

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 10, Matthew 8-9

6-min. Video Overview

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You know, when you read chapters 8 and 9 in the Gospel of Matthew, it's kind of like looking at a portfolio—a stunning showcase of Jesus' radical authority. But this is so much more than just a highlight reel of miracles. Matthew's making a really powerful argument here about what true power even is.

So let's dive in and see what he's talking about. To really get into this, let's just start with a big question for you. I mean, seriously think about it.

If you had ultimate power—power over nature, sickness, even life and death—what would you do with it? Who would you use it for? And maybe the most important question of all—what would it cost you? Well, it turns out that's the exact question Matthew chapters 8 and 9 are designed to answer. The stories we're about to look at—they're not just about what Jesus could do. No, they're meant to reveal the character—the very purpose behind his incredible authority.

Alright, so first things first, Matthew just lays out the sheer scope of this authority. And it's a power that isn't limited to just one area. It stretches over every corner of creation, from the totally natural to the supernatural.

And just look at the range here; it's incredible. In just a few quick stories, Jesus speaks to nature, and a crazy storm on the Sea of Galilee just stops. He commands supernatural forces and demons are cast out.

And then he exercises authority over death itself by raising a little girl back to life. I mean, this is total comprehensive power we're talking about. But here's the thing—these weren't just clean, sterile magic tricks.

Matthew makes it really clear that this whole mission of restoration—it came at a huge personal cost to Jesus. It wasn't effortless. It was an act of profound self-giving.

And here's where we see the price tag. See, in his culture, holiness was all about separation. Touching a leper, a bleeding woman, or a dead body—that made you ritually unclean.

But Jesus, he just flips the script. He consistently steps into that uncleanness. He absorbs it himself to make other people whole.

This wasn't just about breaking some rules. It was a total redefinition of power and holiness—a path that points straight to the cross. So if his power worked by absorbing brokenness, well, the next question is pretty obvious, right? Who was all this for? Who were the people on the receiving end of this radical authority? And the answer, for the people back then, was absolutely scandalous.

Okay, so on one hand, you've got the religious rulebook of the day—keep your distance from outsiders, especially the occupying Romans. And whatever you do, do not share a meal with notorious sinners. But Jesus? His actions were a direct contradiction to all of that.

He praises the faith of a Roman centurion, a foreign soldier, and heals his servant. And then, most shockingly of all, he goes to a dinner party full of tax collectors. And we really have to get our heads around what this meant.

A tax collector wasn't just some guy doing accounting. No. They were seen as traitors, working with the Roman occupiers and getting rich by ripping off their own people.

So to sit down and share a meal with them, which was an act of deep friendship and acceptance, was just a profound statement of radical inclusion. And when the religious leaders, you know, predictably challenged him, Jesus gave this famous reply, and it totally reframed his entire mission. He wasn't some philosopher for the people who had it all together.

He was a doctor for the spiritually sick. His power was aimed squarely at the very people that society and religion had totally written off. Okay, so you've got this radical power.

This wild, inclusive mission. What does it actually cost to sign up for this? Well, the answer is an allegiance that was every bit as absolute and demanding. This leads to one of the most, well, frankly, jarring moments in the Gospels.

A guy wants to follow Jesus, but he asks to go fulfill his family duty and bury his father first. And Jesus' response sounds incredibly harsh. Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.

Okay, to make any sense of this, we need a quick dive into first-century Jewish burial customs. So after an initial burial, the oldest son had this sacred duty to come back about a year later to collect the bones for their final burial. So this guy, he wasn't just asking for a few days off for a funeral.

He might have been asking for a delay of up to a year to take care of this obligation. So look, whether he was asking for a few days or a whole year, the point is absolutely massive. Jesus was claiming that allegiance to him and his new kingdom came before even the most sacred family duty you could have.

The call to follow him was right now, and it was absolute. So what does all of this add up to? The power, the cost, the inclusion, the demand. What's the ultimate point of the authority we're seeing in these chapters? And Jesus himself gives us the master key to unlock all of it.

He quotes the Old Testament prophet Hosea, telling the religious establishment to go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. In other words, real compassion for broken people.

That is the ultimate religious act. It's more important than keeping all the rules perfectly. And that's the bottom line, isn't it? Jesus' ultimate authority wasn't a tool for showing off or for controlling people.

It was an instrument of compassion. It was for restoring what was broken, for including the outsider, and for showing everyone that the heart of God is for the hurting and the marginalized. So Matthew leaves us with this incredible picture.

An authority that doesn't dominate, but serves. A power that doesn't push people away, but welcomes them in. A power that is defined by its unstoppable drive to heal, include, and restore.

And that really leaves the final question to us, doesn't it? What would a power like that look like in our world today?