

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 10, Matthew 9-10

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 10, Matthew 8-9.

In Matthew chapters 8 and 9, we read about many of Jesus' miracles. We looked in the previous lesson at the first of these recounted miracles, which is also very early in Mark's gospel in Mark chapter 1, and that's in Matthew 8:1 through 4 about the healing of the leper.

Well, here we read about a centurion in chapter 8, verses 5 through 13. This one also appears in Luke chapter 7. So, Matthew has material from various sources, but this one is about what we might call a Roman exception because Romans were not very highly viewed. Now again, literally this probably was ethnically Assyrian, but he worked for Rome.

And so, either way, Jews and Syrians didn't get along particularly well in parts of Judea like Caesarea. So, the point of recording the story is that the exception prefigures the Gentile mission as a whole, as we also noted in our introduction to Matthew's gospel. I remember years ago, I was a white associate minister in an African-American church, and one of my really close friends there, a fellow associate minister in the church, was from a particular part of the U.S. where he had experienced a great deal of racial prejudice as an African-American.

And he was talking about white people and just getting down on white people. And I was agreeing with him based on his experience, but then he said something that was like, wait a minute, Robert, I'm white. And Robert said, oh, Craig, I'm sorry.

I didn't mean you. I mean, you're like a brother to me. Well, the next week we were studying Luke chapter 7 about the centurion, and what we noted was that the centurion was an exception.

He was a good Roman. And that exception, though, the reason that Luke recorded that was to say not that, well, this is the only exception, we need to let you know about it so you'd know that there once was an exception, but to let you know that there can be other exceptions, that people can change, that groups of people that you have a prejudice against can be changed. And so, the point of this Roman exception here is that Gentiles could be reached.

Note his response to Jesus. He humbles himself on behalf of his servant. Well, probably Matthew's audience is more likely to identify with the servant than with the centurion.

You didn't normally have Jewish centurions because Jewish people, couldn't really keep kosher, and practice their Jewish faith in the Roman army. So, they would identify more with the servant, especially if this is written after 70 and many Jewish people had been enslaved. This could have been the centurion's whole family.

We don't know. But Roman soldiers were not supposed to marry during their 20 years of service, but they could have servants. The average slave cost about one-third of the pay, annual pay, for the highest legionary.

But the base centurion pay was about 15 times the pay of the average soldier in terms of their base pay. And the senior centurion made four times that, so about 60 times that of the base pay of a regular soldier. So as a centurion, he could have had a servant.

Well, he humbles himself on behalf of his servant and he comes to, he asked Jesus to come and Jesus responds with what may be an obstacle to faith. Now, Luke tells a different aspect of the story, but in Matthew, Jesus says, either I will come or it's a question, shall I come? Many scholars think it's a question because in Greek, the word I wouldn't have to be there. It's superfluous in Greek because it's already included in the verb.

So, having it there makes it look like, shall I come? Now, if it's a question, it's very similar to what you have in 1527 where Jesus blows off the Canaanite woman initially. He's making an obstacle to faith. You know, Jewish people aren't supposed to go into Gentile homes.

Well, this wasn't an idolater. This was a God fear who had paid for the synagogue. We know that from Luke, but that's not recorded in Matthew.

So, is Jesus going to actually go into this home? The response of the man is to acknowledge his inferior status as a Gentile. He recognizes Jesus' unlimited authority to heal, even from a distance. He says, I too am a man under authority.

Well, what was his authority? He was backed by the authority of the Roman Empire. So, when he spoke, people would do what he said because they had to obey him. They were soldiers under the authority of Rome.

And he says, I know that because I'm a person under authority, I understand that you also, speak with authority and things obey you. If you just speak the word from where you are, my servant will be healed. Well, this was highly unusual.

Normally when people sought healing, they wanted anybody to pray. They expected it to be close up. And usually, that's how Jesus healed.

But Jesus responded to this faith. This man could say even far away, you just speak the word and my servant will be healed. And Jesus accepts that as faith.

In verse 10, he says, this is faith even greater than the faith of my own people. Sometimes those who are closest to the truth are least aware of it or take it for granted the most. But this man became the promise of more Gentiles to come.

We see that in verses 11 and 12, where he says, many will come from the east and from the west and will sit down at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. But many of the children of the kingdom, many of those who seem to be destined for the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now gnashing of teeth in some ancient texts referred to anger.

But here most likely it refers to anguish as it also did in some other texts like in the Sibylline Oracles. So, the weeping is probably mourning over damnation. And so is the gnashing of teeth.

In verses 14 through 17, we learn more about Jesus, the healer. He was a healer not only in public ministry but whenever the need arose. In verse 14, newlyweds often lived with the husband's family.

They normally had close ties with their in-laws. Aristophanes told some mother-in-law jokes that are more popular nowadays. But normally, you know, the in-laws would have close ties.

But fathers often died in children's adulthood and the mother was often younger than the father and the children would take the mother in. So, in this case, you know, often you have Peter and his family. They may have lived with Peter's parents initially at the beginning of the marriage.

That was very common. But at this point, they've taken in Peter's mother-in-law. Archaeologists actually think they found Peter's home in Capernaum because of the early graffiti and so on that suggests that that's the right house, very close to the synagogue where a lot of other events happened in Capernaum in the Gospels.

Well, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. She gets up and she ministers to them in terms of taking care of them, their food or whatever else is just an expression of her gratitude and hospitality. And then others came and Jesus healed them all in verse 16.

Mark tells us about how they had to wait till the Sabbath was over. And as Jesus is healing people, we learn about his authority in verse 17, that he performed exorcism with a mere word. Customary exorcism techniques used by others tend to be magical with rituals, with various magical formulas tried to use to get spirits out, or like I mentioned before, using a stinky root to get a demon out.

In the book of Tobit, it's a smell. And Josephus in Antiquities 8 talks about a magic kind of ring and invoking the name of Solomon and so forth. But Jesus simply speaks and it happens.

Most of Jesus' miracles in this section resemble those of Elijah and Elisha. Those are probably the closest parallels to them. Now here with the spirit coming out, you might think of David with Saul as David is playing the music and the evil spirit, if it's really a spirit, and again, this is a matter of dispute, comes out.

And people often thought of that. That's why they spoke of Solomon, his name being good for casting out demons because he was David's son. But in any case, that's just a Jewish tradition.

But Jesus' name, we know from elsewhere in the New Testament, does cast out spirits. Healing was part of Jesus' mission. We see that also in 8.17. And it was also costly to Jesus.

He, Matthew, as he writes this, bypasses the way it's worded in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, and translates the Hebrew directly so that he doesn't give a spiritualized form, but it actually has something to do with physical healing. Now in the context of Isaiah, in Isaiah 53, verses 4 through 6 and 8 through 9, it seems to me at least clear that it's talking about healing from sin. 1 Peter also applies the context in Isaiah 53 in the same way.

Matthew 13:15 applies the context of another healing passage in Isaiah in the same way, the healing in Isaiah 6. But there's some other passages in Isaiah that seem to speak of physical healing, like Isaiah 29, Isaiah 32, and especially Isaiah 35, which Jesus will use later on in Matthew chapter 11. Jesus' mission demonstrates the character of the mission of the servant. And I think it draws on a wider range of texts in Isaiah.

Often the prophets spoke of spiritual healing, healing from sin, but also as a foretaste of the coming age, like in Isaiah 35, where the disabled will leap for joy. There's a fullness of restoration, and Jesus is giving a foretaste of that. What we see here, though, is that Jesus suffered for this, by his stripes were healed, and so on.

Jesus suffered to do this. It cost Jesus something. And it also gives us an example.

1 Peter 2 uses Isaiah 53 that way. Romans 15:1-3 uses Isaiah that way. We need to be willing to suffer for others.

Follow Jesus' example. The cost to Jesus, well, it fits the context in Matthew's gospel. Remember, Jesus is embracing people's uncleanness.

He touches the leper. He publicly acknowledges the woman with the flow of blood touched him. He touches the dead body of the synagogue leader's daughter.

So, Jesus embraces our uncleanness. He pays a price. And also, going around healing people is costing Jesus something else.

I mean, Jesus is not hobnobbing with the rich and the powerful. He's not hanging out with the respected Pharisees. He's not certainly cultivating the favor of the Sadducees who controlled the temple establishment.

He is going to people who are not popular, to the marginalized, to outsiders. We'll see him going to sinners in chapter 9. Jesus is going to people who are sick, who can't be part of an army, who can't support him. He wasn't going with the people who were considered important in that society, because Jesus didn't come to cultivate the favor of the powerful and to bring about a kingdom in that kind of way.

Jesus came to show God's heart and to act on God's heart by ministering to the broken. That's his heart. That's the way he is, depending on the Father to raise him up.

This was a road that would eventually lead to the cross. Yes, it would cost Jesus something. You see something similar to that in John 2.4. Jesus' mother has come to him.

She says, they have no wine, which is a polite Middle Eastern way of saying, please do something about it. Jesus says, ma'am, which is a nice way to speak to a lady, a woman, but not a nice way normally to speak to your mother. Gunay, ma'am, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.

Don't you understand? Once I begin doing these signs, I've started on the road to my hour, to the cross. She didn't understand. Jesus did do the miracle in response to her faith.

But here, he quotes from Isaiah, it cost Jesus something and we should therefore be grateful to him. Whether it's the forgiveness of our sins, whether it's the healing of our body, whether it's any other blessing that God gives us, it cost Jesus something. Isaiah 35 talks about physical restoration and not only physical restoration of healing, but the restoration of God's creation.

He speaks of like the fish in the Dead Sea reviving, the deserts blossoming with lilies. And later on, Isaiah goes on to speak of a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus, as he came, came not just to save us from sin in terms of forgiveness, but he came as a restorer of all that had been broken and lost.

That doesn't mean everybody will be saved because people choose to be lost. And Jesus talked about the gate to destruction is wide, but it does mean that there's a promise of a new heaven and a new earth. And all that Jesus gives us, including the new heavens and the new earth someday, are things that he paid for by his suffering for us.

And so whatever gift we have in this world or in the world to come, we should be thankful because he paid a great price to give us that gift. And these healings are a foretaste of that future world. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Well, Jesus goes on to show that he has nowhere to lay his head and that following him must take precedence before family and social obligations.

Following where Jesus leads. Well, in this particular context, when the person says, I'll follow you wherever you go, Jesus is getting ready to go across the lake in a boat. So, the person is like, oh, can I come in the boat? I'll follow you across the lake.

But following Jesus ultimately costs more than just hanging out with him in a boat. Jesus warns that it may cost a disciple even their basic security. He had a home base in Capernaum, we know from 4:13, but he was traveling a lot in a sense at the mercy of others' hospitality, although ultimately trusting in his father.

Having nowhere to lay your head could be like homelessness. And there were people who were in that situation then, just as there are today. Again, this may be hyperbole, but it's saying we need to count the cost.

Jesus is worth everything. The teacher of righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls, said that he was banished to the wilderness like a bird out of its nest. Also, we read about radical prophets in the Old Testament, like Elijah, who had to eat food out of the mouths of birds until the Brook Kerith dried up, and then he had to go somewhere else.

And God miraculously supplied through a widow and her child. But homeless people were looked down upon. They were low status, whatever the reasons for it.

Jesus is saying you have to be willing, to count the cost. Some have compared this to divine wisdom because there are some texts about divine wisdom being rejected by God's people and having to wander and not have a place among the people. Also,

Jesus may evoke the language of the righteous sufferer in the Psalms, who may be like a bird.

Psalm 11:1, I take refuge in the Lord. So how do you challenge me? Flee like a bird to your mountain. Psalm 124:7, we've escaped like a bird from the trapper's snare.

Also, foxes and jackals haunted ruined places. So, when Jesus talks about not having a place to lay his head, foxes and birds, have places. Even them, who in the Old Testament are sometimes used as images of not having a place, of being chased out of society.

But Jesus says, if you want to follow me, you have to be willing to follow me, even if you lose your most basic securities. Someone else says, just let me go and bury my father first. Jesus says, let the dead bury the dead.

You go preach the kingdom of God. Now, does that sound harsh to anyone? But Jesus takes precedence over other obligations. That much is clear.

But how dead was his father? When someone died, immediately mourners would gather. You can remember Jairus's daughter, where mourners are already there by the time Jesus gets there. At least two mourners were required, even for the poorest person.

That was the custom. The mourners were called keeners. I like that.

This helped to induce proper grieving. In some cultures, often in Western culture, we hold in the grief, we try to control ourselves, and then a year later, somehow we have a nervous breakdown. But some cultures are very good at expressing their grief.

They have rituals that help them to express their grief. And Jewish culture was like that. They would sit for seven days.

It's called sitting shiva, sitting for seven days. People would bring them food, and they would just do nothing but mourn for the seven days. And then afterward, there would be another period of mourning for a year.

Well, they had professional mourners come who would help the family to grieve, to get out of the grief. They would mourn with them. But if the father has just died, according to Jewish custom, this person wouldn't be out talking to a rabbi first.

If he knows that his father has died, then he's going to be home attending the burial. So what's he doing away from the house? Well, by the way, that's a picture of me mourning after I get evaluations from my students. Anyway, right away after the

person died, the corpse would be laid in something like a stretch or a bier and carried to the tomb.

Everyone who saw the procession would join it from behind. Rabbis would even let out their classes for funeral processions or wedding processions. The widow or the mother of the deceased would walk in front of the bier.

According to later rabbis, it was said that Eve introduced death into the world, so she had to walk in front of it. That's probably a later idea, but some of them had some negative views toward women. But anyway, that wasn't nice.

But the widow or the mother would walk in front of the bier. If you remember, when Jesus speaks to the widow of Nahum in Luke chapter 7, he speaks to the widow first, then he touches the bier. He doesn't come in behind the funeral procession.

He's not planning to simply join the procession. He's coming from the front, speaks to her first, and then raises her son. Well, this son should be involved in a funeral procession.

He shouldn't be out talking with a rabbi. The eldest son would leave the corpse in the antechamber of the tomb. If the deceased had no son, the nearest of kin would do it.

In John's case, John's disciples did it, which highlights the fact that Jesus' disciples didn't do it for him. Then the family would sit and mourn for seven days, sitting shiva, while others came to comfort them. They didn't have to do anything.

The family members didn't have to take care of anything the way we do with funerals in our Western culture. Others would just take care of them. That's why Mary and Martha met with Jesus separately in John chapter 11 because somebody had to stay there with all the guests who had come.

So, what's going on? Why is he talking about this? Well, there are a couple of possibilities that have been suggested. One possibility is that this is using a figure of speech that's found in some Semitic languages, where the person is saying, I must first bury my father, requesting that one be able to wait until the father died. Maybe the father wasn't dead yet.

Well, I have to stay around and fulfill my final filial obligation before I leave. And that's been suggested by Kenneth Bailey, who's very familiar with some of those issues. There's also another possibility, and that's the possibility that the son is referring to a secondary burial.

He'd already buried his father once, but then the corpse was left to decompose for one year. Some rabbis apparently even thought that this decomposition helped

atone for sins. So that one rabbi, a moth was starting to eat behind his ear, and his widow said, no, let it do that.

That will help atone for his sins. But in any case, after one year, the son would return to gather up the bones into a box, an ossuary, and then slide it into a slot on the wall. This was the secondary burial.

And if the father is already dead, it's possible that this is the kind of burial that the son is talking about, hence requesting as much as a year's delay. Well, even if Jesus is not presenting this particular demand as urgent, it's no light thing that he's asking for. Because whether one's referring to the primary burial or the secondary burial, this was a son's greatest responsibility.

In the book of Tobit, it talks a lot about burying the dead. Tobit is honorably doing that. That was considered an honorable thing throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, to bury the dead, and it's considered very dishonorable not to allow the dead to be buried.

Well, Tobias, Tobit's son, in the story of Tobit, his final filial obligation is to bury his father. So, whether it's talking about primary burial or secondary burial, this was a great responsibility. Many sages considered honoring parents the greatest commandment, and we have that not only in the rabbis but in Josephus, and burying them the greatest expression of that commandment.

To fail to bury one's father would so shame the person who failed to do it that they could be an outcast from the village for the rest of their lives. The only one who could rightly take such precedence over parents, and we see this in God himself. Rabbis sometimes said, well, we should be honored as fathers, as parents, but not to the extent of, well, come follow me, it's more important, more urgent than burying your father and mother.

So, this is probably about the priority of following Jesus rather than the urgency of following Jesus. Lest you think, though, that it's not an urgent matter to follow Jesus, Luke actually gives a third account, and I'll mention that just briefly here since we're not doing Luke. But in Luke, somebody says, well, just let me say goodbye to my parents.

This isn't a matter of whether the father's dead or maybe a year's delay or whatever. He just wants to say goodbye to his parents. And Jesus says, no one who starts plowing and then looks back is fit for God's kingdom.

Does this one sound harsh? Jesus is alluding here to the story of Elijah calling Elisha in 1 Kings chapter 19. Elijah was a radical prophet who lived in the wilderness and ate food from birds' mouths. And many prophets had radical calls.

I mean, Ezekiel couldn't mourn when his wife died. Jeremiah was never allowed to marry. Hosea probably wished he had never been allowed to marry.

Isaiah ran around naked and barefoot for three years. Perhaps his wife wished that she hadn't married him. But then again, she was a prophetess, so maybe she was used to this kind of thing.

Elijah ate food from birds' mouths. John ate bugs. Ezekiel ate food cooked over dung, supposed to be cooked over human dung.

He said, God, that's unclean. So, God let him use cooked over cow's dung instead. Well, it's a useful fuel.

But anyway, to follow Elijah, this radical prophet, Elisha was giving up a lot. Elisha had 12 yoke of oxen, so he had many fields and many servants. He was ready to give it all up.

Burning the oxen is a sacrifice and a meal. He just wanted to say goodbye to his family, by which he meant to throw a little farewell party for himself. Elijah permits it.

What about Jesus? Jesus said no. The purpose was to weed out the uncommitted, not to turn people away, but to produce strong disciples. And we have that elsewhere in ancient literature sometimes.

Somebody would give like an insurmountable obstacle that you would have to surmount if you wanted to follow the person. And Jesus, these are particularly radical people, Jesus is one of those radical people. He does that.

He wants committed disciples, not just everybody who says, okay, I'm a Christian. He wants people who are really committed to him because those are the people through whom God can make more Christians, not the kind of people who live in such a way that people say, if that's what a Christian is, I don't want to be like that. We need to be real followers of Jesus.

Well, what he said to the other disciple may have just been a radical way of making the point. But Jesus further illustrates his authority. He calls for authority over would-be disciples, but then he illustrates his authority by further actions that we see in the next three miracle stories.

We read about Jesus' authority over nature in 8.23-27. The Lake of Galilee, here it's called a sea. It's often called a sea in the Gospels, but it's not a sea by the usual definition of a sea. It's really a lake, limne.

It's called that by Luke, I think in Luke 5. It's occasionally called a lake, but normally it's called a sea. Why is it called a sea? Well, that's what local people called it. And again, these are early Galilean memories about Jesus that are here in the Gospels.

Well, the Lake of Galilee is about 600 feet below sea level with ravine-punctuated mountains around them. So, the wind would gush down, force through between those mountains, and create sudden storms, and squalls on the sea. Galilean fishing boats were not very large.

They were pretty small. They held only a few men. Renters agreed to return boats undamaged, except in cases of acts of God like storms, which apparently they faced fairly often.

If you're near the shore, you get to the shore. But if you're out in the middle of a lake, you could be in trouble in one of these small boats. Well, we do have other miracle stories in antiquity about heroes or gods who dealt with storms at sea, but these were normally either about deities or heroes who had lived in the distant past, or they were just something where a storm stopped.

It wasn't somebody commanding a storm to stop, and it stopped. And again, the ones that did talk about somebody stopping a storm, these were centuries earlier. What we have here is an account that's fairly contemporary.

It's from within a generation. Mark reports it within a generation, Mark chapter 4, not a legend from centuries earlier. Jesus reproves his disciples' fear in verse 26.

Jesus' peace in verse 24 is that sleeping in trouble was a sign of faith. Many philosophers regarded that as the way somebody should live. They should be tranquil because they can't control what happens.

And in the Psalms, somebody could sleep in peace because they trusted God to protect them. Well, Jesus is asleep, and his disciples are scared because they think they're all going to die. Now, he's already talked about trusting God for possessions, and trusting God to take care of you in chapter 6. Now we learn about trusting God for safety.

There are a couple of possible reasons why he reproves the disciples' fear. Maybe, as some commentators have noted, maybe he expected the disciples to do it themselves. I mean, they've been with Jesus for a while.

Maybe it's like, where is your faith? Why didn't you stop this storm? That's possible. I think at the very least, what he's saying is, you've already seen enough about me. Do

you really think this boat is going to go down with me in it? But they didn't understand yet, and they were astonished.

We see, therefore, an expression of Jesus' power and identity. Verse 27, they're in awe of Jesus' power. Now, again, we have accounts that are later about people who lived much earlier, centuries earlier.

But contemporary accounts are always about divine acts, and these are acts that just happened. But in this case, Jesus acts. Jesus commands the storm to be still.

And there's some language here that reflects the language from the book of Jonah, where God stills a storm when Jonah is at sea after Jonah is thrown into the sea. But there's also a contrast here because Jesus is very unlike Jonah. He's not fleeing from his He's carrying out his mission.

So, we also see something from his exhausted slumber. He's been ministering, and now he's in the boat. He has nowhere to lay his head except in the boat, because of his active ministry.

The next miracle story illustrates Jesus' authority over demons, 828 to 834. The tombs were unclean. They were considered a special haunt of demons and magic.

And also, there was a lot of demonic activity in the area. There was a healing sanctuary at Gadara. Well, Matthew clarifies Mark.

He removes some ambiguities that could have been interpreted magically if somebody wanted to interpret them that way. But also, there's a difference in the location specified. Mark talks about this taking place at Gerasa, and Matthew speaks of it taking place at Gadara.

Well, which one is right? Mark's Gerasa was more powerful in Jesus' time and can be used to identify the region. It's about 30 miles away. Matthew's Gadara is about six miles away.

Many scholars, perhaps most scholars, think that Matthew is addressed to an audience in the region of Syria, which included Judea and Galilee in terms of the Roman administration, but Syria was pretty large. But people may have had, they've been more familiar with the topography. So, Mark names the region by the better-known city, and Matthew names the region by the closer city.

It's not a matter of one being right and one being wrong. It's just a matter of trying to generally pinpoint the vicinity. Both are identifying the region, which is the largely Gentile Decapolis.

There were Jewish people there in the Decapolis until many of them were massacred during the outbreak, at the outbreak of the Judean-Roman War. Many of the women in this area actually were sympathizers with Judaism, and so the husbands, Gentile husbands who didn't want a massacre, didn't want their wives to give away the plot, didn't tell their wives about it, and then massacred the Jewish community, even though the Jews in that region were loyal, and according to Josephus anyway, had said that they would help fight against their fellow Jews. They got massacred.

But there were a number of Jewish people in the region, but it was predominantly a Gentile region, as you know from the pigs. Another difference is that Matthew doubles Mark's demoniacs, and later on in Matthew 9 and again in Matthew 20, he doubles Mark's blind men. Well, why does he do that? There are different opinions on that.

It's possible that Mark spotlights one person. That was often done in ancient biographies. So, Mark focuses on just one character to make it, it may read better in a literary way in that way.

You could do that. Writers did that all the time, and we have other examples of that in the Gospels. Michael Licona has pointed this out in some of his research.

Another possibility is that Matthew is compensating because he's left out some other stories. We know he left out a story of the demoniac in Mark 1. We know he left out the healing of a blind man in Mark 8. It's possible that Matthew is compensating as a way to say, look, Jesus healed all sorts of people. He healed so many people.

I'm just giving you examples, and it's just a way of showing that. Those are just a couple of the possible approaches. Either one could be found in ancient literature.

Even demons recognize who their judge is. In Matthew and Mark, only supernatural, or I should say superhuman beings, recognize Jesus' identity. Ultimately, only God is supernatural in the sense of being above nature because even demons are part of nature.

They're created beings. But we have some other ancient texts where demons would plead for mercy before something more powerful, where demons preferred to remain in the same region, just as soldiers often did, and others often did prefer to remain in the same region. Actually, we have some accounts of that in modern times, too.

But here, these demons certainly are pleading before Jesus. They recognize Jesus has superior power. They say, what is there between us, which was a way of putting distance between the speaker and the hearer? And the demons cry out, have you

come to torment us before the time? Adding to Mark's language, before the time, the kingdom is already as well as not yet.

And we see that Jesus values people more than property. I already gave the joke about deviled ham. It only works in certain languages.

But anyway, exorcisms usually made a scene. That's when people thought they were successful. Well, usually they didn't make this much of a scene when spirits came out.

How would ancient hearers have understood the demonized pigs drowning? Would they have thought that the demons drowned, too? I'm not sure. But it's possible. I mean, we think that demons don't die.

But some of the rabbis told stories about demons that died. And more often in Jewish literature, what we read about is about demons being bound or rendered inoperative, sometimes beneath bodies of water. So if these pigs, affected by the demons, rush over a cliff, they are more susceptible than the man was.

They rush over a cliff into the water. It may be thought that the demons are at least put out of action. They're rendered inoperative.

What is clear in the text is that most people prefer property to people, even though Jesus prefers people to property. The Gentile perspective was somebody who could do something like this was a magician. Hey, look how much property he destroyed.

And they would view him as malevolent. And that's why Jesus sends the man back to say, look, tell them, look, this is what God has done for me. This was not an act of magic.

This was an act of deliverance. In the next miracle account, we learn of Jesus' authority to forgive sins, chapter 9, verses 1 through 8. Jesus was moved by supplicants' faith, even supplicants' faith for others, which tells us that we can pray for others. Like these supplicants did for this man, they had to get him to Jesus.

In Mark's gospel, it says they tore up the roof to get him to Jesus, and let him down through the roof. Matthew leaves out that, but clearly, they went very far as an act of faith to get this man to Jesus. Well, we also learn a lesson here that Jesus is moved by the supplicants' faith.

It says that here, even though it doesn't mention that they tore up the roof here, they brought this man to Jesus. It was an act of faith. But we also see here that the supplicants really need forgiveness more than healing.

I mean, it's not that we don't need healing, but there's something more important. There's a higher priority. And in this case, it's forgiveness.

In verse 2, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven. Miracles were acts of compassion, but they're also signs of the kingdom, which we'll talk about later. It doesn't mean that this man is being forgiven because sin caused a sickness.

There was a common belief that sickness was related to personal sin. Lepers, for instance, were thought to be being punished for the sin of slander. But Jesus isn't saying that.

But in this case, this man needs forgiveness. And so that's what Jesus addresses first. We also see in this narrative opposition from others who think that they speak for God.

We need to be very careful how we speak in God's name. Being religious doesn't necessarily guarantee that we're right. Jesus uses the passive here.

God is the one who forgives. But Jesus doesn't make any atonement. There's no sacrifice that's offered.

And normally, when forgiveness was achieved, Jewish people expected, well, you have to go off for a sacrifice, for atonement. So, they object to this. But Jesus is going to show that he has the authority to forgive sins.

Authority from the Father to forgive. But not even the Messiah was held to have that kind of authority. And so it says they accused him of blaspheming.

Now, when the term blaspheme was used technically, at least by later rabbis, it meant abusing God's name. But the Greek term blasphemeo actually means something much wider than that. It means any kind of reviling or speaking against someone.

And they believe that he's dishonoring God by associating himself with God in this way. Nobody should be associated with God in that way. Nobody has the right to forgive or speak forgiveness on God's behalf when no sacrifice has been offered.

Well, Jesus goes on to demonstrate his authority. His kingdom is not just in words but in power. The signs demonstrate Jesus' kingdom, Jesus' authority, his reign, and his rule.

His authority to heal supports his authority to forgive. If God sent Jesus to come back to fight against the effects of fallenness, call the Omer how much more of fallenness itself. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins.

And in chapter 28, we'll discover he has all authority in heaven and on earth. And the healing brings God glory. This is very common with Jesus' miracles, the association of how people praised God after these things happened, even though his opponents weren't very happy.

But then it turns again to speaking of Jesus' authority over people, over us. Sinners need a physician, chapter 9, verses 9 to 13. Tax collectors were not very well-liked, and he's going to deal here with tax collectors.

Common people, the Am haretz, the majority of people, and the very religious people alike, viewed tax collectors in Judea and Galilee as traitors. Something like Slotis, something like in the Netherlands during World War II, collaborators with the Nazis were viewed as traitors. Sometimes Africans who were involved as middlemen in the slave trade were viewed as traitors.

Well, that's how tax collectors were viewed. They were viewed as collaborators with the occupying power. Rabbis contrasted tax collectors and Pharisees regularly as the epitome of sin and the epitome of godliness.

Tax collectors sometimes overcharged, so Rome actually imposed some precautions so that it didn't go too far. In Egypt, where we have the most surviving business documents, and therefore we know the most about tax collectors, in Egypt, sometimes they would torture people to find out where people had fled as tax fugitives. Sometimes they would beat up an old woman to say, you have to tell us where your son is hiding so we can get his taxes.

Sometimes entire villages were depopulated, and this is no joke. This is actually in the ancient business documents. Sometimes entire villages would skip town and go start a village somewhere else just to get away from the tax collectors.

So, if you think taxes are difficult now, taxes were quite bad in that setting. They could search anything except the person of a Roman matron. So, in Egypt and in Judea and Galilee, they could search almost anybody.

They often demanded bribes to keep you from having to pay even higher taxes. And sometimes they even gave receipts for the bribes. So, among the ancient business documents, they found one with a receipt for 2,200 drachmas.

That's years of wages for the average person. And the receipt said this was for extortion. In some places, the taxes were probably close to 30% to 40% of people's income.

Keep in mind, a lot of people didn't have very much margin for living on to begin with. As a tax collector, Matthew would have been locally prominent. Now, is he the same person as Marx, Levi? Probably.

Double names were common back then, and so there's no reason that this couldn't have been. You read ancient business documents, often it would identify people with two or sometimes even three names, so you'd know which person with this one name that it was. Some people have suggested that Matthew or Levi was a customs official.

Customs, they would charge you 3% at each municipality. You'd go from this region to this region to this region, but 3% at each place adds up if you go to a lot of places. The money then went to local treasuries run by the aristocracy.

But given how people felt about tax collectors in the Gospels, my guess is that this is probably more like somebody collecting directly from local people. Jesus is eating with sinners. He calls Matthew, Matthew follows him, Matthew invites him to his home, throws a banquet for him, calls all his friends together, and Jesus eats with him.

Now, in that culture, that was a problem because eating with somebody was considered a way of showing approval for them. Jesus wasn't necessarily approving the lifestyle, but he was loving Matthew. When we do see Jesus spending time with sinners in the Gospels, we do see what he's doing.

Normally he's teaching, the influence is going from him to them. Some people think that when he was eating with sinners, this is talking just about the Am haretz. The Pharisees considered the common people, the Am haretz, sinners because they didn't always tithe on their food.

And if Pharisees bought food from them, called demi-produce, they would have to retire the food. But normally when people in antiquity used the word sinners, they meant something more heinous, including things like tax collectors, prostitutes, and so on. Well, Jesus is eating with these tax collectors and sinners.

To eat with somebody established a covenant relationship. And it established a covenant relationship to the extent that, there's a story told in Homer's Iliad that illustrates this very well. There are two warriors from different sides of the war who are going into battle and they're getting ready to fight each other.

And they get to talking as they're fighting. And they realize that one's father hosted the other's father at a meal a generation earlier. And they said, well, we can't fight them.

There's a covenant relationship between us because your father hosted my father. That's why in the case of Judas, John 13 says, the one who lifted his heel against me, the one who ate with me, that was heinous. If you eat with somebody, it establishes a covenant relationship.

Well, here's Jesus eating with these people. Not surprisingly, the Pharisees complained about that. The religious people complained about that.

Well, Jesus' mission was only to those, he says, who acknowledge their need, verses 12 and 13. This was a society that heavily emphasized honor and shame. Many societies do today as well.

And the Pharisees' complaint against Jesus constituted a challenge. Well, if you're going to behave like that, then, you know, it's an insult to him and he has to respond. Quick repartee answering your challengers could shame the challengers.

Jesus says, go and learn. Now, the Pharisees were among the most learned of people in the land. So, saying go and learn was an insult to them.

It implies their ignorance. When Jesus talks about a physician only is for those who are sick, many people in antiquity, Jew and Gentile alike, used health as a metaphor for spiritual or moral wholeness, and physicians as a metaphor for philosophers, educators, and others who could help a person not only physically, but morally and spiritually. So, Jesus can use this, you know, he's been healing people.

Well, yes, it also has implications. Jesus is a moral healer, a restorer of people. And he speaks of calling sinners, not calling the righteous.

Calling, the term also could refer to inviting. Well, Jesus is invited to a meal, but he's really inviting people to God's banquet. And he says in 913, haven't you ever read that God desires mercy more than sacrifice, quoting from the book of Isaiah? Well, that's quoted again in Matthew chapter 12 and verse seven.

Remember that Jesus says in Matthew five, that the law won't pass away. But then he goes on to interpret the law in a very different way than his contemporaries. Jesus goes for the principles, he goes for the heart.

And here's one of the hermeneutical keys that Matthew gives us, repeating it twice, where Jesus says, I desire mercy rather than sacrifice. The importance of compassion is that certain things are central to God's law, and certain things are central to God's values. This is one of those things in terms of how we should be treating people.

And Jesus is exemplifying that and how he reaches out to people. He also says that there's a time for everything. Some things are more suitable than others.

Jesus stands up for his disciples. Teachers add the answer for their students' behavior. Jesus does stand up for them.

And he talks about how there are appropriate times for everything. Now, he could have said, hey, you know, you're complaining about this eating. Look at me.

I fasted for 40 days. How many of you have fasted 40 days? But remember, Jesus wants us to do our fasting in secret. So, he doesn't appeal to his own fasting.

He says, you know, you say, well, John's disciples fast. Why aren't your disciples fasting? Look, it's inappropriate to fast until the wedding banquet ended. The wedding banquet was often seven days long.

And, you know, other people understood that. The sages, interrupted their schools to hail a bridal procession passing by. This may be a later rabbinic tradition, but some of the later rabbis said, you can't schedule a wedding on Shabbat because Shabbat is full of joy and a wedding is full of joy.

And you just can't have all that wedding in one day. It's just too much. So, the idea was weddings are times of joy.

They're not times for mourning. They're not times for fasting. And Jesus says it's inappropriate to fast while the bridegroom is with them.

The bridegroom will be taken away. That will be the appropriate time. And he talks about propriety in other ways, too.

He speaks of a new, unshrunk cloth. Well, it shrinks after it's sewn onto an old cloth, which is already finished shrinking. And so, it tears it.

It rends the cloth. It's not appropriate. Old wineskins, you don't put new wine into old wineskins because old wineskins, are already stretched to the limit as the wine ferments and expands.

You put new wine into it and it starts expanding. It's going to burst the wineskins. Then we read about extraordinary miracles of compassion.

Jesus' willingness to heal, we read about in 9:18 and 19. And then we read about scandalous faith in 9:20 to 21. This woman with the flow of blood, is kind of ostracized, Leviticus chapter 15, because of her flow of blood.

She can't really be out in the crowds touching people. Mark mentions the crowds, but Matthew doesn't. But she's got a really difficult situation.

She couldn't marry in this situation because with the continual flow of blood, Leviticus 15, she can't have a husband to have intercourse with her. And you can't have marriage without intercourse, according to Jewish teaching. And therefore, she couldn't be married at this point, if she ever was married.

And there's also the stigma of childlessness. So, she's enduring many things. Mark says the physicians only made things worse.

Matthew and Luke leave that out. Not surprising that Luke would leave that out, of course. But this woman, has scandalous faith.

She reaches out and touches the hem of Jesus' garment. And in this case, it would be like what today we call a prayer shawl in Judaism, where you have the fringes of this cloak. She reaches out and touches those.

And Jesus embraced her need. We talked about that earlier. Jesus responded to that faith.

Sometimes faith isn't when you really feel something strongly, strong certainty. Sometimes faith isn't like you have everything figured out and managed to suppress all doubt. Sometimes faith is desperation, where you say, God is the only one who can help me.

And God, I'm not letting go. I'm not letting go. And you keep trusting him.

Jesus showed that it wasn't magic. It wasn't just her touching him. It was her act of faith.

And Jesus publicly embraces that. But in the same way, in the same story, Jesus exercises authority over even death. Children often died young.

We know that from ancient business documents in Egypt, which were poorer than in Galilee. But in Egypt, it appears that about 50 percent of all children born never lived to adulthood. So, children often die young.

You had to have at least two professional mourners, as we said. So they would have mourners gathered. But this man is very different than the woman with the flow of blood.

I mean, she had spent all her living. She didn't have a husband. This man is a ruler of a synagogue.

This was a position of great status. Normally it was a position given to donors in synagogues, people of wealth, people respected in the community. And yet his grief reduces him to the same status as this woman who needs healing.

All of us, sooner or later in life, are reduced to the same level of desperate need unless it's our death that reduces us there. And so, Jesus goes in and he says, she's just asleep. Sleep was a common euphemism for death, but the people laughed at him.

The mourners are supposed to be mourning. But here Jesus is just keeping the messianic secret. He's not letting word get out that he's a healer more than necessary.

I mean, he can't help it with some cases, but this isn't private. He can do it in private. He took her by the hand.

Well, you could contract ritual impurity from the flow of blood, Leviticus 15, from childbirth, Leviticus 12, but touching a corpse, corpse impurity, that wasn't something like the flow of blood where you'd be unclean till evening. Corpse impurity, Numbers chapter 19, you'd be unclean for a week or seven days. But Jesus touches her to bring her life.

And I'm not saying Jesus actually became unclean, but in the sight of others, he was touching her, sharing her uncleanness. And yet it's wonderful that Jesus was willing to be identified with us in our brokenness to make us whole, to make us clean. And he does that.

Well, in the last miracle story of this section, we read about astonishing cures for disabilities in 9.27-34. Jesus responds to faith. The blind men here confess Jesus as the son of David before Peter confesses him as Messiah in Matthew 16. You're also going to have the Canaanite woman doing that, people in great need confessing Jesus.

And we see Jesus can cure anything. Here he cures blindness and inability to speak in these two stories. His opponents are ready to ridicule him.

Pharisees say he does this as the ruler of the demons. Well, today we have people dismissing the reliability of eyewitnesses. We have people saying all sorts of things to explain away miracles, to explain away testimonies that God himself gives to what he's doing.

Now, of course, not all claims of miracles are true, but when God really does miracles, there are people who will try to explain those away to get around them.

We shouldn't feel too surprised because they did that to our Lord himself. We just need to keep speaking the truth and following the truth.

Jesus will go on after this to draw another lesson about his authority in chapter 9 verses 35 to 38. And that's where we'll start in the next lesson.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 10, Matthew 8-9.