

Meaning in the Miracles: Jesus Defeats Death

Matthew 9:23-26

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Please grab the Bible from the pew in front of you and open to Matthew chapter 9. And I don't just say that because it's a great way to start a sermon, I say that because I want you to be in the practice of looking in the book for yourself. Seriously, don't take my word for it. Don't come here for a nice talk, come here to encounter God. And God gave us His word as the means to hear His voice. So open yours up and follow along.

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Today we are in part two of a two-part miracle Jesus performed in Matthew 9. I'm talking about the healing of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years that happens as an interruption while Jesus is on His way to resurrect a 12-year-old girl.

Now throughout this series we've said that Jesus talked incredibly big about Himself. So one time He said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."¹ And another time He said: "Because I live, you also will live."² And another time He said "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die."³ So Jesus talked as though nothing in the universe, even death, held any power over Him. And not only that but He spoke of being able to give the victory He has over death to those who follow Him. It's an incredibly big statement.

And if you are going to claim this kind of authority then you need to do something to maintain your credibility, because if you don't then you get lumped in with all the other deluded people that are running around.

Like Harry Houdini who as he approached death told his wife, "If there is a way out of the grave I'll find it. And I'll come back to you on the anniversary of my death." Now you have to give it to this lady for being devoted. She held a seance for him for years on his death day. But surprise, surprise, the worms got fatter and he never came back. Nobody escapes death. And yet it's hard to accept that it will happen to us.

So I heard about a Turkish watchmaker who decided that he would build himself a special grave. The grave had an eight-inch window on top and a pushbutton electric alarm bell inside his casket so if he happened to be buried alive by mistake, he could push the button and ring the cemetery's guard room.

On top of this he put a light bulb in the casket and instructed his family to be sure to leave it on for a week just in case. Only then could they turn it off.⁴ This guy couldn't comprehend that death could happen to him.

¹ Matthew 28:18

² John 14:19

³ John 11:25

⁴ Adapted from <http://trinitybaptistardmore.com/message2.php?messageID=15254&> (Accessed February 21, 2018)

As extreme as these two examples are, the reality is that everyone healthy wants to live. And our whole culture has idolized this to the point of making appearing younger and extending life into multi-billion-dollar industries. But while all sorts of people have tried to cheat death, none have succeeded. There is no elixir of life. There is no Philosopher's stone.

And Jesus knew this, and so He didn't just expect people to believe Him when He talked about resurrection. Instead, after speaking of His authority over death He turned around and performed miracles only God could do. He called these "the works of the Father". And He did them in order to prove His words had weight.

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Now I don't think there can be anything more comforting than the thought that death doesn't get the final say. And that's because with the physical eyes we've all been given death does seem to get the final say. This week Billy Graham died.

I watched some of the memorial program his family put together. It was amazing. Graham is estimated to have preached to over 210 million people in person. And on top of this he was an innovator. He was the first evangelist to effectively use the technology of TV for ministry. And through this He reached hundreds of millions more. In fact the earliest memory I have of watching TV was of a Billy Graham crusade. I can still hear it! You think I yell lots; that guy was noisy! But what an incredible ministry, and an incredible life.

But even Billy dies. Death knows no limits. It has no respect! It is the greatest enemy we have. And death is scary. Solomon says God has put eternity in our hearts, that means we feel deep in our bones that we weren't meant to die, and that there must be something more. And so the inevitability of death is something that can undo even the bravest and most devout.

But as powerful as death is, it is a defeated enemy. In Hebrews 2 we read:

Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could He die, and only by dying could He break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could He set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. (Hebrews 2:14-15 NLT)

That's an incredible text. It says, in spite of the fact that everyone dies, Jesus followers don't have to fear death because Jesus has beaten it! Jesus stole the sting from death and the grave.⁵ He has set everyone free who has lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. And so if you are a Jesus follower here then this is the promise He gives you. Jesus alleviates us from fear of everything, including death.

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⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:55-58

Now Matthew's goal was to lay this out for us in the final three miracles that he gives us in this section. So in the first section of miracles Jesus defines who the kingdom of God is for – it's for broken people who need a Savior. And to outline this He proves He had the authority to heal by healing a leper, the servant girl of a gentile centurion, and Peter's mother-in-law.

In the second section of miracles Jesus proves He has authority over the chaos of life – that's the natural, the supernatural and the sin-induced chaos – by calming the storm, casting out demons and forgiving the sins of the paralytic.

And now in the third section Jesus proves His authority extends over death. And so there are three miracles here. Jesus raises the dead girl, and then He gives sight to dead eyes and speech to a dead voice. Matthew's point is that Jesus doesn't just raise dead people, but He can resurrect the dead parts of a body as well. Jesus' authority is absolute.

So let's dig into the text starting at Matthew 9 verse 18, but this time continuing right through to verse 26.

[Read Matthew 9:18-26]

Now last week we said Jesus wasn't just restoring life here – as though that is a small thing – but the way He restores life demonstrates the accessible compassion of God and redefines what blessing looks like in Jesus' kingdom.

So Jesus was accessible. If you wanted to hear Him speak you could find Him. He was like Billy Graham. Or, I suppose Graham was like Him. There were constantly multitudes of people surrounding Him. And while He taught He met the needs of those who came to Him, He healed the sick, He restored what was broken whether that was relationships or spiritual bondage or physical sickness.

And in doing all this Jesus was giving us a picture of who God is. So we aren't deists. We don't believe in a god who exists but keeps Himself at arms length. We don't believe in a cosmic watch maker who winds things up and then lets them run their course. No, YHWH is a loving Creator who goes by the name Father. He gets His hands dirty embracing our mess and re-creating us out of the midst of it. And while He makes no bones about being holy, He made a way for us to approach Him with the blood of Jesus. Jesus shows us that God is accessible.

And we've seen this throughout this series. So remember that centurion? He's a gentile. He knows he's got no right approaching a Jew and asking for anything. And yet he comes anyway and petitions Jesus for help. And Jesus stops what He is doing and responds to his need.

And the bleeding woman situation is the same. Now her understanding about Jesus is incomplete. She has some superstitious belief wrapped up with her faith. She thinks Jesus' shirt is magic. But she's humble. She doesn't want to attract attention to herself. She intends to disappear.

But Jesus won't have that. And so He finds her in the crowd. In Luke He asks "Who touched Me?" And everyone denies it. And then the disciples respond, "Jesus, that's a bit of a dumb question, who didn't touch You? Look at this place, it's crazy busy." But Jesus knows God's power has flown out of Him and so He searches. He's not okay with simply allowing physical healing. He wants relationship. And then we get this exchange between Jesus and this desperate woman.

Luke tells us

The woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. Then He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." (Luke 8:47-48)

This woman falls at Jesus' feet. She's afraid. She's trembling. Have you ever seen someone so afraid that they are trembling? Recently I have. Somebody I know got caught in their sin and it is going to be exposed to everyone. And as they spoke to me they shook. This only happens when your whole world is crumbling down around you.

But here's the crazy thing. Jesus is there when our worlds comes crashing down. And like we saw last week, it's these moments that 10,000 years from now we are going to look back on as the moments of blessing. It's only when we get desperate that we get past ourselves and grab onto Jesus.

And the way Matthew and Luke paint this scenario one minute everyone is jostling and pushing and then all of a sudden the crowd is gone and Jesus is having this incredibly intimate conversation with this trembling woman.

He calls her daughter. That's more than personal it's familial. It's full of affection and tenderness. He's not put out that she has interrupted His mission to heal Jairus' little girl. He's got all the time in the universe for this woman because she's His little girl. That's accessible!

And this is the way Jesus thinks about you when your brokenness brings you to the end of yourself and you fall trembling at His feet. Jesus has all the time in the universe, and He's ready to spend it with you.

So are you going to let Him? Are you going to stop pretending you've got your brokenness under control and let Jesus embrace you?

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And then Jesus tells her, “your faith has healed you.” Now last week we brought out that the word healed here is the word “sodzo”, which can mean healed, but it’s usually translated saved. If you want to just talk about your body getting better you say “iaomai.”

And there are lots of texts where Jesus heals people who have no faith. So the little girl Jesus is going to raise in a couple verses has no faith – she’s dead! And the two demon possessed men by the pig farm had no faith. So faith isn’t a prerequisite to healing any more than it is a prerequisite for creation. If God wants to do it, He does. But if God is going to save then faith has to be there.

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Let me draw this out from a couple texts. We get one of the clearest examples of this in Luke 17. There we read:

Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When He saw them, He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed [*iaomai*], came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then He said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has [*sodzo*] made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

So nine lepers get healed, and one leper gets healed and saved.

In fact sometimes Jesus uses *sodzo* without any physical healing at all. So in Luke 7 when Jesus is having dinner at a Pharisee’s house a sinful woman shows up – she’s got a reputation. And she lives up to it! she breaks a jar of perfume and falls at Jesus’ feet and starts washing them and kissing them and wiping them with her hair.

Put your hands up if you would be totally cool with a prostitute doing this to one of your dinner guests at your kitchen table? Anyone?

Like, “Who let her in here?! And why are You letting her touch You?”

And I love how the story unfolds. Jesus asks Simon the Pharisee “Do you see this woman?” And he’s like, “ummm... yes, everyone sees the woman Jesus. We’ve all got our hands covering our eyes in shock, but we can’t stop seeing the woman.”

And then Jesus responded:

I came into your house. You did not give Me any water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give Me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved [sodzo] you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:44-40)

There is no healing here, just salvation. Here it is brothers and sisters: If you’ve been a Jesus follower for any stretch of time you’ve no doubt got stories of God saving you out of broken situations. I’ve got stories of being stranded and God starting cars without keys. I’ve got stories of Nikki and I being broke students and receiving grants we didn’t qualify for. I’ve got stories of our family having a particularly stressful week and being so busy that the plan was Mr. Noodles for dinner, and then with no warning someone shows up at our door with the best cabbage role feast you can imagine. I’ve got lots of stories like this. And they are great stories. I write them in my journal.

But friends, hear this. While God often steps in and changes our circumstances – and it’s nice when He does – ultimately broken people don’t need nice, we need *sodzo* – we need to be saved. And it is often only when our brokenness doesn’t get alleviated that we come to the end of ourselves and fall at the feet of Jesus.

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I want to tell you a bit about this week. Remember last week Elliana prayed for God to show her that He was real? Well this week has been a wild ride. Last Sunday after church we drove to Vancouver to buy a new van because our old one was biting the bullet. We had been expecting this expense, but surprise, surprise it ended up costing more than we anticipated.

On Tuesday morning as we were driving home I got a text message from our next door neighbour – the other side of our duplex. And she said, “We’ve been gone all weekend, and just got home. And it’s raining in our laundry room.” A copper elbow had

developed a pin hole leak. But that's what we've got insurance for. So I got that ball rolling.

That night as we lay in bed it started raining on us. And it turns out our roof has developed a few leaks.... Actually by my most recent count I believe it is 12. So it's been buckets and roof shoveling. Then yesterday morning we had no water pressure. And I can't even believe it, but a shark bite on some plumbing work I had done last summer let go and we put 2 inches of water under our subfloor.

On top of this there have been a couple bumps at Lighthouse, I've had an investment deal teetering on the verge of collapse, and my kids have had a particularly difficult week full of disobey – all this week!

And from my place with my feet on the ground this morning I don't see resolve for any of these problems.

But this morning as we were lying in bed listening the kids sneak out of their rooms before 7 when they are allowed we started praying and asking that Jesus would work in us to cause us to image Him in the midst of this. It was a beautiful time of prayer, and I have to tell you I'm not sorry Elliana prayed what she did.

And 10,000 years from now you had better believe that bleeding woman is still going to be talking about how fortunate it was that she bled for so long. A blessing is whatever makes us grab hard onto Jesus.

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Now in verse 23 Jesus finally shows up at Jairus' house. It's taken longer than expected. Jairus' girl is dead now and Jesus is at a funeral instead of a sickbed. And it's a noisy one. Does anyone have flute accompanied wailers lined up to perform at their funeral? If you do I want to be there – that would be something.

But evidently Jesus isn't really into this tradition because when He gets there He kicks them all out. "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep."

Now everyone knows she is dead. But what they don't know is that she's dead unless Jesus says she isn't. And here Jesus knows what He is going to do. He's going to reach His hands into the brokenness of this family and He's going to bring resurrection.

But can't believe it and so they laugh. The word is scornful laughter. It's the kind of laugh Sarah let slip from her mouth when the messengers told Abraham she was going to have a baby. It's a faithless laugh that says "God can't do anything about my brokenness."

And Jesus doesn't like this kind of laughter so He doesn't say anything, He just puts them out. And then He goes and takes the girl by the hand – Luke tells us He says "*Talitha kum*" which means little girl get up, and she does.

Now Jesus' word alone was powerful enough to accomplish this, but He wants to accomplish more than that – He wants to show the Father's compassion. So He touches the lives of broken people. Do you see the beauty of that?

Maybe this is where you are at today. You've heard Jesus' word, but you need His touch. Your brokenness is desperate and you long for Jesus to come close so you can feel His compassion. Jesus loves to do that for His children. So grab His shirt.

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There is one other side to this text. And that is a call to action.

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In verse 26 Matthew says "News of this spread through all that region." When people get saved by Jesus, like this woman did – she got *sodzo* – and I suspect Jairus and his family did as well though it doesn't say. But when this happens Jesus followers turn around and proclaim the glory of God to those around them. They take the grace and mercy Jesus has poured into their lives and they pour it into the lives of others.

Now when it comes to how we do this there are two camps Christians fall into. Conservative churches like ours have historically said "We have to help people believe the right things about Jesus so they can get saved too. Souls are what matters. And if you've got time left over, and you feel like making the world a better place, knock yourself out. But it's secondary. It's not that important.

Liberal Christianity, on the other hand, has placed their emphasis on social justice. They pour their energy into staffing food banks and digging wells. They want to say "this world matters." But they have said this at the expense of the exclusivity of Christ. Jesus isn't all that important.

But Jesus doesn't fall into either of these camps. For Jesus the answer to the question "What's more important, the body or the soul?" Is "Yes." Yes, the body and the soul are most important. Jesus isn't a dualist. People for Jesus aren't souls with disposable bodies. Nor are we bodies alone. Our bodies and souls are tied together.

Now yes, Jesus wants people to get *sodzo*, but even though He knows only one leper is going to come back He heals all 10. And even though He knows there are only going to be two people in the crowd who are going to fall at His feet, He moves through the crowd anyway.

Jesus wasn't concerned that most of the good He was doing wasn't getting results. He just kept generously pouring out the gifts and abilities He had to alleviate the suffering of those around Him so that they could respond in belief. And He calls us to do the same.

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And on this note I want to end by taking a moment to thank you again for your support of Lighthouse. If you haven't heard of Lighthouse it is a second service that meets here Saturday nights and aims to introduce Jesus to the youth and young adults of the city. But more broadly, Lighthouse exists to shine the light of Christ into the city of Prince

George. We want to be part of Prince George meeting Jesus. But we are also deeply convicted that Jesus wants us to make Prince George a better city while we are here.

The state of Palestine was transformed when Jesus showed up, and we think Prince George should be transformed when Jesus shows up in us.

And so last night, instead of having a regular service here, Lighthouse went down to St. Giles Presbyterian and joined the Coldest Night of the Year walk around PG. And together with several of you who gave to this, we raised \$1250 which is going towards the AWAK homeless shelter.

Now we know that staying at this shelter isn't likely to *sodzo* someone. But nothing we do is going to *sodzo* anyone. Only Jesus does that. But what we do is seek to be His ambassadors. We bear His name, and so we give ourselves to using the abilities and talents we've been given to do the things He did. And Jesus gave Himself to both the physical and spiritual brokenness of those around Him.

And so Fort George is committed to this, and Lighthouse has sought to do this as well. And your support has enabled this to happen. We are partners in this adventure.

Friends, Jesus the approachable and compassionate Saviour has generously poured His grace into our lives. Many times He has healed our brokenness and alleviated our pain. That's my testimony, and I know many of you share it as well. But sometimes He hasn't. Sometimes we've suffered. Even good people we know have died. But if you are a person of faith, then in spite of that you don't need to fear because suffering and even death are defeated enemies. Jesus has won. And everyone who sees Jesus like this is empowered to be His ambassador in the place He has put us. And for us, that means shining His light, in word and deed, into this great city.