

## **Dr. David Turner, Matthew**

### **Lecture 4B, Matthew 8-9: The Authoritative Deeds of Jesus**

Greetings, this is David Turner, and this is Lecture 4B, The Authority of Jesus in Matthew 8 and 9. We are lumping together for this lecture an analysis of the structure of Matthew 8 and 9, along with some running comments on some of the key matters there. You will notice, please, on pages 20 and 21 of the supplemental materials that we have begun with the analysis of Matthew 8 and 9. Please look over to page 21, the supplemental materials, where we note that after Jesus has given us His authoritative teaching, as Matthew has presented it to us in chapters 5 through 7, the Sermon on the Mount, now Matthew presents Jesus to us as an authoritative doer of miraculous deeds. So, we have the miraculous words and the miraculous works of Jesus, both of which are calculated by Matthew to demonstrate to us the authority of Jesus.

Notice how 7:28, and 29 makes it clear that the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' authoritative word, and notice how chapter 8, verse 9, as well as chapter 9, verses 6 to 8, stresses the authority of Jesus explicitly, and of course, implicitly, His miraculous deeds do that as well. So, it appears that what Matthew has given us in chapters 8 and 9 is a selection of Jesus' miracles, which complements Jesus' teaching, and He has shown us that Jesus is a person who teaches under God's authority, with God's authority, and who acts with God's authority. These miracles in chapters 8 and 9, as we state on page 21, the chart there, aren't just tossed in here randomly, but they're arranged in a very interesting pattern.

Notice on the bottom half of page 21 that we have three sets, or three cycles, if you will, of three healing miracles, followed by material on discipleship. In the first cycle, in chapter 8, verses 1 to 17, we have the healing of the leper, the centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law, followed by the discussion with the two would-be disciples. In the second cycle, 8:23 through 9:8, we have three miracles, the stilling of the storm, the demoniacs, and the paralytic, followed by Jesus responding to some questions from the Pharisees about His association with sinners, and a question from John's disciples about why his disciples did not fast, where he stresses the notion of theological newness, in 9:9 through 17.

Then we have the third cycle, with the miracles in 9:18 through 34, where a daughter and a woman are both healed in one story, followed by a blind man being healed and demons being cast out, concluding with the stirring remarks made by our Lord when He looks upon Israel as sheep without a shepherd and calls the disciples to pray for more workers for the harvest field. So that's probably the best way to analyze what we have in these chapters overall, as alternating stories, stressing the power of Jesus

to do miracles, demonstrating His authority as the one who can forgive sins on earth, 9:6 through 8, and His ongoing need for more disciples and the need to confront disciples who don't have their heads on straight, as it were. So with that background in mind, let's look at cycle number one in Matthew chapter 8, verses 1 through 22.

Three miracle stories which comprise Matthew's first set are about a leper, a Roman centurion, and a woman. It's interesting that the first and third stories are both about Jewish people, and both conclude with scripture citations, Leviticus 13:49, 14:2, and 8:4, and Isaiah 53:4, and 8:17. Although the second story does not contain a scripture citation, it's nevertheless the featured story in this set because it's given more space than the other two and because it stresses the key theme of Matthew 5 through 9, the authority of Jesus.

It also emphasizes the faith of a Gentile, 8:10 through 12, another key Matthean motif. Jesus and the outsiders. Why did Matthew select from the many stories that were evidently available to him these three stories about a leper, a Gentile, and a woman? It's very likely the selection was made to show Jesus as a friend to those who were powerless in Jewish society.

The leper was ceremonially impure and thus would have been cast out from all Jewish social and religious functions. The Roman officer would, of course, have military power over the Jews whose land his empire occupied, but due to his ethnicity, he would have no religious clout whatsoever. Peter's mother-in-law would have no ceremonial or ethnic handicaps, but her sex would preclude her from many privileges available only to males.

None of these three would have been able to be admitted to the court of Israel in the temple, where Jewish males presented their offerings to the priests. Nevertheless, it is these people who, for various reasons, were at the margins rather than at the center of society, whose healing stories Matthew tells. Matthew does not feature stories about the social elite of his day, but stories about those who lack status.

Why is that? Matthew is consistently interested in those who were down and out because he knows that they are often surprisingly open to the message of the kingdom. From the tawdry woman in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1 to the appearance of the bizarre astrologers in Matthew 2 to those healed in Matthew 8 and on and on throughout his gospel, Matthew frequently shows his readers that not only that Jesus will save his people from their sins, but also that his people are an amazingly diverse group. Matthew's community was most likely made up of Christian Jews, and it was crucial for them to acknowledge their mission to disciple not only their own nation (Matthew 10:5 and 6) but also all the nations 24:14, and 28:19.

Matthew, therefore, presents Jesus not only as the messiah of all the nations, but also as the model for ministry which brings the messiah to all the nations. Jesus'

disciples in Matthew's community must get beyond their understandable but mistaken scruples in the areas of ritual purity, ethnic exclusivism, and sexual stereotypes, and so must any Christian community today examine its own myopia and comparable areas. Whatever one's culturally driven views of illness, ethnicity, and sex, one must submit to the master's model and love outsiders as he did.

Bruner's commentary, as well as Keener's commentary, both have good insights on this material. Next, something that comes up here that's quite challenging is the matter of healing and the atonement, since Matthew 8:17 cites Isaiah 53:4 in reference to the ministry of Jesus and his death and its relationship to physical healing. It's helpful to note that pain, illness, and death originally were rooted in sin according to Genesis 3, and that redemption from sin will ultimately result in the redemption of the body, Romans 8:23, and the end of pain, Revelation 21:4. Matthew saw the healings and exorcisms performed by Jesus as indications of the presence of the kingdom in breakings of that future reality.

Look at 11:2 to 6, and 12, especially 12:28, 29. Therefore, Matthew connects Jesus' healing of physical illnesses to his ministry of healing as well as his substitutionary death. In connection with the kingdom message, the healings are tokens of the ultimate eschatological results of Jesus' redemption.

While some have made far too much of this, taking it as supporting the notion that Christians need never be sick, the answer to the perennial question about whether there is healing in the atonement is yes. But this must be qualified by pointing out that such healing is guaranteed for all only in the future aspect of the kingdom. There are individual experiences of healing in the present age, but these do not warrant the conclusion that Christians can simply name and claim their healing because it has already been guaranteed by the atonement.

Matthew 8:17 applies Isaiah 53:4 to Jesus' earthly ministry, not to his atoning death. The point of these miracles is to stress Jesus' unique authority, not the blessings he brings to his people. Matthew 8 and 9 are about Christology, not therapy.

The role of faith in these three healings is not uniform. Faith was obviously involved in the first two healings, that of the leper and the officer's servant, but in the latter case, it was not the faith of the servant but that of the officer. In the third case, that of Peter's mother-in-law, there's no indication that anyone's faith precipitated the healing.

Perhaps it is the leper whose words best imply an appropriate view of the healing. The leper knows that Jesus can heal him if he wishes to heal him. This puts omnipotence and providence side by side.

There is no doubt about the former; Jesus is able, but the leper does not presume upon Jesus' sovereignty. That would be putting the Lord to the test. The disciple cannot dictate that God is willing to heal, but he must rest in a sovereign providence that makes no mistakes.

The leper is not deficient in faith, but is amazingly proficient in spiritual wisdom. Next, we comment briefly on the two individuals who wanted to be Jesus' disciples in 8:18 through 22. These two individuals who speak to Jesus about discipleship illustrate opposite problems.

The first one in 8:18 through 20 is carried away with emotional enthusiasm, but has not rationally considered the sacrifice involved in an itinerant ministry. Perhaps his mind is on all the miracles Jesus has been performing, and he wants to continue to experience these glorious events. But there will be miracle workers who are not acknowledged by Jesus as his own at the final judgment, according to 7:21 to 23, and true disciples must be willing to be deprived of life's basic necessities.

A second individual has a more realistic understanding of the sacrifice entailed in Jesus' ministry, evidently. He wishes to postpone following Jesus until he can bury his father, an excuse which seems legitimate in view of Genesis 50 verse 5, Exodus 20 verse 12, Deuteronomy 5:16. Jesus himself, in the context of debunking the traditions of the Pharisees, reaffirmed the Torah on the necessity of honoring one's parents in 15:4 to 6. But harsh as it may seem, Jesus teaches that the demands of his kingdom revise one's notions of family. Compare 10:37, 13:46 to 50.

Neither of these two individuals is the stuff of which a faithful disciple is made. The first's enthusiasm is due to his ignorance of the cost of discipleship, and the second's timidity is due to his awareness of that cost. Jesus needs people who have counted the cost of discipleship, people whose faith is tempered with a realistic understanding of the deprivations that may come to the one who follows Jesus.

Compare 10:34 to 39, 16:24, 25, and other passages. One hopes that both of these individuals were led by these rebukes to examine themselves and later to follow Jesus. But the silence of Matthew's narrative is sobering.

Now we move on to the second cycle and discuss the matter of the miracle of the calming of the storm. By calming the storm, Jesus has shown himself to be the Lord of nature, but it seems clear from the way Matthew tells the story that the nature miracle is intended to teach about discipleship. Jesus plans to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, according to 8:18. Two would-be disciples apparently delay the voyage, but their interviews with Jesus teach the reader important lessons about following Jesus.

As soon as the voyage commences, the storm erupts, and the disciples' little faith, compare 6:30, 14:31, and 16:8, is tested. It is genuine faith, but it is sadly limited in its awareness of the power of Jesus. After the challenge of the storm and the rebuke of Jesus, their faith was ostensibly strengthened.

The most critical concern of Jesus' disciples is not the potential persecutions or disasters they may face. Rather, it is the quality of their faith, which is directly proportionate to the accuracy of their perception of Jesus, the object of their faith. On this point, it's instructive to recall 8:26, where in the middle of a disaster in process, as the boat is about to go under, Jesus addresses the disciples' weak faith before he rebukes the storm.

This indicates that the first priority of both ancient and modern disciples must be to focus on the power of Jesus, not the power of life's storms, which threaten to overcome them. It may seem that Jesus is asleep, unaware of their difficulties, but he is able to handle the difficulties easily as his disciples maintain their faith in him. They must realize that Jesus, the object of their faith, is able to get them to the other side of the lake.

Matthew 8 concludes with the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniacs, which is the second miracle story in Matthew's second set of miracle stories. Matthew 9 will conclude the second set with the story of the healing of the paralytic in 9:1-8. Demon possession appears frequently in Matthew. Get your concordance, and you can find that for yourself.

But the details of this particular incident are remarkable. Previously, Jesus had cast out demons, and he had just calmed the storm. But here, his single word, go, demonstrates his authority over demons, animals, and the Sea of Galilee.

The authority of Jesus' words 7:28-29 and deeds 8:9-9:6 is just a key point of this story, as it is in all of Matthew 8 and 9. But this episode shows that the authority of Jesus operates alongside his mercy. Jesus relates to these dangerous demoniacs with the same compassion that has been implicit in his ministry since 4:23, and which will become explicit in 9:36 as a model for the disciples' own mission in chapter 10. Evidently, the country of the Gadarenes was a Gentile country.

The rejection of Jesus by the inhabitants may be taken along with 10:13-15, where the disciples are warned that their mission trip will also result in rejection in some households and villages. The rejection of Jesus is exemplary for his disciples, who should not view themselves as above their master. Rather, they must face rejection and persecution realistically, with faith, not fear, 10:24-33. All who minister for Jesus need to be reminded that at times their best intentions for unbelievers will be received in a negative way.

Compare 7:6. Those who do not know Jesus often make it clear that they do not want to know about Jesus. The people who reject his authority exclude themselves from his mercy. Carson's wry comment about the Gadarenes puts it well.

They preferred pigs to persons, swine to the Savior. But the grace of God can still today turn those who reject Jesus into his followers when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed by the words and deeds of Christians. Matthew 9-8 completes the second set of the three miracle stories with the account of the healing of the paralyzed man.

The healing of the paralyzed man extends the authority of Jesus to its most crucial aspect, the forgiveness of sins. Readers of Matthew may have already seen how Jesus taught with authority in the Sermon on the Mount, 7:28-29, and they're also aware of his authoritative acts of healing even from a distance in 8:9. But authority over the forgiveness of sins is much greater than authoritative words and actions. Authority to forgive sins gets to the root of the problems and illnesses, which are the symptoms of sin.

One can teach against sin, but this does not cause sin to stop, let alone secure its forgiveness. One can heal sick people, but sooner or later they'll get sick again, and ultimately they'll die. Jesus' authority in these domains, as great as it is, pales in comparison to his authority to forgive the sins which are the root of all the other problems.

Such authority is at the heart of Jesus' mission to save his people from their sins, 1:21, by giving his life as a ransom for them, 20:28, thereby inaugurating the new covenant. 26:28 compared Jeremiah 31:31. As God's beloved son, Jesus acts with a divine prerogative. He does not blaspheme; he saves.

The relation of sin and sickness is a complex matter. Humans do not have the requisite insight to diagnose whether sin is the cause of sickness in individual cases. Yet it is possible that Jesus, through the Spirit, knew that this man's illness was due to sin, or at least Brunner argues that way.

And it's also possible that his illness was psychosomatic, and that the forgiveness of his sins freed his mind of guilt and thereby healed him. That's the way Barclay takes it. I have my doubts.

Matthew does not focus, though, on the reason for the man's paralysis, but on the authority of Jesus to forgive his sins. In the present age, the righteous may suffer many physical maladies. But in redemptive history, human sickness and death are ultimately the results of human sin.

Genesis 3. Human beings find themselves caught in the maelstrom of sickness and death because of the rebellion of our first parents. But through the obedience of the

last Adam, the new humanity can find immediate release from sin's bondage and ultimate physical healing as well. Compare Psalm 103:3.

Jesus' healings are a sign that the ultimate defeat of sin and Satan has begun. It is significant that Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders here is not conciliatory, but confrontational. The accusation of blasphemy contradicts Jesus' unique standing as the Son of God, and no gentle compromise is possible in this case.

And sadly, things are only to get worse, as 9:34 will soon indicate. After our three miracle stories, we now move into the material on discipleship in the second cycle. First, Jesus' response to the Pharisees.

After reading the thoughts of certain scribes in the last pericope, Jesus now responds to indignant questions from the Pharisees. This pericope clarifies the mission of Jesus by recounting events which transpired after the call of Matthew in 9:9. After being called, Matthew throws a dinner party for his previous and new associates, 9:10.

Certain Pharisees accusingly ask Jesus' disciples about their social companions, 9:11. The teaching of Jesus' mission flows from this controversy. 9:12 and 13 compare Hosea 6:6.

As the ultimate and definitive teacher of the law, 5:17, Jesus exemplifies the ideals of Hosea 6:6 in calling Matthew the tax collector to be his disciple and in associating with tax collectors and sinners. While the Pharisees no doubt knew this text, they did not grasp its applicability to the matter of associating with outcasts. Jesus has previously exemplified such ideals in his ministry to the leper, the Roman officer, and Peter's mother-in-law in 8:1-17.

His kingdom ministry is not circumscribed by ritual impurity, ethnicity, or gender, and neither will social stigmas limit its outreach. God's primary attribute in relating to sinful humans is mercy. Thus God's primary desire for his people is for them to show mercy, not to offer sacrifices.

Matthew portrays Jesus' ministry to outcasts as epitomizing this ideal. It's not that Jesus downplays adherence to the law nor the sacrificial system, but that for him adherence to the law starts with a compassionate heart. Davies and Allison put it well in their commentary, cultic observance without inner faith and heartfelt loyalty is vain.

Compare the similar story about Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. But certain Pharisees oppose this model of ministry. Matthew skillfully presents the opposition to Jesus from the Jewish leaders as becoming more and more pronounced.

Here the Pharisees question Jesus indirectly through his disciples, but later the questions of various Jewish leaders will be addressed to him directly. Ultimately Jesus turns the tables and asks them a question which they either cannot or will not answer, and this effectively ends the pattern of interrogation. Notice this especially in chapter 22 at the end.

Jesus' social interaction with notorious sinners scandalized the Pharisees of his own day, and it likewise tends to embarrass those in our day whose views of separation from worldliness stress externals rather than personal integrity. Jesus and his disciples had no qualms about associating with sinners, and Christians today dare not hide their light under a basket due to legalistic scruples. Associations with unbelievers must be handled with wisdom so that ethical compromise is avoided, but fear of such compromise cannot become an excuse for isolation from those who most need the message of the kingdom, 5:13-16. Associating with them is the way to summon them to repent.

The second part of the discipleship stories in this second cycle concerns Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist on fasting. Jesus' disciples did not follow the traditional practices of the Pharisees. They enjoy table fellowship with undesirables, and they do not fast.

So again, the basic issue is the relationship of Jesus, his teaching, and his disciples to Moses, his law, and his disciples, the Pharisees. While many interpreters argue that this pericope shows the fundamental incompatibility of Jesus and Moses, Israel and the church, law and grace, this view cannot be sustained in light of 5:17-20. A more nuanced approach is needed, one that takes due note of the temporary presence of the bridegroom with the wedding guests. A wedding celebration obviously calls for a feast, not a fast.

During the short time of messianic jubilation while Jesus is with his disciples, fasting is inappropriate. But Jesus will not always be with the disciples, so the time while he is with them should be characterized by extraordinary joy and devotion. After Jesus is taken away, his disciples will once again fast.

Matthew 9:14-17 is, on any interpretation, a key text on the matter of continuity and discontinuity in biblical theology. While it's been argued above that the text does not teach a blunt supersessionism in which Jesus replaces Moses, it's clear that when the disciples fast after Jesus has been taken away, they do not go back to fasting as if he had never come. Jesus does not endorse Pharisaic fasting traditions, but he does teach his followers how to fast in 6:16-18. What did Jesus imply with the final clause of the pericope so that both are preserved? Does he mean to say that the new wineskins and the new wine are both preserved? Or that the old wineskins and the new wine are both preserved? It appears in light of 5:17-20 in Matthew's overall teaching that the second option is best.



Jesus as the ultimate teacher of Israel preserves the law and prophets by fulfilling them, not by merely reiterating past teaching, which overstates continuity, or by bluntly jettisoning past teaching, which overstates discontinuity. Fasting is preserved, but in the new context of the righteousness of the inaugurated kingdom, not in the old context of Pharisaic tradition. Now we move into the third cycle of healing and miracles of miracle stories and discipleship in Matthew 8 and 9. In Matthew 9:18 and following, Jesus is once again responding to people in physical need, but the familiar theme is reiterated here in an unusual fashion with one story in 9:20-22 within the framework of another story, which begins in 9:18-19 and is concluded in 9:23-26. Both stories stress the activity of faith in initiating touch as the means of healing.

In comparison with Mark and Luke, Matthew's version of the double story is highly condensed. The placement of the story of the healing of the woman in the middle of the story of the raising of the official's daughter delays the outcome of the initial story and heightens the suspense of the reader. The two miracles in this double story address two basic issues of human existence: the depths of parental love and the pain of chronic disease.

In this case, the chronic disease results in social ostracism due to ritual impurity. The synagogue ruler's love for his little girl confronts the power of death when he takes the initiative to plead for Jesus to touch and heal her. The power of Jesus defeats the power of death, and a family is spared the shattering effects of the loss of a child.

When one keeps in mind the already-not-yet conception of the kingdom in Matthew, the raising of the little girl hints at the ultimate resurrection of the dead by the power of Jesus. The hemorrhaging woman takes the initiative to touch Jesus' garment so that she can be rid of her chronic disease with its resulting ritual impurity and so that she can be free to experience normal human social relationships again. Her condition may not have been so hopeless as that of the official's daughter, but her despair must have been deep after 12 years in which she found no relief.

The verb used for her deliverance, *sozo*, implies an even greater deliverance from the sin which is the root cause of physical infirmity. Compare 8:17 and 9:26. As touching these human needs, the major thrust of Matthew's narrative is Christological, not anthropological. The human needs are mentioned merely to stress, not only to stress Jesus' compassion on them, but to stress his power.

Jesus is presented once again as the one whose authority on earth to forgive sins is demonstrated by his powerful deeds of compassion. 9:36. This presentation continues in the next two incidents as blind and mute men are healed. In these two next incidents with these two miracle stories, the third set of stories, 9:18-34, comes to an end.

Jesus has been portrayed as a healer of leprosy, paralysis, fever, demon possession, blindness, and muteness in these stories. He has even raised a little girl from the dead. It must be remembered that these acts not only demonstrate the compassion which is highlighted next in 9:35-38, they also demonstrate his authority on earth to forgive sin.

9:6. For Matthew, the miracles are not so much about human needs as they are about God's grace to his son Jesus, the Messiah. And now to summarize the teaching on discipleship in 9:35-38. Matthew 9:35-38 concludes a narrative of selected miracle stories which began in 8.1 and at the same time introduces the mission discourse chapter of chapter 10. For the structure of Matthew 8 and 9, we've already talked about, but it's important to note how the stress in Matthew 8 and 9 on the authoritative deeds of Jesus answers to the stress in Matthew 5-7 on the authoritative teaching of Jesus.

Thus, Matthew 5-9 presents Jesus as the authoritative Messiah of Israel whose words and deeds proclaim the rule of God. The nearly identical summaries in 4:23 and 9:35 serve as bookends that bracket these two quote-unquote books of Jesus' words and deeds. At the same time, 4:23-5:2 and 9:35-10:4 provide narrative context for the discourses in Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 10, respectively.

When one considers Matthew 9:35-38 as a bookend with 4:22-25, it becomes apparent that Matthew 5-9 amounts to a sampling of Jesus' authoritative words and deeds. Both his teachings and his actions demonstrate the authority of God's rule and his actions demonstrate his authority as the Son of Man to forgive sins. It's clear that Matthew 9:35-38 performs two functions.

It not only looks back as far as 4:22, it also looks ahead to the mission discourse of chapter 10. Matthew 8 and 9 present three sets of three miracle stories, and interspersed before and after the second set are stories emphasizing discipleship. These discipleship stories prepare the reader for the need for mission workers expressed through the dual metaphor of shepherds for Israel, who will work in the harvest fields.

Such workers will count the cost of serving Jesus 8:18-22. They will perhaps come from the undesirable elements of the culture 9:9-13, and they will understand the newness of Jesus' kingdom message 9:14-17. These are the kind of workers for whom the disciples are told to pray in 9:38. Judging from the sobering instructions in the mission discourse just ahead in the narrative, these workers will need to endure much opposition. The opposition that is ahead for the disciples as shepherd harvesters is also hinted at in Matthew 5-9. Jesus teaches that his disciples' righteousness must surpass that of the current Jewish leaders and that his authoritative teachings have a powerful impact upon the crowd, which transcends the influence of their current leaders.

Many of those leaders will evidently be displaced at the eschatological banquet by those who acknowledge Jesus' authority 8:11-12. Certain of these leaders believe Jesus is blaspheming when he forgives sin, and they accuse him of being in league with Beelzebub when he casts out demons 9:3-34. Thus, it's no wonder that Jesus pictures Israel as sheep without a shepherd and calls for more harvesters. And it's not surprising that the current leaders will oppose the disciples' mission in 10:14, and in the next chapter, Matthew narrates how Jesus prepares his disciples to encounter the growing opposition already engendered by his own ministry.