been in the room as an eyewitness, he certainly saw her when she was presented to her family.

Well, the effect of this was electric. Again, Matthew records that Jesus’ fame is spread throughout that region.

*Jesus has the right to allow and so, may often seem to be popular.*

### **The Concern of Jesus (v.27-31)**

Jesus demonstrates His power over darkness.

<sup>27</sup> And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” <sup>28</sup> 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.” <sup>29</sup> Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” <sup>30</sup> And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, “See that no one knows about it.” <sup>31</sup> But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

### **In Hearing their Plea (v.27-28)**

They are on their way after leaving the home of the ruler. Two blind men join the throng to follow Jesus. But they begin to cry out for help. They keep on crying out these words. Their eyes are blind, but their hearts are seeing. They cannot see Jesus but by faith they see with their understanding.

They are recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, the promised son of David. This is the king who would sit on David’s throne. Before the king they plead for mercy. Jesus confirms that their faith not only sees who He is but also what He can do.

It is of little use to acknowledge that Jesus is who He is with believing that He can save you. Identify, even assent is not saving faith. Saving faith also humbly trusts that Jesus can and will save. He may be a Redeemer; but are you trusting Him to be your Redeemer?

### **In Restoring their Sight (v.29-30a)**

Notice how these set of stories emphasize touch. The woman with the blood issue touches Jesus' robe. Jesus touches the blind men's eyes. He will take the hand of the dead maiden and raise her up.

Also, these stories are illustrating the proportionality of faith. In both instances, Jesus says and Matthew writes, "According to your faith..." This does not endorse some kind of "believe it, have it" theology ("name it, claim it" being the worst of this). But the Bible clearly teaches that the faith God gives, the belief we have, has a proportion to what that faith obtains. We have seen this unfold in the texts. Without faith a person is lost, unsaved, unforgiven. Little faith in dangers and hardships allows for fear and desperation. Great faith simply trusts, asks, and submits. Real faith never demands. Great faith believes God for what is impossible yet is willing to submit to what God decides to do. So, there is a proportionality to faith, but it never obligates God in the moment even of need.

The Lord opened their eyes. They could now see. They once were blind. But Jesus' touch in conjunction with their faith granted them what they believed Jesus could do for them.

### **In Limiting their Testimony (v.30b-31)**

For the first time we encounter a very surprising command from Jesus. "Do not publicize this." Not only was it a command, but Matthew also characterizes it as a "stern warning." How is it that no one is going to notice that two men who were once blind can now see? Their family and friends are surely going to know unless what is expected is that they are supposed to go home and act like they are still blind. Jesus never commands the ridiculous or a deceit. Obviously, Jesus intends for them not to go around and publicize this, announcing it, no putting it on Facebook, no tweeting about it, no pictures on Instagram.

What do we think about this? A stern warning from the person who just healed your blindness is disobeyed! They spread the fame Jesus throughout the whole northern region of Galilee. They are so amazed at what Jesus has done for them that they simply spread His fame all around.

Want to know why I think Matthew records this? We are not so amazed, moved, wowed by what Jesus has done for us. They had a command not to spread it around and talk about it everywhere., Yet they did. What is wrong with us *who have a command TO spread it around, and yet we DON'T?!?!?* So, before you get all self-righteous about their disobedience, why don't you obey what Jesus told you to do? Could it be that your eyes are not really opened? Or could it be that having now had your eyes opened for a while, it no longer amazes you. Jesus' saving power that opened your eyes and delivered you from His wrath and gave a full pardon and forgiveness of your sins just does not move your soul anymore.

*Jesus has the authority to prevent the spread of His fame.*

## **The Controversy about Jesus (v.32-34)**

From the physical darkness of blindness, we now find Jesus confronted with the spiritual darkness of demon possession.

<sup>32</sup> As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. <sup>33</sup> 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." <sup>34</sup> But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

### **In Confronting the Demon Possessed (v.32)**

Once again this is "as they are going." Jesus is simply on the road walking along with His disciples near Him and the crowds following Him. He is not seeking out this man. Jesus is not initiating this confrontation. Jesus is not on a demon hunting crusade. He is not reclaiming this territory from demons for God. He is simply submitting to the moment by moment passing of His Father's providence. In that providence, a demon oppressed man who could not speak was brought to Jesus.

Matthew gives us no details. We don't know who brought him. We don't know how he was brought. We don't know if he came willingly or was he chained? We only know that someone believed in Jesus' power to deliver this man from his oppression. Whoever it was believed in Jesus' power enough to take the risk, to do the hard thing, to bring him to Jesus.

### **In Freeing the Demon Possessed (v.33)**

Matthew does not tell us what Jesus did to cast out the demon. Matthew is not writing and in fact may be avoiding creating a manual for casting out demons. I want you to look at the sentence carefully. "When the demon was cast out, then the mute man spoke." When... then. What is the emphasis? It is not on Jesus casting out the demon. The text doesn't even say that but rather states it as something that happened. But what happened was... the mute man spoke. He talked. His soul was loosed from spiritual bondage and so was his tongue. Freed from the demon oppression his tongue was now freed to speak.

Matthew wants us to think about a couple of things. And I want to phrase them as two questions for you to answer in your soul.

Do you believe enough in Jesus' power to save, to deliver, to forgive that you bring others to Him?

Having had your soul set free from sin and darkness, is your tongue now set free to speak of all Jesus has done?

### **In Eliciting the People's Admiration (v.33)**

The people are stunned. I think Matthew intends for us to see this long run of faith, forgiveness, and mighty miracles as drawing out a growing crescendo of

amazement. The crowds marvel. This stunning power has never ever seen before in Israel. Something great is happening. Someone momentous is here.

### **In Provoking the Pharisees' Judgment (v.34)**

The Pharisees have accused Jesus of blasphemy when Jesus forgave sins against God. That was a mighty act of authority that only God could do. Now they are confronted with a mighty act of power that only God could do. But this blasphemous man cannot possibly be casting out demons in God's name and with God's power. So, Jesus must be doing this by the power of the prince over demons. The Pharisees are perilously close to saying Jesus is Satan.

With multiple acts of divine authority and power Jesus has drawn both great crowds and great criticism. He has effectively driven a sword between the people and their false religious leaders.

*Jesus's kingly authority and saving power often will divide the crowds.*

### **The Crowds around Jesus (v.35-38)**

In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He is often followed by huge crowds. That is entirely understandable. Look at what He could do...

<sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

### **In Receiving Jesus' Ministry (v.35)**

Jesus' ministry amazing in its size and scope. He traveled extensively. He taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath, that is on Saturdays. He preached and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. He healed every disease and affliction. His ministry was fulfilling what the Old Testament said the Messiah, the king would do. We got a sampling of His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. We know how clearly and emphatically He proclaimed the gospel calling for repentance. His power over disease, death, and demons was on full display. It must have been an exciting, amazing, exhausting time.

### **In Eliciting Jesus' Compassion (v.36)**

The crowds came. We know they would. Even in our wicked, weak, jaded society today, charlatans falsely claiming to do what Jesus did attract enormous crowds. But Jesus looked over these growing crowds and He saw lost sheep. He saw they were harassed and helpless. They were reaching out for help from anywhere. They were not watched over and cared by a Psalm 23 kind of shepherd. His heart went out to them. Many are seeking the momentary circus. Some are seeking to do what everybody is doing. Some are distressed and afflicted. Some see the opportunity for their own advancement. This crowd going out to Jesus are like any other crowd of lost people.

It is easy to condemn. It is easy to turn away in disgust. It is easy to want to huddle in safety. It is easy to denounce *crowdism*. But Jesus sees beyond the external appearance of what they pursue. He sees the interior distress and exterior situation that is exposing it. They are without a shepherd. They need the Lord. They need the King. They need their Ruler and Redeemer.

### **In Sending Jesus' Disciples (v.37-38)**

In words for the ears of the disciples in that moment, and for all the moments after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus simply is being commissional. Matthew is anticipating the next chapter in our Bibles. He is on a trajectory towards the final verses in his book. He is sending these piercing words across the ages to our own time and troubles.

There is great opportunity and great need. There are few poised to move towards that opportunity and those needs. So, what should we do?

We ask the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers. We pray for God to help people see the opportunity and fill the need. We pray for laborers.

We start with ourselves. For that is what is next.

*The crowds are helpless and hopeless without the compassion of Jesus.*

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## **Reflect and Respond**

What about the crowds?

- Jesus has the right to allow and so, may often seem to be popular.
- Jesus has the authority to prevent the spread of His fame.
- Jesus's kingly authority and saving power often will divide the crowds.
- The crowds are helpless and hopeless without the compassion of Jesus.

Here is the power of Jesus. He has power over disease, over darkness, over death.

Here is the salvation we need:

We were dead. So, we need the new birth, the resurrection work of the Holy Spirit.

We were blind. So, we need the work of the Spirit to grant us faith so that we will see.

We were ravaged by sin. So, we need healing work of the Spirit to restore our souls.

We were lost sheep. So, we need the good and great and chief Shepherd to provide for us.

Follow the Lord. Be a true disciple. Pray to send. Prepare to go.

