

The Mission of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning church family, my name is Bec and today I'm going to be doing the Bible reading from Matthew chapter 9. So this is straight after last week where Jesus heals the demon-possessed men and the city asked him to leave.

So we're going to read Matthew chapter 9, starting at verse 1. And getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven. And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, this man is blaspheming.

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven or to say rise and walk?

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home.

[1 : 1 1] And he rose and went home. When the crowd saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Fear is one of those things that we all have. And perhaps we don't like to admit how much it plays a part in our daily lives.

There's fear of COVID at the minute. But then more generally, there's just fear of the future. There's a lot of that around at the minute.

Climate change. Increasing military threats. Losing our job. Losing our health. Fear of losing our comfortable lifestyle. Perhaps even fear of our failures as Christians.

There's just so many points at which fear can get a hold of us and does get a hold of us. Our most deep-seated fears are shown in relationships. We fear being exploited, manipulated, betrayed, abandoned.

[2 : 2 0] And all those things we fear, they're massive fears, when our craving is so much the opposite. Our craving is to be loved and accepted. Larry Crabb says that driving all our fears in relationships is the more powerful fear, the more deep-seated fear of being abandoned and rejected by God when we die.

So behind all our fears is that notion that, well, someday we're going to stand before the Lord and perhaps be abandoned and rejected by Him. So fear is a reality.

But there's an important thing to know here. Fear isn't always the same. Some fear is good. Some fear is helpful. Why?

Because it's based on evidence. It's based on experience. It's based on reality. And of course then some fear is bad. Some fear is debilitating.

It's unnecessary because it's based on irrational thinking. It's based on stuff that's contrary to the evidence. It's based on our own perception of reality or perhaps even based on our own imagination.

[3 : 3 2] So dealing with fear well, therefore, is about having a healthy fear. A healthy fear motivates healthy responses.

Healthy responses will move us towards truth and produce real personal benefits. The introduction is that way because I think in this section of Matthew, fear is also a key response that links these units together, these miracle units together.

It's a very big part of this section of the life and ministry of Jesus. And it goes something like this. As Jesus confronts the world, and that's what he's doing in these chapters, chapter 8 and 9 specifically, As Jesus confronts the world, then his power, his authority, his priority and mission produces and prompts fear responses.

Some good fear responses, some bad fear responses. And the incident of the man healing this paralyzed man has a full range of responses.

But before we get into that, I want to just give you a little bit of bigger context again, as I often do. If you want to turn back to chapter 4, verse 17, we'll just set this whole section in context once again.

[4 : 56] Where Jesus from that began to preach saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus frames his mission as the long-awaited Messiah, God's king and savior, come to reestablish God's kingdom or rule in this world.

And not surprisingly, he's a demanding king. His arrival therefore demands repentance, which is, among other things, just a complete reset of how we think and how we act as we think about God and how God operates in this world and how we ought to relate to God in this world.

And Matthew aligns that with what the prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah wrote. And he uses massive bookends to sort of frame everything he's saying from chapter 4 through to the end of chapter 9.

Chapter 4, verse 23 to 24 and chapter 9, verse 35, the two bookends, where it talks about Jesus teaching and proclaiming and healing.

That's the mark of his ministry. Healing every sort of disease and illness and ailment. Jesus' authority, identity and priority in mission was marked by teaching, proclaiming and healing.

[6 : 16] And then in chapter 7 and 28, after the Sermon on the Mount, we find that working out. The people were amazed. And that marvel and amazement has both excitement and fear in it.

It's incredible what they're just hearing. But it also is unnerving what they're hearing. Because of the radical nature of it and the radical challenge embedded in it. And chapter 8 and 9 then is carefully structured as three groups of three miracles.

Each group having a radical demand for loyalty to Jesus after each set of three miracles. Each miracle demonstrates that Jesus is God and King in God's world.

Because he does the things that only God could do. So each miracle is amazing. But it's also unnerving. What do we do with this man? Each miracle demonstrates Jesus' compassion and priority as God's King and Savior.

Reversing the effects of sin. Restoring sin distorted image bearers to fellowship with God. Now the healing of this paralyzed man is the third miracle in the second group of three.

[7 : 31] And these three miracles particularly are linked by fear responses. And these fear responses, as I've said before, are prompted by confrontation with Jesus' power, authority, and priority.

So look back at the one in the storm. Jesus calmed the storm. The disciples were in fear of their lives due to the storm on the lake. But then their fear changes and they were fearful of this man who calmed the storm.

What sort of man is this? The people at Gadara, where these two demon-possessed men were, they start off with a deep fear of the violence and the power of these two possessed men.

And then their fear changes to a fear of Jesus. Having seen him heal these two men. And they're so fearful of Jesus. They say, look, please, just go away and leave us alone.

And then, of course, the demons. They cower before Jesus. They can see past Jesus to the fact that Jesus has got it. And they beg Jesus. Don't destroy us now.

[8 : 49] Just let us go into the pigs. A range of fear responses. As people are confronted, as Jesus confronts the world.

Now, the immediate context, then, as we sweep into chapters 9, verses 1 to 8, continues with more fear responses. So, put in a setting here, Jesus is back in Capernaum.

And Matthew then takes us straight into the story of the healing of this paralyzed man. No background details like Mark and Luke gives. And I think Matthew doing that actually creates a contrast with what's gone before, the fear responses of the Gadarenes.

And now, these five blokes who come to Jesus in helplessness and yet confidence. These blokes show great faith in Jesus.

That is, they're able to see past the circumstance of their friend. This guy's been paralyzed for a lifetime. They're able to see past the circumstance of their friend to the compassion and healing power of Jesus.

[10 : 06] Everybody present is expecting a miracle. A miracle of healing. But then Jesus opens the dialogue by saying, I think, quite unexpectedly, as Marie's brought that out already.

And just feel these words. Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven. Why?

Now, why? Why would Jesus lead out with those words? Because his words expose the unseen reality for this man.

There's a reality, a physical reality. It's very obvious. Has been all his lifetime. He's paralyzed. But Jesus wants to expose the unseen reality for this man. It's a much deeper spiritual paralysis.

And it's caused by fear of God. And caused by sin. So how does that work? Well, severe disabilities were thought to be a very obvious, tangible, physical evidence of God's curse on that person.

[11 : 22] For a particular sin. So, as this guy is brought by his mates to Jesus, his fears for the future would have been deep and very, very persistent.

What if my friends who are sticking with me thus far, what if they abandon me because I'm accursed and they don't want to be around me anymore?

Then what will become of me? And when I die, I'm already living with the evidence of God's curse for some sin or other.

But when I die, all my sin is taken into account. Will I experience God's curse even in a more tormenting way? In a more debilitating way? The man knew he was physically paralyzed.

But my suspicion is, as he came to Jesus, he also knew he was spiritually paralyzed. Unable to stop sinning. Unable to get away from the curse of God.

[12 : 30] Unable to stop God's wrath from falling upon him at some point in the future. It would have been a deep fear indeed, my friends. Unable to stop sinning.

Unable to stop sinning. And Jesus speaks into that deepest of fears. Jesus speaks gently into that deepest of fears.

Take heart, my son. Take heart. Stop being driven by fear of me.

Your friends have come to me, brought you to me. But I know you're fearful of me. Stop being fearful. Stop being driven by fear of me.

And instead, be comforted. Encouraged. Be confident. Your sins are forgiven. You are in good hands as you come to me.

[13 : 41] It's as if Jesus said to me, yes, my son, you came to me in your helplessness. You came to me needy. You came to me deeply fearful.

And then your fear got worse because your confrontation with me exposed an even deeper plight. Your situation is worse than you first thought it was, perhaps.

As you now wrestle with your sin. But my declaration to you, my son, is that your sin, all of it, is forgiven.

Not only that, but the word my son means he's been restored to full family privileges.

Fully accepted in relationship to Jesus, son, and therefore heir. Now those sort of theologies don't develop until much later after Jesus is killed and resurrected and goes back to heaven.

[14 : 50] But it's all there in embryonic form. Now friends, how sweet those words must have sounded.

I've been working on this all week, on these words. I thought I would get over it this morning, but I haven't got over it this morning. It's come back. I was almost going to say it's come back to haunt me. But those words are so powerful.

Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven. And here it is.

One word. Two lots of fear. A bad fear response. A good fear response. The fear response brings this man to Jesus.

And the word of Jesus both exposes the depths of his sin and his fear. And at the same time, dispels it. There's the gospel for you.

[15 : 59] Why do we need to fear? Come to Jesus in all our sin. His word will expose it. There's no question about that. And that's partly behind my tears this morning.

But at the same time, his word dispels it. How sweet those words must have been. The focus shifts now to the scribes who come to Jesus.

But they come in outrage. At Jesus' claim to be God. They know jolly well what Jesus is claiming. When he says your sins are forgiven.

They were the theological professors of the Jewish scriptures. And they knew that Jesus was claiming to be equal with God. And in their eyes, that was the worst sin a person could commit.

So in their eyes, as they looked at Jesus, he was far worse than the paralyzed man. He deserved God's curse even more than the paralyzed man. He deserved to die for such arrogance.

[17 : 06] And perhaps their outrage also were not told. But perhaps they thought, well, this man obviously is accursed by God.

So how dare this man, Jesus, offer him kindness and deliverance when God's already ruled on his fate. And in response to them, Jesus reveals their internal reality as well.

They also are suffering from a spiritual paralysis and fear. Just as deep, just as strong as that paralyzed man, but different. And thinking about the options Jesus gave these guys in verse 5, it's not quite what we would think.

Because the scribes, I suspect, would have thought it easier to say, get up and walk. Now, why do I say that?

Because I think for the scribes, the really difficult, the really dangerous thing to say was your sins are forgiven. Because a statement like that was to invite God's wrath to fall on you.

[18 : 17] And if God's wrath didn't fall on you, certainly the wrath of the scribes would and the Pharisees. So I think they would have thought it was easier to say, get up and walk. Because the worst that would come out of that is Jesus would just look like a fool.

Because he couldn't do it. See, the scribes knew their scriptures well. They knew Moses and Elijah had done wonderful miracles.

They knew to associate miracles with God's special servants. They had actually witnessed Jesus' miracles. They couldn't deny that. So miracles were not common, but certainly possible.

But what wasn't possible was for any man, and no prophet had ever even come close to, what Jesus said, son, your sins are forgiven.

But Jesus claims authority for both. And he immediately heals the man physically, as evidence of the unseen spiritual healing that's just happened on the inside.

[19 : 27] And without fuss, almost an anticlimax to the story, without fuss, this man, having been paralyzed for years, gets to his feet, full mobility, full muscle tone and strength, and takes off home.

Disappears. As if he'd been walking for the whole of his life. But the focus, therefore, because of the way the story is structured, the focus remains squarely on the scribes.

This man just exited, staged, left, wherever that side is. And the focus stays on the scribes. And their spiritual paralysis.

What do I mean by spiritual paralysis? These guys were soaked in the study of God's word. And yet, they were paralyzed in the way they had understood God's word.

So they couldn't see what was in front of their face. They couldn't see that which should have been so obvious to them. That Jesus was presenting precisely with the characteristics and circumstance and context that the scriptures, especially Isaiah said, would mark the coming of Messiah.

[20 : 45] God's savior and king. And they couldn't see it. Or they wouldn't see it. Because it didn't quite fit with what they expected God to do. Or what they thought God should do.

Isaiah 43, verse 25. And it mixed in among the servant songs back in Isaiah. It was very clear that Messiah would come. And this would mark him. Teaching, proclaiming, and healing.

And forgiving of sins. Now these guys were so badly, totally paralyzed spiritually. Such a deep level.

And they were probably, no doubt, also fearful. Part of their outrage at Jesus was a fear response. Jesus is going to undermine God's purposes. Jesus is at odds with God's purposes.

We've got to stop him. We've got to protect God. God. There's no doubt these guys had ample evidence that Jesus is God.

[21 : 52] But would that change their thinking? Would that change their attitudes? Would they change their thinking and attitudes based on the evidence before them?

Would they come to a proper fear of God? Based on what they can see. And what Jesus is teaching. Would they come to a proper fear of God in obedience and worship?

Or, like the Gadarenes, would they dismiss Jesus based on their own understanding of what he should be? Or what he might be?

Or that he was undermining or threatening God's salvation process? See the difference again? Good fear will draw them into Jesus. Like the five blokes just before them.

Bad fear will keep you from seeing the blessings of Jesus or push you away from Jesus. And the final part of the story has the crowd coming to Jesus in fear and worship.

[23 : 00] And I use the word fear there because marveling just doesn't cut it. The word is a very strong word. And it actually does have fear built into it. And in a sense, all worship should have some degree of fear.

Not a paralyzing, debilitating fear. But a caution, an awesomeness. A sense of division and difference. God being up here and us being down here.

And it seems like, therefore, verse 8 is a really hard verse to understand. And all the staff and all the elders have spent some time trying to help me on this one.

But I take responsibility for what's said here. It's a hard verse to understand. And I think it's this. It seems like the crowd have accepted Jesus as a son of man type figure.

That is a son of man type figure. And by that I mean that they recognized he was a special servant of God. Remember Nicodemus recognized that? Yes, I know you're a special servant sent from God.

[23 : 59] It's in the character, it's in the category of a John the Baptist and Elijah or one of the prophets. It's highly unlikely they're seeing him as he described himself in this instance as the son of man.

I.e. Messiah, God's king and savior. So I would say this. That when the crowds come to Jesus in fear and worship. Then their sense of awe and respect for Jesus is genuine.

But really, really limited and short sighted. Severely limited by their understanding of Jesus as not much more than a miracle worker.

A gifted servant of God among them. So there you have it. The story. Three. Lots of people come confronted by Jesus.

Responses. Fear responses. It's an amazing story. And it's captured in such a challenging way by Matthew. And it's more confirmation of the power, authority and priority of Jesus in his mission as God's king and savior.

[25 : 13] So just in the time left me, I just want to wrap up with two or three sort of applicatory points. And the first one is this, that Jesus, we need to see Jesus as the ultimate evidence and the ultimate experience of God.

You remember back on the lake, and I'm linking these three miracles together again. The disciples said, what sort of man is this?

Well, the answer with an absolute mountain of evidence in these three miracles is that Jesus is the God man that Matthew has introduced to us right back in chapter one of his record.

Jesus is Emmanuel. Emmanuel. God came into the world to rule and save his people from their sin. Why would you call him Jesus?

Because he will save his people from their sin. So the evidence is there in great mountains. But I know that evidence doesn't really cut it for people today.

[26 : 28] People don't really care whether something's true. They want to know the experience. Does it work? Is it real? And I would say to you this morning, if that's you in that category, that Jesus is the greatest experience of God.

And it works like this. It begins when Jesus confronts you or you're confronted by Jesus. That confrontation begins with a deep fear of rejection because of sin.

And rightly so. But it moves through to undeserved forgiveness. And forgiveness can only be appreciated when you recognize it's undeserved.

And that can only be appreciated when you recognize that you deserve God's judgment. And you ought to be fearful before the great king and the holy God. And then you realize that forgiveness is driven by Jesus' love.

By his identification with sinners. He's the son of man. That's an identification with sinners. He's come back home, verse 1, to his own city. Now Capernaum was in that area where the Orthodox Jews just thought it was a disgusting place.

[27 : 56] It was a place where Gentiles were. It was dirty. It was just nowhere you'd want to be if you were a self-respecting Jew. And Jesus identifies with it. The place of sin. The place of helplessness.

Lostness. Chaos. And so that forgiveness, that undeserved forgiveness is driven by Jesus' love and identification with sinners.

And it ends in a new relationship with God. My son, your sins are forgiven. Which is a proper fear of God. An awe of God.

A worship fear. A worship fear. A worship fear. A worship fear. A worship fear. A worship fear. A worship fear. So when confronted by Jesus, a response of fear is totally appropriate.

But not paralyzing hopeless fear. Rather, a proper awe based on the evidence which draws us to Jesus with confidence that he is able to, that he delights to, give us forgiveness.

[29 : 07] To give us a fresh start. To give us a fresh start. Just like this paralyzed man had a fresh start in life. So come to Jesus.

Come with all your fear of rejection. Come with all your fear of rejection. And you'll know the sweetness of forgiveness even more. But let's not forget the fear which would have gripped Jesus when he said, your sins are forgiven.

This is one of the most helpful points come out of this discussion with the elders the other night. I wouldn't have got this. One of the elders brought it to my attention. Just imagine the fear that would have gripped Jesus when he said to this paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven.

You see, the scribes had it right about Jesus. About the man, sorry, first. The scribes had it right about this man. He was under God's curse.

And he didn't deserve kindness or deliverance. They had it right. Sin is a serious matter before a holy God.

[30 : 23] It simply can't be overlooked. And the scribes were right about Jesus. Except they didn't know it. The scribes were right about Jesus.

For granting forgiveness to this man, he did deserve to die. But not for his sin. For the sin of this man that he's just granted forgiveness to. So imagine the fear in the pit of Jesus' stomach.

Every time I heal one of these people. Every time I forgive their sins. That's a sin that I have committed to pain with my death on the cross.

At a future point. Forgiveness came easy to this paralyzed man. But it was a hard fought task for Jesus behind the scenes.

Each one of these people that Jesus had come to rescue as king and savior. Was going to cost him pain on the cross.

[31 : 32] Separation from his father. Deep, deep fear. And it was out of a proper fear or respect for his father's will.

That Jesus dispensed forgiveness. Knowing it would cost him his life. And that fear was a proper fear. That drew Jesus to his father. In utter dependence.

Outer commitment. Outer loyalty. Outer trust. For the task which lay ahead of him. My friends, I finish now by saying.

Jesus called you to repent of wrong fear. And cultivate true or proper fear. So I end where I began.

Thinking about the fears which grip us. And drive our actions. And shape our thinking. How much of your fear do you think is bad fear?

[32 : 42] Unhelpful. Debilitating. As you try to wrestle with the various circumstances of your week. And how much is good fear? Based on evidence.

And moving us towards Jesus. Towards truth. And security. With confidence. So many it would seem.

Including some in our church family. Have a. What I would call an unhealthy. Debilitating fear of COVID. Or likewise of the government's intention.

In response to COVID. And that fear may be understandable. But I want to bow out and say. Well is there a similar fear of the Lord?

Not a debilitating fear. But is there a focus. On in confidence. And security. In the Lord of the pandemic. In the God who appoints governments.

[33 : 40] To their places. And knocks them down. Whenever they don't do. What he wants them to do. Do you see. Do you see how that needs to be balanced? Good fear. Will allow us to operate well.

Draw us to Jesus. Draw us to the Lord God. In his sovereignty. No matter what seems to be happening. Here around us. Good fear. Will help us. See past our circumstances.

To the Lord of our circumstances. Do you need to repent. Of some of those things. Sometimes we fear.

Coming to Jesus. Will mean missing out. On our greatest needs. And our problem there. Is that we define our greatest needs.

As health. Wealth. Good career. A big nest egg. For retirement. Friends.

[34 : 36] Stable family. Well behaved children. And so the list goes on and on and on. And so we're driven by fear. As some of those things.

Become elusive to us. Or go completely opposite. Of what we want. Or need. Because we've made them so essential to life. None of these things are bad in themselves.

But when they come from fears which drive us. We're in great danger of missing our true needs. And true blessings in Christ. Forgiveness of sin.

And new relationship with God. So my friends. I'll just finish up with this. If you've not yet come to Jesus. And there may be somebody here on Zoom. Or here even in the room this morning.

If you've not yet come to Jesus. The evidence is clear. The evidence is clear. He is a trustworthy king and saviour. He is compassionate. In his demands.

[35 : 39] He is demanding. But he's compassionate and loving. In his demands. Always committed. To working for your good. There's nothing to fear in that. Come to Jesus.

Come to Jesus for the ultimate experience of relationship. Which is the thing you're craving for. In the depth of your soul. Love. Pure love. Pure love. Pure love. And complete acceptance.

So this morning. Why not ask Jesus for a fresh start. Forgiveness. Acceptance. The good life in Jesus. Ask him.

Ask him. Ask him. Ask him. To speak. Speak into your deepest fears. Come to him. In your deepest fears. And trust him.

To speak into those fears. And expose them. And dispel them. With that same word. My son. My daughter. Your sins are forgiven.

[36 : 40] Just pray with me. Lord. What a. What an amazing. Part of scripture.

Lord. It's probably a bit silly to say that. Because every part's amazing. But Lord. Just that phrase. Take heart. My son. Your sins are forgiven. So. Laden with love. And warmth.

So poignant. So full of pathos. Lord. I pray that we might. Not fear to come to you. Knowing our.

Spiritual paralysis. Knowing our. Spiritual helplessness. Come to you. Confident. Lord. You will speak into those deepest fears. You'll help us see that things are even worse.

Than perhaps we first realize as we come to you. But with that same word. Lord. You will dispel those fears. And open us up. New good life. Before us.

[37 : 34] So I pray Lord. You might help us to hear your word this morning. And act on it. In Jesus name. Amen.