

How to Shock Jesus

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Date: 09 September 2018

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to Matthew chapter 8, to the reading that was read, Matthew 8, verses 1 to 17. And if you don't have a Bible, you might need to share with some people around about you, particularly if you're in the front row.

People in the front rows could pass a Bible forward to these people in the front row who need Bibles, especially my family. It's a great privilege as we come back to Matthew chapter 8 to see the real Jesus dealing with real suffering.

And chapters 8 and 9 are chock-a-block full of action and miracles of healing. This is our first day in this fall term in Matthew's Gospel.

And I want to remind you that back in chapter 4, when Jesus appeared on the scene, he began preaching this, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And then we're told he goes around Galilee in chapter 4 doing two things, preaching and healing. And then we have chapters 5 to 7.

[1 : 03] It's a long sermon, preaching. Chapters 8 and 9, healing. And the sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, as you remember, finishes in chapter 7, just the last two verses.

This is the response. Matchless teaching coming from his authority.

And then we move into chapters 8 and 9 and we see matchless authority in Jesus' healing. And in these two little chapters, more than half the miracles in all of Matthew's Gospel are squeezed in, in three groups of three.

But they all have to do with the coming of the kingdom of heaven. And the problem for us is we don't like the idea of kingdoms. We don't like the idea of someone with authority.

We just have this inbuilt bias against us. During the summer, Bron and I made it to South Africa for a conference. And we came out through the airport in Johannesburg.

[2 : 14] And all of a sudden, some young men in red tracksuits came trotting out one of the side exits. And we were about to go through the passport control. And all the passport control and all the staff at the airport abandoned their offices and abandoned their seats and just went over to talk to these young men in red tracksuits.

So we walked out and asked, who are these young men in red tracksuits? And it was the week before the World Cup. It was the whatever team Lionel Messi plays for. Barcelona, Argentina, whoever it was.

It was some soccer team and Lionel Messi was there. And I thought, so what? So we don't like authority.

It makes me jealous. That sort of authority. That's why when we look at the miracles of Jesus, Jesus, they're not just illustrations of show-stopping power.

There's actually a resistance to the king. There's a resistance to Jesus' authority. And part of the way you see that is that the suffering is not neutral.

[3 : 23] We'll go through this. Demons, death, darkness, leprosy. And in the middle of conflict and contamination and contagion, what Jesus does is beside his power, he reveals his astonishing kindness, goodness, loveliness, his grace.

And do you know where that gets him with the religious leaders? If you have your Bible open, just look to the end of chapter 9, verse 34. Do you know how they explain his miracles? They say he gets his power from the devil, verse 34.

What's Jesus' response, verse 35? He continues teaching and healing. Why? Verse 36. Because he had compassion.

Compassion. Every word and every action of Jesus in these chapters is driven by a tender heart love, a compassion. We're going to see this a little bit together.

And as we move through the fall from chapters 8 to the end of chapter 11, it finishes with a single command of Jesus, a call of Jesus, where he says, come to me, he says, come to me, all you are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.

[4 : 39] And the question we should be asking as we go through these chapters is why? Why should we come to him? What is it about him that makes him worth coming to? So I want to look at the first 17 verses of chapter 8 under three headings, shall we?

The people who come, the posture of Jesus, and the purpose of God. Three Ps. Firstly, the people who come. So as Martin read our lesson for us, we had three quick stories of power and kindness. And did you notice the one thing that makes the people in common is they're the wrong people. A leper. Not allowed.

If the wind is up, a leper is not allowed within 150 feet of anyone else. A centurion. A Gentile. Not even a Jewish person. And a mother-in-law who's been sidelined and bedridden with fever.

So on top of their physical suffering, these are all people who have been debilitated and excluded and isolated in some way from social life of the people of God. Verse 2. Look at these people.

[5 : 45] Leprosy is a terrifying and horrifying disease.

And it was then. It was infectious and it was untreatable. And it was debilitating. And it was deforming. And it was degenerative and disfiguring and desensitizing.

And you couldn't hide it. And when you got it, you were evicted. You were driven from your home. You had to live in some form of quarantine. And there were various leper colonies out in the wilderness.

And your family treated you as dead. And when you went to beg for food, you had to wear clothes that marked you out. And you had to, if you came close to people, cry out three times, unclean, unclean, unclean.

These were the real untouchables. That's why Matthew begins his verse 2 with, and behold. Behold is Matthew's favorite way of saying, look out.

[6 : 48] Something big is just about to happen. He doesn't call out unclean. He comes and he kneels before Jesus. And he doesn't say, which is what I would say, please heal me. He says to Jesus, if you will, you can make me clean.

You see, it's hard enough to believe that Jesus can cleanse him. You know, that Jesus has the power and authority to reverse this incurable disease and restore him.

This guy's issue is he's just not sure Jesus cares. He's just not sure Jesus wants to do this for him. He knows Jesus has power. He's not sure about Jesus' compassion to him individually.

Come to the second person, to the centurion in verse 5. He's grasped both sides. He's grasped the fact that Jesus has authority and kindness.

And he is so convinced of both that Jesus is shocked. I call this sermon, how to shock Jesus. You see, in verse 10, when Jesus heard this, he marveled.

[7 : 54] Truly, I say to you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. This is, you know, this is the only time in Jesus' life this word is ever used of him. It's usually used of people responding to the amazing things that he does.

But he's so taken back that this guy, he's got no Jewish pedigree, no Jewish background. He's a complete Gentile and a Roman and an occupier. And he comes to Jesus and he understands both that Jesus has the power and that he is willing to do it.

Again, he's the wrong person, not remotely Jewish. He's the local authority. I mean, he's got probably 100 soldiers.

Up there in Galilee, that's a lot of soldiers. He's one of the top two or three people up there. You would never find him and this Jewish itinerant preacher teacher in the same room.

But he too has a pressing need. One of his servants is lying paralysed and the Greek says in tortuous pain. And he has the humility to get himself up and to go to Jesus fully confident that Jesus can heal his servant and that Jesus will heal his servant.

[9 : 04] And it's so surprising that the translators neutralise the translation. In verse 7, it doesn't say, I will come and heal him. It's an emphatic question.

Am I to come and heal him? Jesus is trying to get, he's not saying no. He's trying to get everyone to see how unusual this is. You want me to come to your place to heal your servant?

And that makes sense of verse 8, which does not start with a but, it starts with an and. The centurion says, of course not, Lord. I'd never expect you to come under my roof. I'm not worthy for

that to happen.

But I understand who authority works. I've got physical and political and military authority. You know, I say something and it happens. The stool is creaking.

And if I disappear, we'll close in prayer. The point is that this man recognises in Jesus that he has a kind of authority he knows nothing about.

[10:08] He asks him to do what is completely impossible. Jesus hears it and marvels. Now, this Christian view of faith is unique. It's very different than the view of faith that's common today.

Our view of faith is basically being upbeat and positive and sticking to something. It doesn't really matter what you believe. So Nike's latest campaign has a professional footballer from the States saying, you've heard this, believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything.

And everyone walks by going, oh, that's fantastic. But, you know, it's just cruel. And it's false. I could believe with all my heart I could sacrifice everything I have to play professional football.

That's my wife laughing at that. The same is probably true for most of us here.

We'll never get there. And 99.999% of those who see the ad. It's just cruel. Jesus marvels at the honest humility of a guy who believes that Jesus can heal and that he cares.

[11:20] And he's willing to stake the life of his servant on the word of Jesus. And though the crowd thinks the centurion is the wrong person, he shows he's part of the kingdom of heaven because he acts on that belief.

So here are some of the people who are coming to Jesus. I've got to move quickly. Secondly, what's the posture of Jesus? Again, I say, these miracles are not there for the wow factor. The same authority that astonishes crowds in the teaching now astonishes crowds in the miracles, not just because of their power, but because Jesus' power is perfectly combined with goodness, kindness, compassion, and love.

This is Jesus, the eternal Jesus, meekness and majesty. And the way you see this is through all the completely unnecessary details that we have in the passage.

You notice that? So verse 3, after the leper asks, if you will, you can make me well. So Jesus, verse 3, and Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, I will be clean.

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. It's completely unnecessary. Jesus could just have said the word, step back a bit, given a bit of distance and said, okay, be clean.

[12:40] But he doesn't. He does two things that are unnecessary. He stretches out his hand and everyone goes, ooh, and then he touches this guy. How many years is it since anyone has touched him?

It's the first thing Jesus does. He steps across the chasm of this separation and this isolation and this divide, this disgusting disease.

And Jesus wants to demonstrate, he wants to enfold the radical acceptance and love that he has for him. And he does. He reaches out and touches him and commands, be clean.

And he is. Because Jesus is not just, he's not just someone who's discovered a superpower of healing people. He's not just bringing people back to physical health.

He's bringing people into the kingdom of heaven with this demonstration of radical kindness and acceptance. Just think about this for a moment. Right from the beginning of the gospel, we've known that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

[13:46] But he does not just take on our human flesh merely to stand as a teacher, separate, and tell us the truth. Nor does he just come in flesh so that he might reach out and touch with compassion.

But he takes on our flesh so that he enters into the absolute depth of our experience so that we might become flesh of his flesh.

He comes from heaven. He enters our experience. He goes to hell. He takes our flesh upon himself. He dies on the cross to cleanse us from everything that would separate us from the blessing of God.

And we just find it's hard to believe. I find it hard to believe. I find it hard to believe because you don't find this sort of grace anywhere else in life. And Jesus says, of course I want you to be clean. Be clean. And he is. And I need to race on. I'd love to talk about the compassion of Jesus in the third little story.

[14:45] If you want to read it later, just notice there's no mention of faith. Jesus completely, without faith, he heals everyone. People bring sick and lame and friends and demon-possessed

that night to this house in Capernaum.

And Jesus heals them all. But it's the middle miracle, I think, where we see Jesus open the door widely. So you look down at verse 11. Straight after he's commended the faith of the centurion, what does he say?

He turns to the crowd. He says, I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness.

In that place they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done for you. This is a command. It's like, go, make it, sir.

Have it happen. As you've believed. And the servant was healed at that very moment. Don't you find it amazing that this compassionate Jesus speaks with absolute self-conscious authority about our destiny?

[15:50] That he has no problem speaking about who it is who ultimately belongs to the kingdom of heaven and who doesn't? And the kingdom of heaven is Jesus' favorite way in Matthew's gospel of speaking about what it means to belong to him, to be united to him.

To come to him, to know him, to love him, to come under his authority. It's not a place, but it's a group of people who are under the dynamic rule of Jesus Christ.

People who, because of the rule of Jesus, have a new love and a new life and a new pattern and a new power in their lives. And Jesus pictures the kingdom of heaven, which we're familiar with, as a feast, a meal, and a banquet.

And he gathers up all the best blessings of this life, all the satisfaction of our needs and God's finest provisions. And throughout the gospel combines it with plenty and happiness, personal happiness and leisure, where everything impure and anything unclean and everything evil is done away with. Where men and women and boys and girls enjoy being in the presence of each other and enjoy being in the presence of God and enjoy the feast together. And here we know that everything evil is past, including death itself, since Jesus' names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are there.

[17:08] I mean, these guys died centuries ago, but they're very alive. They're more alive than you and I are there in the feast today. And what's revolutionary about this is the people who are there and how they get there.

Because pretty well everyone in the crowd believed the great figures of the Old Testament were worthy. You know, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, you know, Elijah, Moses, they're worthy. And they assumed that if I live a good life and clean myself pretty clean and go to synagogue every Sabbath and don't stray too far, the kingdom of heaven will be mine by birthright. And Jesus overturns this and he says, he says, this kingdom is such good news for all the wrong people. It's for the people who know they're not worthy. It's for the leper. It's for the centurion. It's for every Gentile. It's for everyone who will come to me, he says. He throws open the doors of the kingdom of heaven to east and west.

You know, Australia to the west coast of Canada. Yeah. Not, well, not for everyone who thinks they're worthy. Nor for the people who are trying to make themselves worthy.

[18:17] For those who know they are not. We're not worthy to have Jesus come under our roof. And I think this helps explain who the sons of the kingdom are. These are the ones who were supposed to welcome Jesus.

These are the ones, as we'll see with the Pharisees, who think that they are worthy of the kingdom. No, no. The kingdom is made up of people like this leper, like Peter's mother-in-law, like the centurion.

Everyone who comes to Jesus. Everyone who stops pretending they're worthy. Blessed are the poor in spirit, said Jesus, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He has come to give us the kingdom and he's come to take us into the kingdom by giving us himself.

We need to take him at his word and come to him. And thirdly and finally, briefly, the purpose of God. You notice Matthew rarely leaves us without an Old Testament reference.

He wants us to understand the big picture of what God is doing. But this is not just a random collection of supernatural powerful healings, but they go to the heart of Jesus' ministry.

[19:21] How's your seat? Mine's holding up. Look at the last verse, please. This, he says about the three miracles, was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Now, there are some people who take this to mean, well, since Jesus has taken away our illnesses, Christians ought to be healthy, wealthy, and happy. But all they need to do is to come to St. John's and have a look at us. Sorry, that's not a theological answer. It's a terrible thing. They say, you know, if you're unhealthy or you're depressed or unhappy, it's because you don't have enough faith.

Work up faith. But Jesus, very interestingly, in the last verse, verse 16, has been healing indiscriminately. There's no mention of faith.

So that the deep principle of God that's operating in Jesus' miracles and power is specifically tied to this Old Testament quote, which comes from Isaiah 53.

[20 : 25] It's a famous chapter, right? So that night in the alleyway and the streets of Capernaum, as Jesus healed every sickness, every disease, cast out every demon and restored people physically, we get a glimpse of the great work that he has come to do, where he will finally put things right and he will bring the kingdom in all its fullness.

And it's very interesting if you chase this back to Isaiah 53. It's a very famous chapter. This quote comes from verse 4. In verse 5 and then to the end of the chapter, it's all about how Jesus takes our sins away by his substitutionary death.

So let me read verse 5 and 6. Don't turn to it. I'll just read them to you. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

By his wounds we are healed. We like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. But Matthew doesn't quote from that.

He quotes from verse 4. Before there's any mention of Jesus' death, before Jesus is led like a lamb to the slaughter or offered as a guilt offering, verse 4 is a simple statement that prepares us for the death of Jesus by showing that in Jesus' life he takes our illnesses and bears our diseases.

[21 : 53] Literally, as he's healing these things, he is lifting off and carrying away our illnesses and evils. And the fact that Matthew chooses this verse means that all these miracles are not separate from the work of the cross.

In rolling back the effects of evil and sin, Jesus has begun to march toward the hour of darkness on the cross. The first thing Jesus does as an adult is he gets baptized.

Remember in Matthew's Gospel? He doesn't need to get baptized. He's got no sin to be baptized from. But he begins the task of identifying with us, preparing to take our place.

Then he goes out into the wilderness and he does battle with Satan, again without sin, to identify with us and preparing to take our place. And when he touches the leper and when he gives the word of healing and when he casts out evil of any form, he is giving us a little picture of what he is going to achieve by the great work of bearing our sin on the cross.

So, this morning, I think this passage points us to two delights. And the first is this.

[23 : 09] It's Jesus' delight in bringing the kingdom of heaven to us and bringing us to the kingdom. It's his delight. He doesn't do it because he has to. He's forced to.

He doesn't do it because he owes it to us. Jesus says in another Gospel, Fear not, little flock. It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He owes us nothing.

He gives us everything. You don't have to force God to be generous. And he opens the kingdom of heaven and the doors of the kingdom of heaven and proclaims it and heals because of his own delight.

It's very strange, isn't it? I mean, he suffers and he dies because it is his joy and his desire that we would join him reclining at table and join all those from east and west.

That's the first delight. It's Jesus' delight in giving this to us. Do you believe that? And secondly, it brings delight to Jesus whenever he finds true faith.

[24 : 11] We have to stop trying to make ourselves worthy of his kindness. Grace is for the unworthy. Faith is looking at Jesus and seeing, believing what he promises that he can do it and that he cares enough for us to do it.

And you'll see as we come to the end of these chapters in chapter 11, here is the great promise. Come to me. All you are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Very simple.

Come to me. All you have to do in-■ will be first and do for the nd outline.

I promise you that I am about to not be Woo christ. Click the bar on the right size. I have a 3-way menstrualogen today. I will give you the Yo- 14 days.
[25 : 16] The baby is timeless. I am or I will be happy to have your own strewn graph.