

Matthew 8-9: Jesus' Miracles and the Cost of Discipleship

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Session 10

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener focuses on Matthew chapters 8 and 9, exploring how Jesus' miracles demonstrate His divine authority and prefigure the inclusive Gentile mission. By healing marginalized figures, casting out demons, and calming a storm, Jesus confronts ancient social and physical barriers, offering a foretaste of the restoration of all creation. Keener emphasizes the radical and costly nature of discipleship, which demands putting Jesus' kingdom above all conventional family and social obligations. Ultimately, these chapters illustrate that Jesus is the moral and physical restorer who willingly embraces human uncleanness and suffering.

Outline

I. Jesus' Miracles in Matthew 8-9: Demonstrations of Authority and Kingdom Inclusivity

- **A. The Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13)**
 1. A Roman exception that prefigures the Gentile mission as a whole.
 2. The Centurion's deep humility: coming on behalf of his servant and acknowledging his own unworthiness.
 3. Jesus' obstacle to faith: testing the centurion with "Shall I come?" which highlights barriers regarding Gentiles.
 4. The Centurion's faith: recognizing Jesus' authority to heal from a distance, analogous to military command under Rome.
 5. Jesus' response: declaring his faith is greater than any in Israel, and prophesying that many from the East and West will sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom, while children of the kingdom are cast out.
- **B. Peter's Mother-in-Law and General Healings (Matthew 8:14-17)**

1. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law in Capernaum; she immediately responds with grateful service.
2. Jesus exorcises spirits with a single word, contrasting with magical and elaborate contemporary techniques.
3. Prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4: physical healing as a manifestation of the Servant's suffering and a foretaste of the complete physical restoration of creation.

II. The Cost of Discipleship (Matthew 8:18-22)

• A. The Eager Scribe (Matthew 8:19-20)

1. Offers to follow Jesus anywhere, but Jesus warns of the cost: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head".
2. Jesus' homelessness symbolizes rejection and a lack of basic security, evoking the righteous sufferer of the Psalms and radical prophets.

• B. The Hesitant Disciple (Matthew 8:21-22)

1. Requests to "first go and bury my father".
2. Interpreting the request: either waiting for an elderly father to die (primary burial) or waiting a year for the secondary burial (re-burying bones in an ossuary).
3. Jesus' radical response: "Let the dead bury their dead".
4. Cultural weight: Burying parents was seen as the greatest commandment of filial piety; Jesus claims authority that takes absolute precedence over even the most sacred family duties.
5. Elijah contrast: Elijah permitted Elisha to say goodbye to his parents; Jesus refuses, emphasizing undivided commitment for true discipleship.

III. Jesus' Authority Over Nature and Demons (Matthew 8:23-34)

• A. Calming the Storm (Matthew 8:23-27)

1. Sudden, severe windstorms (squalls) common on the Sea of Galilee due to its low elevation.

2. Jesus' peaceful sleep in the storm as a sign of perfect trust in God.
3. Jesus reproves the disciples' fear as a lack of faith, and stills the wind and waves with a command.
4. The disciples are awestruck by His identity; Jesus' calming of the storm echoes Jonah but demonstrates His superior authority.

- **B. The Gadarene Demoniacs (Matthew 8:28-34)**

1. Setting: Gadara/Gerasa in the Decapolis, a predominantly Gentile region.
2. Matthew mentions two demoniacs (doubling Mark's single character), a common stylistic feature in ancient biography.
3. The demons recognize Jesus as their Judge and beg not to be tormented "before the time".
4. The demons enter a herd of pigs which drown in the sea, illustrating that the demons are put out of action.
5. The local people prefer their property (the pigs) over human deliverance and ask Jesus to leave.

IV. Jesus' Authority to Forgive Sins and Eat with Sinners (Matthew 9:1-8)

- **A. Healing the Paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8)**

1. Moved by the faith of the friends who brought the paralytic.
2. Jesus addresses spiritual healing first: "Your sins are forgiven".
3. Scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy because only God forgives sins, and no temple sacrifice was offered.
4. Jesus heals the paralytic as visible proof of His authority to forgive sins on earth.

- **B. The Call of Matthew and Table Fellowship (Matthew 9:9-13)**

1. Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector (collaborator with Rome, viewed as a traitor and extortioner).
2. Eating together in that culture established a covenant relationship of mutual approval and intimacy.

3. Pharisees criticize Jesus; Jesus replies that the sick need a physician and quotes Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice".

V. Fasting, New Wineskins, and Miracles of Restoration (Matthew 9:14-34)

- **A. The Question of Fasting (Matthew 9:14-17)**

1. John's disciples and Pharisees fast, but Jesus' disciples do not because the Bridegroom is with them.
2. Parables of the unshrunk cloth and new wine in old wineskins: the new era of the Kingdom cannot be forced into old religious forms.

- **B. The Hemorrhaging Woman and the Ruler's Daughter (Matthew 9:18-26)**

1. The hemorrhaging woman: suffers ritual impurity and social ostracization; her desperate, "scandalous" touch of Jesus' fringe heals her.
2. The synagogue ruler (Jairus): a man of high status reduced to desperate grief.
3. Jesus touches the dead girl, defying corpse impurity laws to bring life, illustrating His willingness to share our uncleanness to make us clean.

- **C. The Blind and Mute Men (Matthew 9:27-34)**

1. Blind men confess Jesus as the "Son of David".
2. Pharisees explain away the miracle by claiming He casts out demons by the prince of demons.