



MONDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:18-26

Plug In...

The leader's daughter has died but he believes Jesus could raise her to life again. Jesus' ability heals the sick, exorcises demons – will he be able to raise someone already dead? Suspense climbs as Jesus diverts to the concern of the bleeding-woman. Upon arrival to the leader's house everyone is in funeral mode (possibly days had elapsed since the girl first died). Jesus says to the funeral commotion, "Go away. The girl is not dead, but asleep". The suspense is at its highest.

Jesus raises the girl up!

Chew It Over...

Clearly the girl was dead. That's why the people laugh at Jesus. The story's climax – will Jesus do the impossible? He does. We've just witnessed a resurrection. The reality of death, in the presence of Jesus, can be described as like sleep. People greatly fear death. Our society deals with its fear by largely pretending it doesn't exist: "let's not talk about such things". With Jesus around, the horror of death is transformed for the Christian.

Tonight, you'll go to sleep. When you wake up you will have enacted a mini-resurrection – albeit in picture form. The power of that metaphor – one Jesus here gives us – should re-arm the approach to your day. For the Christian death cannot hold them down. This brings a fearlessness. One which gives them confidence to do kingdom-based things – no matter the cost.

Think over how the reality of the resurrection must shape today, and tomorrow, and the next? Some helpful passages to ponder over include: 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 and Philippians 1:18b-26.

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that we may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, that we may be able to discern what is best for today as we anticipate being pure and blameless on the day of resurrection with Christ's return.



TUESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:27-31 & Hosea 3:4-5

Plug In...

This is the first-time humans in Matthew's gospel have identified Jesus as *The Messiah*. [NB: The title 'Son of David' means God's promised 'anointed' servant – the Messiah (*Cf.* 2 Samuel 7:5-17)]. The Old Testament builds the picture: when this person from David's line arrives, he will bring with him blessings (see: Hosea 3:4-5; *cf.* Isaiah 61).

Jesus responds to the blind men's request "*Do you believe I am able to do this?*"

Chew It Over...

How does this interaction show that 'faith' is not just a general belief in God?

Jesus doesn't use any adjectives to describe the faith of the blind men. E.g., the Centurion's faith was "great" (8:10); the disciples' faith was "little" (8:26). In both these former cases Jesus acted whether the faith was great or little. Here there is no comment on the quality of the faith. What are we learning is the essence of faith?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God for the blessings you currently have from The Messiah and are guaranteed to receive in full in the future. Ask the Lord to increase your faith in his identity and ability.



WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:32-34

Plug In...

A mute man has just been healed. Healed by one who now is being attested as the expected Son of David. After the demon is driven out, Matthew says, "*the man who had been mute spoke*".

Chew It Over...

The man spoke. You yearn to hear what his first words were. Anticipation builds, what will this man say next? Instead of closure on this question, we instead hear from two other groups. Group One: The crowd are amazed and say "*Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel*". Group Two: The religious leaders of the people (the Pharisees) say, "*It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons*".

The story puts us in the middle of it. What will you say? You've just witnessed a man healed. What do you think? What is your response?

Both polarised reactions are intense. Review your experience of Jesus. How intensely do you respond? When was the last time you were saying to someone, "Wow! I've never seen anything like it, can I tell you more?"?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Holy Spirit to impress upon you again the 'Wow!' of the gospel; to inspire you from your bones – this is something amazing that has told, spread, shared.



THURSDAY 01 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:35-36 & Ezekiel 34:20-31

Plug In...

Matthew's gospel paints an Israel that is corrupt (2:1-3, 16), wicked (7:11), grossly sick and demon-infested through it's 'land' (chaps. 8-9) – in sum it is a land under the shadow of death (4:12-16); one which needs to repent (4:17). This is the make-up and reality for the 'crowds' we read of in Matthew's Israel.

Notice. It is over this very crowd which Jesus has compassion.

Chew It Over...

This is a call by Matthew that we, the readers, adopt the view Jesus has. How do you see messy lives in your network, the fractured community on the Central Coast? It is easy to look at people's choices, the company they keep, the ideals (or lack of) within the community and conclude "well, waddaya expect!". The danger is simple equations.

The key to seeing this scenario differently is to see that these people are harassed, and helpless, and without a shepherd. Jesus teaches things are more complex. On the one hand, people are wicked, do make bad choices, sinfully indulge, but on the other hand, are simultaneously abused by others, in a state of confusion, and do not have leaders (both family, and community) to help them out.

Read Ezekiel 34:20-31. A promise that the Messiah whom God sends will be a good shepherd. One we learn in Matthew sorts out the complexity of our situation. Jesus both leads us well, protects us, and saves us from the punishment we ourselves deserve (Matthew 1:21).

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord to make it possible for you to see our world the way he did. Ask that you will maintain a horror at sin and injustice, but eagerly seek the welfare and concern of the corrupt sinner. May we be distinctively compassionate in our world.



FRIDAY 02 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:37-38

Plug In...

The metaphor describing the 'crowds' of Israel was sheep without a shepherd. Now Jesus describes the same crowd with a different metaphor: a field primed for harvest. Jesus' own compassion for the sheep signals he might be the Messiah. Remember, the promised Messiah would have compassion for the sheep (Ezekiel 34:20-31). Since the Messiah has arrived, compassion can be dispensed *en masse* to the harvest field. The means will be through workers advancing into the crowds armed with the message of Jesus.

Chew It Over...

Jesus' direction, "*Ask the Lord of the harvest...*" reminds us of Jesus previous teaching on prayer (Matthew 7:7-12). We are to pray, keep on praying; pray knowing God will answer kingdom-based prayers.

We are about to head into our season at The Lakes where we engage the harvest-field. We have had lots of meetings, heaps of planning, stacks of equipment organised. The strategy is in place. This is all good and necessary. However, may we not forget the order: first ask God – pray first.

If we are too busy with getting Good News Week set up and ready to pray, then we will find ourselves too busy and the strategy is flawed from the outset. All our life is like this. If life is too hectic to pray, then our life is too hectic!

How are you going to fight for time to pray in your life, in your ministry? How does prayer (an action itself) communicate what you believe?

Prayer Suggestion

Let's pray that we might pray continually.



WEEKEND 03-04 DECEMBER 2016

SERIES: MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Read: Matthew 9:22, 29 (an excursus on 'faith').

Plug In...

Chapters 8 & 9 demonstrate people get help, get salvation, from Jesus *when they come to him*. Faith in these stories is shown to be simply bringing your need to Jesus. This is faith, despite what the quality of that faith may be (8:10; 8:26). Particularly in chapter 9 we see two people come to Jesus with their need and Jesus' response is to acknowledge their faith and then fix their need.

See, 9:22 – "*your faith has healed you*"; 9:29 – "*according to your faith let it be done to you*".

The spectrum of faith presented here is not quality – i.e., the more you put out the more you get. That would make salvation *because of* faith (your faith is the cause). Rather, the collection of stories show that it is *by* faith. Jesus first comes to them graciously as the saving Messiah. The only question is: do they believe he is able to save them?

The dividing line in the spectrum is not little to great; but unbelief to belief. To simply approach Jesus with your need is the belief he may help you. You've crossed that line, even if you have many lingering doubts. Bring those doubts to Jesus and we find our faith increases from little to great.

[In time, the Bible shows that presence of simple faith in our life is a gift of grace enabled by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Ephesians 1:3-4).]

Chew It Over...

There is a famous Confession from the Reformation, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, which pulls it all together helpfully ('Question 60').

Question: How is one righteous before God?

Answer: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, although my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and that I am still prone always to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

Prayer Suggestion

Meditate on each line of the Confession. Praise God for the truth each line contains. Ask the Lord to imbibe our believing heart with these truths each day as we confront our own sin. Thank God for His work outside of our efforts that secures our salvation.