

THE GOSPEL  
OF  
MATTHEW



**BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES**

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**THE GOSPEL  
OF  
MATTHEW**

Volume Two

by

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INTRODUCTION  
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THE PROBLEM OF ORDER IN  
MATTHEW'S NARRATION

Is this section really a series of events subsequent to the Sermon on the Mount? It would seem so upon first reading Matthew's text alone. Yet the most cursory comparison with Mark's and Luke's Gospels, of the events included in this section, reveals that there are clear differences in order and emphasis. (See Volume I, Introduction, pp. 4, 5) If it is really Matthew's intention to follow a topical, rather than a chronological, arrangement, we need not be concerned if Mark and Luke both record much of this material in Matthew's chapters eight and nine in relationship to other events. Again, it seems clear that Matthew is illustrating the summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry mentioned in 4:23-25, by means of a good example of His preaching (chaps. 5-7) and ten good samples of His miracles (chaps. 8, 9). If so, must there be necessary time and place connections between each of the samples? Would not logical connection suffice for what we deem to be

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Matthew's evident purpose? Matthew concludes the section (chaps. 5-9) in the way he began (cf. 9:35 with 4:23-25), adding the note concerning the need for laborers in the harvest, a note which prepares his readers for the next major section (chapter 10) containing the commission of the Twelve to evangelize Galilee.

### WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THESE MIRACLE STORIES?

What is the singular importance of Matthew's placing a collection of Jesus' miracles together here in this place in chapters eight and nine? The relationship to Matthew's whole plan, as we can determine it from his end result, is that he, as a writer of brilliantly clear narration, has given us a quick outline of his project (4:23-25) and now sketches in the outline with examples. He might even be responding to an unspoken demand: "We have heard this visionary who gives us high ideals. But what can He do? Can He DO as well as DREAM? And, better yet, can He make US doers?" It might just well be that Matthew places this striking collection of miracles right after the Sermon on the Mount to provide conclusive evidence that Jesus is not just a dreamer, but also One who really has the power to make us over into whatever image He demands. The miracles Matthew presents do not say merely that this Jesus is a wonder-worker, but, primarily, that this Jesus can throw in the super-natural difference between what we are and what He wants us to be. Best of all, He who has such wonderful power can also transform our feeble wills, our blind eyes, our demonic desires, our double-mindedness, our spiritual insensitiveness to all that is important to God, our emotional storms, our physical wretchedness—all this and more He can transform into a person of usefulness to God. Incidentally, we must admit that He has chosen not to transform us by a sudden word of power, because He, our Creator knows that the fashioning of character takes time and countless lessons learned through the practice of obedience to His Word. But that is just the point: the gospel itself is His word of power to transform us into His likeness. Matthew knew, just as did the other Apostles (See Jn. 5:30-47; 10:37, 38; 14:10, 11) that Jesus' miracles were but the authentication of God, given as credentials to prove that Jesus knew what He was talking about, regardless of whatever claim He might make.

And so it is that Jesus "came down off the mountain" figuratively too, so as to meet people's need at the level where they live. It is no wonder that great multitudes could follow a Savior like Jesus who was not satisfied to thunder lofty ideals from His ivory tower on the



## INTRODUCTION

heights of the mountain but was willing to walk and work among needy people. But notice that He did not merely attend to their most pressing need, as they themselves viewed that need, but He responded to their need in such a way as to accomplish at the same time His higher purpose. Matthew's outline draws our attention to Jesus' genius for combining His merciful ministry to real human need at any level with His presentation of His credentials as being truly a "visitor from outer space" come to earth to bring a message of earth-shaking importance.

In these two chapters Matthew arranges his material into ten demonstrations of Jesus' might. These can be arranged into groups of three miracles each followed by a response, the third group having actually four exemplary wonders and two scandals.

But a caution is in order here: we must never destroy the quality of these miracle stories as history in order simply to draw some parabolic teaching from them. They are told by the eyewitnesses as the sober history of facts which actually occurred upon which the secure conclusion is drawn that the miracle worker is thus identified as from God. A secondary purpose for miracles is to show God's mercifulness in practical ways in direct response to some need of men. And yet, despite this caution urging us to let the eyewitnesses tell their story, as we read this history we cannot help identifying ourselves in the stories with the leper, with the Centurion, with Peter's wife's mother, with the demoniacs, the four men who brought their paralyzed friend, with Matthew the publican, with Jairus and his wife and countless others. If we take these stories seriously as true narrations of real events, we cannot but begin to identify ourselves and our problems in these stories. Perhaps Plummer (*Matthew*, 123) is right when he argues for a third intention behind miracles:

Perhaps the (Jesus') touch (of the leper) was also necessary for the sake of the millions who were to read of this cleansing. No *moral* pollution can be so great as to make Christ shrink from contact with a sinner, who comes to Him with a desire to be freed from his plague, and with the belief that He has the power to free him. Christ's miracles are parables. That was part of their purpose when they were wrought, and it is their chief meaning to us . . .

Plummer's metaphor ("Christ's miracles are parables.") must not distract us from the principle truth that our psychological reaction to these facts is parabolic in nature. Psychologically we reason thus: "If Jesus can treat with such tender sympathy this wretched sufferer, He can certainly cleanse me too." Although this begins to be argument

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from analogy from which the conclusions are always doubtful, yet the factual character of the narrations and the conclusions drawn from them by the Apostles in their doctrine assures us that our identification with the miserable characters helped by Jesus was no misplaced confidence.

But if it be objected that we cannot rely for our applied conclusions upon this psychological (intuited) self-identification in the persons whom Jesus loved and helped, then let us remember that, though it is true that we have often identified ourselves with the mythical figures of fairy stories as children or the heroes of dramatized fictions of later years, fully knowing that they never existed, how much more surely can we see ourselves being blessed and helped in these narrations of *fact*! What was it that drew the multitudes to Jesus for healing and blessing? Was it not the news spreading like wildfire that He had helped others, coupled with the conclusion of the suffering individuals that perhaps He could and would help them too, if they could but get to Him? (cf. Jn. 4:45-47; Lk. 5:15; Mt. 4:24-25; Mk. 3:7-12) Our measure of sanity is best gauged by that degree to which we acknowledge the real world and reject the world of fancy. It was into this real world that Jesus came to do His works, reveal to us the Father and call us to enter His service.

But, again, the compelling power of these miracle stories recorded by the four Evangelists lies in the authenticity of the facts. While it is true that men can be led to believe the most monstrous falsehoods, yet anyone who endeavors to construct a reasoned picture of the life of Christ that ignores the factual character of the miracles, must be confounded by the fact that Jesus' life had no sooner ended in apparent failure and defeat, than the entire company of His disciples began immediately to proclaim Him to be a God. They did this against great psychological hazards and unspeakable physical difficulties. Also striking for its absence is the testimony of any first-century contemporary of the early witnesses that denies the reality of any facts involved in the miracles. How did it happen then that the Apostles and early Christians concluded that Jesus was God and worthy of their worship and service if there were nothing in His life to distinguish it from that of ordinary men or that would identify His ministry as supernatural and His person divine? (See special study on miracles at conclusion of chapter nine.)

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 12. Jesus Heals a Leper (8:1-4)

Section 13. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 14. Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law (8:14-17)

Section 15. Jesus Calls Men to Discipleship (8:18-22)

Section 16. Jesus Stills a Tempest (8:23-27)

Section 17. Jesus Frees the Gadarene Demoniacs (8:28—9:1)

### JESUS' RELATION TO THE OUTCASTS OF ISRAEL

(The following were suggested by Wm. Barclay, [I, 298-300]:)

- I. Jesus Touched the Untouchable. Here we see the man who was kept at arm's length by all men, wrapped around with the pity and compassion of the love of God. (8:2-4)
- II. Jesus Loved the Unloveable. Here we see the love of God going out to help the foreigner and the slave whom men either hated or despised.
- III. Jesus Healed the Unknown, Humble Folk. Here we see the infinite love of God of all the universe displaying all its power where there was none but the family circle to see (8:14, 15), to Whom any man at any hour might come without being thought a nuisance. (8:16, 17)
- IV. Jesus Challenged the Badly Motivated. (8:18-22)
  - A. The scribe, the short-sighted enthusiast in danger of shallow zeal.
  - B. The disciple already committed to any other duty in danger of tragic failure to seize the greatest opportunity.
- V. Jesus Calmed the Uncalmable. Here is the power of God bringing peace and serenity into tumult and confusion. (8:23-27)
- VI. Jesus Tamed the Untameable. Here we see the power of God dealing with Satan's power, God's goodness invading earth's evil, God's love going out against evil's malignancy and malevolence. Here we see the goodness and love of God which save men by triumphantly overcoming the evil and hatred which ruin men. (8:28—9:1)

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Section 12

### JESUS HEALS A LEPER

(Parallels: Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

TEXT: 8:2-4

2. And behold, there came to him a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
3. And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.
4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus accepted the worship of this miserable leper. If Jesus is not God come in the flesh, what should one think of Jesus for accepting? Or was this "worship" that one must render God alone?
- b. What insight do you gain into the nature of true worship in this leper's request, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst . . . "?
- c. What is significant about Jesus' touching the leper?
- d. If leprosy was a dread disease, why does Matthew say Jesus "cleansed" him instead of "healed" him?
- e. Why was it important for the cleansed leper to "tell no man"?
- f. Why was it necessary for the leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering?
- g. Why would the priests need to know that the leper had been healed "for a testimony unto them"?
- h. What do you think Jesus' deepest purpose was in commanding the cleansed leper to "tell no man"? Could not Jesus foresee his disobedience to such a difficult command? Or, foreseeing that the man could not keep such good news quiet, Jesus might have used reverse psychology to get the maximum advantage of news coverage through a rapidly spread "secret". What is your opinion?
- i. Do you think, in light of the previous question, that the man was entirely blameworthy for his actions? Are his actions true to normal human psychology; i.e. are they actions that we would normally expect people to do under similar circumstances? If so, does this mitigate his responsibility for disobeying Jesus' specific prohibition?
- j. What is your opinion? Jesus touched the leper. Do you think that Jesus was legally (in relation to Moses' law on defilement) unclean until sunset that day and until He had bathed Himself? On what basis do you answer as you do? This question may not seem too important to moderns, but upon how you answer may depend how much significance you attribute to Jesus' spontaneous but meaningful gesture.

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

While Jesus was in one of the cities, a leper approached Him when he saw Him. He was a mass of leprosy, covered with it, Coming up to Jesus and falling to his knees, he bowed his face to the earth in front of Him and begged Him for help, "Sir, if only You are willing, You can cleanse me because You are able to do it!"

Jesus' heart was moved with compassion and, stretching forth His hand, He touched the leper, saying as He did so, "Indeed, I am willing! Become clean." Instantly he was cleansed of the leprosy, for it left him. Jesus dismissed the former leper with this stern warning, "Be sure that you tell nobody; but go to the priests for your physical examination, and offer the gift Moses commanded in Leviticus 14, for your recovery. Do this as a public proof—as evidence to the authorities and the people—of the reality of your cure."

But the man went away and began to talk freely about it and spread the news so much that more than ever Jesus' reputation was well-known. Consequently, it became impossible for Jesus to show Himself in a town but He stayed outside in the open country which was sparsely settled. Yet great multitudes of people came to Jesus from every quarter to hear His message and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus continued in His habit of retiring from time to time to lonely places to pray.

## SUMMARY

When a leper in the last stages of his disease came to Jesus in one of the Galilean cities, humbly and desperately, seeking cleansing, Jesus touched him, speaking but a word of power. He then sent the man directly to the priests to undergo the necessary physical examination performed by them and offer, consequently, the proper sacrifice. The man was not to mention his cleansing to anyone prior to that examination but he spoke freely about it to all. His actions rendered Jesus' ministry more difficult because of the excited crowds pressing Him to perform the same miracles on their own sick folk. But Jesus managed to keep up His habit of praying by getting away from people to be alone with God.

## NOTES

## I. THE LEPER'S REQUEST

**8:2 There came to him a leper.** With this surprising sentence Matthew begins this section which describes the marvellous supernatural

works of Jesus. To be able fully to appreciate Matthew's inclusion of precisely this illustration of Jesus' unfailing compassionate love for outcasts, we must grasp the whole Jewish viewpoint regarding lepers and leprosy. Otherwise, we may fail to see why this sentence is such a surprise. For special help in grasping the Jewish concept of ceremonial and spiritual defilement (Lev. 15:31), seek out the principal passages in the OT on this subject by checking through concordance listings under "defiling, defilement, unclean, uncleanness, common, impure, profane, unholy, polluted".

Leprosy is an infectious condition produced by microbe discovered and described by A. G. Hansen in 1874. Hansen's disease is contagious, its infection being thought to arise from direct contact with infected skin and mucous membranes, although not very readily communicated by casual contact. Seemingly it is not hereditary. Nerve involvement is attended with anaesthesia, tingling and pain of the parts affected. In those forms of leprosy where nodular growths are the most prominent features the small bones of the hands and feet are destroyed and often drop off. Modern medicine has discovered treatments for leprosy of the various types (lepromatous, tuberculoid and non-specific) and control through early diagnosis, isolation and some drugs that show encouraging results, although complete cure is not yet promised. Spontaneous arresting of the disease and temporary cures have occurred. However, treatment is often necessary for years. (See UWRE, 2954; ISBE, 1867)

Some affirm, however, that Hansen's disease is not the biblical leprosy. There are several complications to our problem of identifying precisely the leprosy of the Bible:

1. The Biblical terminology identifying leprosy describe only the initial symptoms and discuss none of the later manifestations as a fully developed disease or attempt a medical description of its characteristics. The purpose of the biblical terminology was originally for identifying and isolating the victims of this disease. It is worthy of note that there is no mention of treatment of remedy for the disease.
2. The biblical term "leprosy" in the critical passage (Lev. 13) is obviously used in several senses, meaning, generally, "skin disease" and, precisely, "leprosy" (the real thing). It would seem that Moses in that passage is describing leprosy and then listing eight other skin diseases which might be confused for leprosy, but which, regarding ceremonial defilement, were "clean".

3. Any remarks derived from the Mosaic legislation would have to be tempered by the actual practice of the Jews in Jesus' time, which may well have been quite different from that intended by Moses. For instance, while Moses required lepers to stay out of inhabited centers (Lev. 13:46), this regulation may have been relaxed in later times so that lepers even entered a segregated portion of the synagogues, although not into the Temple. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 493)

This circumstance however would not surprise us especially in Galilee where Gentile custom and influence were stronger, producing a more general laxity of rigid Judaism. Further, there are four facts that serve to clarify much ignorance regarding modern prejudices concerning lepers and leprosy:

1. The biblical position regarding lepers and leprosy was stated in relationship to *one* nation of people, the Israelites, to whom the law of Moses, which contains the leprosy legislation, was given. Thus, the prejudices and inhumanity expressed regarding leprosy after the coming of Christ has no basis whatever in Christian documents, since Christ did away with that law *with all of its prescriptions*, whether on leprosy, circumcision, sabbath days or atonement.
2. Although certain biblical cases of leprosy were clearly visitations of the wrath of God (Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kg. 5:25-27; 2 Chron. 26:16-21), this by no means proves that all cases were that. This view of leprosy as a "stroke of God" may explain the usual hauteur with which some rabbis kept lepers at a distance. The defilement that a leper brings to others by contact with them may also explain this. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495)
3. Modern medical science has been able to discover medicine that for all practical purposes and under the right conditions of hygiene, does away with the virulent aspects of the disease, promising new hope for lepers which was totally unavailable in Bible times.
4. The chief emphasis of the Levitical legislation in the first place was the defilement which the disease brought to the sufferer, thus rendering him incapable of entering either the camp of Israel or of participating in the formal worship of Jehovah while in the grip of that disease. And it was by a sin offering that the ceremonial uncleanness was atoned for, upon one's cleansing from leprosy. (Lev. 14:13, 14, 18b-22) But the

homiletic use of leprosy as a TYPE of sin is not biblical, although the similarities are striking. Were we to judge leprosy from the ancient Jewish standpoint of defilement, there could possibly be no lower state, nor worse defilement than this; however, estimating the disease from Christ's standpoint, there are certainly worse defilements than mere leprosy. (Study Mt. 15; Mk. 7) Let it be remarked that though leprosy was atoned for by a sin, that is, a guilt offering, yet Jesus never declared the sins forgiven a leper in connection with his disease, in the same way in which He apparently did not hold the demon-possessed as particularly guilty or sinful, or as He did in the case of others (Lk. 7:47-50; Mt. 9:1-8). Yet, from the silence of the Scripture record, no real argument can be made, inasmuch as the Apostles recorded only what we have. But it must be made absolutely clear that leprosy today carries no spiritual contamination to any man as it did only to Jews under Moses law.

**There came to him a leper**, but not just a leper, for he was "full of leprosy" (Lk. 5:12), hence not clean (Lev. 13:13), because, were the man merely covered with white disease, he could have been pronounced clean without recourse to Jesus. On the other hand, there is an air of desperation in his voice. The fact that he approached Jesus "in one of the cities" (Lk. 5:12) may not prove the desperation of his case, which presumeably would have driven him to approach Jesus in one of the cities, for, while the OT law required lepers to stay out of the camp of Israel (Lev. 13:46) and as a matter of practice they were thus excluded (Nu. 5:1-4; 12:13-15; 2 Kg. 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-23; Lk. 17:12), yet other cases indicate that lepers could enter cities (among Syrians not under the Mosaic law, 2 Kg. 5:1-5; among Jews, Naaman was permitted to enter Samaria, 2 Kg. 5:5-7. Four lepers thought they could enter the city of Samaria, 2 Kg. 7:3, 4). And had the Deuteronomic code specified that all sorts of unclean persons had to leave the city wherein they dwelt after Israel entered the promised land? The Levitical prescription had spoken of the lepers leaving the camp of Israel while Israel dwelt together in one great tent city around the tabernacle in the wilderness. How did the prescription apply upon entering Canaan? Again, Edersheim's note (*Life*, I, 493) should be recalled that lepers were permitted into a segregated compartment in the synagogues also. In what particular city of Galilee the leper approached Jesus is not stated.

We can better appreciate the impression Jesus made upon people



by this simple affirmation: **a leper came to him**. In order to preserve their self-righteous personal ceremonial purity, some rabbis went so far as to declare a distance no less than six feet as sufficient to keep from a leper, but if the wind blew from the direction of the leper, scarcely 100 were sufficient. Others boasted of throwing stones at lepers to keep them at their distance. Another went on record as refusing to eat an egg—the best example of well-packaged food—purchased on a street where a leper had been. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495). And yet this leper came to Jesus, without precedents in Jewish history, except perhaps the case of the Gentile Naaman (2 Kg. 5), whose position as an outcast of Israel he now shared. It may also be that the Lord had not cleansed any lepers previous to this occasion either; at least Matthew's summary (4:24) does not specifically mention leprosy as an example of Jesus' power. If this observation is correct, we can sense the same difference between Jesus and His contemporaries that this leper must have felt, a difference which awakened in him a long-absent hope that this friendly Galilean could change his vile body into the image of His own healthy human body, and thus caused him to dare to approach Jesus.

**and worshiped him** (see notes on "worship" at 2:2) Mark and Luke strengthen this expression by noting that the leper knelt in front of Jesus bowing his head to the ground. From this unashamed expression of deep reverence for Jesus, how much can we deduce of this man's understanding of Jesus' true identity? Is he approaching Jesus with the same respect for Jehovah that caused Naaman to stand before the door of Elisha? Perhaps we can say he intended the highest respect for this Prophet who spoke for the living God and who could, through the power of the Almighty, cleanse him. It is tempting to read more understanding into the leper's confession than he actually grasped of Jesus' Deity. **Lord**, for this Jew, may not have meant all that this glorious title has come to mean to Christians, for until Jesus' full Self-revelation was completed and His highest claims fully justified and His true identity completely announced, it is quite possible that those who addressed Jesus as **Lord** intended little more than the term of courtesy and respect, "Sir" (cf. Mt. 21:29; 25:11; 27:63; 1 Pe. 3:6; Jn. 12:21; 20:15; Ac. 16:30; Rev. 7:14), as also the term *kyrie* is so used in modern Greek. The problem is not how much this man understood of Jesus' true position as Lord of lords, and thus the depth of his devotion, but rather what real content is present in our addressing Him as Lord, given our superior advantages of knowing Him. (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)

**If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.** Nowhere has

there ever appeared a better statement of the right basic attitude of prayer, which so trustingly, yearningly lays our otherwise hopeless case upon God's power to help. (See notes on 5:10) The leper probably did not intend this plea as a prayer to deity, but as the disciplined request for cleansing. He meant, and we must mean as we pray,

1. If thou wilt (Luke adds *edeêthê*, "He begged Him.")
  - a. Some have suggested that this leper's expressed uncertainty about Jesus' willingness throws the responsibility for his continued misery upon Jesus who could so easily deliver. Perhaps so, for, psychologically, people are tempted rather fatalistically to blame God for their continued suffering, and with this sighed expression they resign themselves to their fate. Also the usual treatment received at the hands of other rabbis might have taught this leper never to presume upon any.
  - b. It is more probable that the leper's lowly acquiescence intends to leave Jesus free to decide whether to leave him in his horrible contamination or not. It takes deep insight and rigorous discipline to place his case in these terms before Him who is the leper's last hope. As he bravely states his desire, he is committing himself, if Jesus shall so choose, to remain a leper! (cf. Dan. 3:16-18; 2 Sam. 15:24-26) He thus showed a more profound insight into the Lord's authority than some more privileged disciples.
2. **Thou canst make me clean:** "I am sure of your power." No double-mindedness here! (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Heb. 11:6; Jas. 4:4, 8) Note how immediately the man comes to the point of his petition: "Cleansing, Lord!" No flowery expressions or lengthy appeals to Jesus' reason, understanding or sympathy were needed. Christians can learn more directness in their petitions from this Jew who felt his need deeply and could concentrate it into one sentence.

## II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE

**8:3 And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him.** To the western mind this verse cannot have the earth-shaking importance it would have had to the Jew trained in Levitical legislation regarding ceremonial purity and defilement. (See on 8:2; Lev. 11:39-45; 13:45, 46; 15:all, esp. 31; 18:24-30; 22:3-9; Nu. 5:1-5; 6:5-9, 12; 19:11-22; Dt. 24:8, 9) These passages clearly require Jewish clergy and laity alike, as well as those under special vows, to maintain

that special separation from certain acts and contacts that were defined by God as "defiling" or "unclean." While it is true that there were certain acts which defiled but were permissible (sexual relations, for example, Lev. 15:18), yet, for the most part, no God-fearing Jew could bring himself to go deliberately against the general order: "You shall not defile yourselves . . . you shall be holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44, 45) without bringing himself under the condemnation: "Thus shall you keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." (Lev. 15:31)

But what is so eternally important about views on Jewish defilement to the modern Christian whose entire mentality revolves around completely different principles?

1. Because OUR appreciation of this meaningful gesture of Jesus is enhanced as we understand the background in which it comes. Leprosy's attack upon this man brought into the picture all of the heartless application of Moses' Law. The Law was the same for all—heartless, and he, a leper, had been forced by that Law to leave his family, his associations, his life. That same Law required all to clear a heart-chilling circle around him everywhere, none could share with him the warming embraces of love. The Law had perhaps made him even forget how the touch of another's hand felt, for he was now, for the duration of his hopeless case, a fellow-sufferer with others of the living dead. Yet, Jesus, "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:41), swiftly, spontaneously moved to the leper's side, and touched him. This was a demonstration of love we should not soon forget! This was an answer that shouted Jesus' love more than any word could have done. For Jesus, and for those who follow Him, there is but one law: loving helpfulness to anyone who has a need, regardless of the loathsomeness of that which makes his need so apparent. If necessary, we must be prepared to dispense with conventions and take the necessary risks to help a suffering fellow human. This means also that we must be prepared to take the consequences for our actions.
2. Because our understanding of the nature and identity of Jesus of Nazareth is partly contingent upon what we think of this act whereby He seemingly went beyond the express prohibitions of God's Law. The Law had been clear enough against this deliberate defiling oneself through contact with what had been

defined as "unclean". Why must Jesus break the Law—if He, in fact, did? Or, is Jesus, as Author of the Law, hereby revealing a facet of its interpretation and application that we could not have previously known?

- a. Is he revealing that the Law is not the only or perfect expression of perfect righteousness, and that much of the loving compassion for suffering humanity, which God Himself really felt, had to be omitted from the Law's legal prescriptions? If so, by His actions Jesus is saying, "Friend, the Law says I cannot touch you, but God's mercy, which triumphs over strict justice, permits it." This seeming disregarding of the ceremonial law is on the same level as those acts which, though, strictly speaking, are violations of the Mosaic legislation or interpretations thereof, are yet acts in which not only Jesus, but any man could rise higher than the strict application of the law, so as to show mercy and kindness to these miserable, suffering neighbors to every Jew. Lev. 19:18 is also legislation on the treatment of lepers too, and more people than Jews failed to see this.
- b. Is Jesus revealing here, as elsewhere, that any Jew could have ministered mercifully to these unfortunate sufferers? (See on Mt. 12:1-8) If so, Jesus may be saying, "Though the safe course for any man is not to touch you because of the absence of adequate medicines whereby you could be healed and brought back into the circle of human fellowship again, yet I am that medicine, hence, I am the only one truly qualified to bridge the gap and bring you back to health." Is Jesus' action intended to teach us that the law of loving-kindness is above the law of ceremonies? (cf. Mt. 9:12, 13; 12:1-14) Certainly, He is teaching that, although the Law heartlessly had to separate the "unclean" from the "clean" to preserve holiness, there was however no excuse whatever that could justify all the inhuman traditions and heartless cruelties on the part of the ceremonially "clean, pure and righteous."
- c. Could it be that Jesus is also revealing the end of the entire system of ceremonial defilements? This He will do on other occasions and by means of the very character of the gospel (cf. Mt. 15:1-20). If so, this incident is in perfect harmony with other revelations. This point is however not weakened by the fact that the leper was not dispensed with the

necessity to present himself to the Levitical priests for inspection and official recognition as cleansed, because the Law itself must stand until Jesus took it away by His death on the cross. (Eph. 2:11-16. See notes on Mt. 5:17-20)

But, how could Jesus touch the leper without incurring at least one day's defilement?

1. One possible answer offered by some is that He thus declared Himself an independent Priest, after Melchizedek's order, hence qualified to touch such a leper. This is doubtful, because, His future priesthood was to be heavenly and universal while the Law's prescriptions dealt with this world's problems and the Jews only (Heb. 8:4). Further, the Mosaic system established the Levitical priests as the official health officials; Jesus, the future High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (see Heb. 6:20—7:28), had not been designated such a health official for whom Moses' laws had relevance. Again, Jesus made no such declaration of High Priesthood during His earthly ministry. There is a better reason why Jesus touched the leper without fear of contamination or defilement:
2. He was God and could act without any reference to Old Testament Law if He so choose: as Deity, He was the Author of the Law, hence above it. Evidences supporting this conclusion, which find their only satisfactory explanations in this conclusion, are the following:
  - a. Jesus showed divine authority by taking charge of the Temple, when He cleansed it (Jn. 2:14-22).
  - b. There is no evidence that Jesus ever offered sacrifices for sin or even attended all the feasts required of all Jews. (Dt. 16:16) Rather there is evidence to the contrary which would explain why Jesus would not have offered sin offerings. (See Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15)
  - c. Jesus forgave sins directly, without reference to the Mosaic system (Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 7:48-50).
  - d. He deliberately announced the change of the central place of worship, a cardinal doctrine of the Mosaic system. (Jn. 4:20-24 contrasted with Dt. 12:1-14; Josh. 22; 2 Kgs. 18:22; 2 Chron. 32:12; Isa. 36:7)
  - e. Jesus set aside the distinction between clean and unclean foods (Mt. 15:11; Mk. 7:19).

- f. For all practical purposes, Jesus drastically altered Mosaic legislation regarding divorce. (contrast Mt. 19:1-9 with Dt. 24:1-4)
- g. Jesus was baptized by God's inspired prophet, not for forgiveness of sins, as John had commanded others, but "to fulfill all righteousness" (see on Mt. 3:15).
- h. He also claimed to be "greater than the Temple" (Mt. 12:6), "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:8), and declared that there are cases when human needs supercedes the strict observance of the Law (Mt. 12:1-14) His enemies thus understood His claims to superiority to the Law and its institutions and attacked Him at His trials on this basis, ignoring His disregard for their traditions (Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58).
- i. The KEY INCIDENT which explains Jesus' unique position as Son of God and, at the same time, Son of Man, is the temple-tax incident (Mt. 17:24-27). God's Son is not bound to pay the temple tax even though Moses commanded it (Ex. 30:13; 38:26).

Thus, here Matthew records an act of Jesus that was, for those trained in Levitical purity, every bit as marvellous as the cleansing itself. But to Jesus, the Son of God come in human flesh, this act was no different than what He had been doing since His incarnation, for His incarnation had already brought Him into intimate, defiling contact with mortal flesh. Some have observed that when Jesus touched and healed and cleansed the leper, that Jesus' purifying touch overweighed the contaminating influence of the leper's uncleanness. Jesus was not defiled, but the leper was cleansed; the two were not left in the leper's former condition—defiled (the situation covered by the Law). Jesus made the leper like Himself—pure, (a situation unimagined by any but God!) How like Jesus to touch this leper! Here is a revelation of His quickness to perceive another's feeling because He loved him. In short, here is the untouchable wrapped around with the love and mercy of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

- 3. Another reason why Jesus may have chosen to touch the leper was to clear any doubt about His willingness to heal. But there is no indication that Jesus touched him to strengthen the man's faith, as some say, because this miracle like many others did not depend upon the faith of the individual healed. (cf.

8:5-13, 28-32; 9:18-25; Lk. 7:11-15) There is no hint of a psychosomatic "cure" here.

**Saying, I will.** (Greek: *thélo*) This is not the simple future (*ésomai*) meaning "I shall do it," but rather *thélo*, meaning, "I wish (to heal you), I am willing (to do it), I will it!" This expression of Jesus was not merely the naked word or warming touch but also the sheer exercise of His will, which cleansed the leper. **Be clean.** The command of Jesus is perfectly consonant with the previously expressed views on defilement: He did not say, "Be healed," even though this certainly was involved, but rather: "Be cleansed." The marvellous and immediate result: **And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.** Both Mark and Luke note further: **immediately the leprosy left him**, almost as if to answer critical charges that Jesus' "healings" were not obviously and immediately manifest to all, but required time, much prayer and boundless credulity. Instantly the raw sores and dead flesh and insensitive nerves were restored to perfectly normal health. This omnipotent act of Jesus shadows into insignificance all modern attempts at "faith healing," because His was real, immediate and complete.

**8:4 See thou tell no man.** Mark says that He "sternly charged him." This man's former conduct in coming to Jesus in a city to be healed, when the clear implication of the Law was to forbid it, showed that he needed such severe language. But he showed a similar carelessness with Jesus' stern warning. This command probably clarifies the fact that the leper was not cleansed in the presence of the "great multitudes" of 8:1, for such a charge as this could have little meaning, although Jesus sometimes required this of multitudes also (Mt. 12:15, 16).

But this command to silence cannot be urged as proof that Jesus, during His lifetime never claimed to be Messiah, or that He was, for some reason embarrassed by the possibility that His disciples after His death might attribute Messiahship and Deity to Him on the basis of such fabulous stories as the (unreal) cleansing of a leper. His injunctions to silence had quite another basis: He was fully aware of His real Messiahship and time schedule. He did not always forbid such publicity (as in the case of the paralytic, [Mt. 9:2-8 also Jn. 5:1-18]); rather He sometimes commanded it (Mk. 5:18-20). He also empowered Apostles to enter the same miraculous ministry (Mt. 10:7, 8). This seeming inconsistency between Jesus' claims to be Messiah and His forbidding people to say anything about His works which identified Him as such, cannot be offered as basis for rejecting the miracles as not possessing historical reality or for supposing that the prohibitions of

publicity are but hypocritical expressions created by the writers of these narratives. This apparent inconsistency is really a valuable guarantee of the truthfulness of the witness given by the gospel writers. To resolve the supposed contradictions we need but look in each case of an injunction to silence for answers to the following questions: In what part of Palestine was Jesus located when He prohibited such publicity? To what persons did He make such prohibitions? What political background made necessary such precautions, which without them, would have hindered further the progress of Jesus' ministry and schedule?

Galilee and Judea were particularly sensitive to any Messianic uprising. Jesus needed time to teach what kind of Messiah God really intended, before the people could seize Him and use Him and His movement to raise a national liberation front to deliver the nation from the galling yoke of Rome.

**See thou tell no man**, is sometimes interpreted by some as Jesus' use of reverse psychology whereby he forbade the man to advertise the miracle, thus insuring its greater publicity. It is reasoned that surely Jesus would have foreseen the effect of so wondrous a cleansing upon the emotions of so horribly afflicted a wretch, and could thus have predicted the enthusiastic reaction to his cleansing. Perhaps, it is said, Jesus told him not to tell, so that the man would tell it all the more as a secret too good to be kept. After all, nothing travels as rapidly as a secret!

No, this suggestion is doubtful because:

1. Although reverse psychology is not in itself wrong, the plain import of Jesus' words required obedience to their obvious meaning, unless something in the face or voice of Jesus indicated to the man the opposite meaning, a fact not recorded by any Evangelist. Rather, both Mark and Luke record the man's actions, beginning with the weak adversative *dé*, Luke adding also *mállon*. While *dé* by itself, may introduce a contrast between the clause it introduces and that which goes before it, *mállon dé* introduces an expression or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded. ("instead"). Luke's actual word order is *dé mállon*, which Arndt and Gringrich translate "but to a greater degree, even more than ever." So it is clear that Mark and Luke regarded the result of the man's advertizing as contrasting, not harmonizing, with Jesus' intent.
2. Political popularity of the Messiah concept among the Jews was definitely detrimental to the real success of Jesus' ministry,



and to agitate further an already emotionally charged atmosphere was not at all expedient.

3. Also, the man needed to concentrate on his own obedience to God by carrying out without interruption the prescribed ritual for cleansing. He must not disregard God's commands out of excited gratitude to Jesus.

But, someone might object, was not there a crowd already present when Jesus thus forbade the unwanted publicity? Were a crowd present, would not His injunction to silence be rather meaningless, since, manifestly, the crowd, not being required also to keep silent, would have spread the news? And, is not the exact wording of Luke that "a report about him (or "Him"?) went abroad, so that many crowds gathered . . ." more consonant with the possibility that there were already many present who also told of the cleansing? No, because Mark clearly links the coming of the crowds to the man's actions after he left Jesus. And just because Jesus was in one of the towns does not presuppose the existence of a crowd. Mt. 8:1 probably is not to be connected chronologically with 8:2-4, so again we have no crowd until after the man went away. There is also hurry implied in Mark's expression: "He sent him away at once" (*euthus exēbalen*), lest his lingering till excited crowds could gather, further hindering the man's getting away to Jerusalem and impeding Jesus' ministry.

**But go show thyself to the priest** means: "Go to Jerusalem!" because the seven-day ritual of cleansing and offerings were to take place at the Temple (see Lev. 14:11) and the priest who officiates at the cleansing is the same as he who offers the sacrifices, applies the blood and oil. A whole colony of priests living in Galilee could not pronounce him clean, without that trip to Jerusalem. Jesus, our potential High Priest, superior in every way to Aaron, does not here set aside the man's responsibility to obey the then-valid Levitical prescriptions that applied to him. Jesus, Himself the end of the Law, would not save the man the long walk to Jerusalem for his physical exam.

**And offer the gift that Moses commanded.** See Lev. 14 for the entire procedure of cleansing. **Offer for thy cleansing.** Though Jesus' Power had taken away all the physical aspects of the leprosy, and thus the leper was "cleansed" physically, yet a leper is legally "unclean" until his physical examination by the priests confirms the fact that the disease has indeed left him. Though a healed leper is considered "clean" prior to his offerings (Lev. 14:7), he is not legally "cleansed" until after his offerings (Lev. 14:20).

**Go show yourself to the priest . . . for a testimony to them.** Who is "them"? **Them** is plural while **the priest** is singular, so can the testimony to be rendered, refer to the priest at all? Perhaps, since one priest may be a representative of the class of people in Jerusalem hostile to Jesus. It was very important that the priests have the testimony borne to them that this healed leper could bring, because they had not all the opportunities to see all the miracles that crowds in Galilee had. The priests who had only heard of Jesus, or who were hostile and unbelieving, needed to have this conclusive evidence of the reality of Jesus' miracles thrust into their presence. They became thus, to us, another group of witnesses to the reality of this man's cleansing and to the fact that Jesus did not disregard the law (cf. Mt. 5:17, 18). And, certainly, the clean bill of health from the priest in the hands of the former leper would be powerful witness to the Messianic identity of Jesus. There are a multitude of reasons why Jesus should make this peculiar requirement of the man:

1. That the people and priests might see that Jesus did not disregard the Law.
2. To get the official seal upon the validity of the cure by authoritative certification by the priests, thus convincing others of the completeness of the cure, permitting the former leper to re-enter society.
3. To prevent the priests from hearing of the miracle before the man arrived; and from deciding against the reality of the cure out of hostility to Jesus. They could perhaps deny that the man had ever been a leper, or that he had been truly cleansed. Thus their ignorance of the cause of his cleansing would keep them from being prejudiced against a correct appraisal of the leper's true condition.
4. To prevent the multitudes from becoming unduly excited about so great a miracle (cf. Jn. 6:15), when Jesus' primary purpose was to preach, not to heal (Lk. 4:42, 43).
5. To remind the man himself of his responsibility to God's revelation as then given and applied to his case. He might be tempted to think that a man so miraculously cured was not bound by ordinary rules. His mixing with others before being declared clean by competent authorities would serve only to confirm the antagonism of the religious leaders to Jesus.

### III. THE LAST RESORT

Did the cleansed leper get to Jerusalem and offer as he had been told or did he disobey this command also, as apparently he did the

other one to tell no one? Mark says: "But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news." All of the justifications in the world that the man could have offered for his actions did not remove the hindrance he thus created for Jesus: **Jesus could no longer openly enter a town** (Mk. 1:45). This was not a question of ability but of strategic impropriety of doing so. Jesus was planning and executing the strategy of His campaign, but the leper created a crisis for Him, by coming to him openly in a city. Jesus sought to settle it by endeavoring to keep the miracle as private as possible, but the disobedient leper interrupted Jesus' plans, caused unwanted excitement, thus closing the door to further activity by Jesus in open cities.

**He was out in the country** (Mk.), **withdrew to the wilderness** (Lk.) and still the multitudes came to Him from every quarter to hear and be healed! Jesus had to use such withdrawals to the desert places as tactics to thwart the plans of those who sought to take over His movement to use it for their own political ambitions. Jesus' only hope of accomplishing His earthly purpose lay in the careful training of a few hardy believers who were zealous enough to imbibe of His spirit and purposes and carry out His work after the heady excitement caused by His presence had died down. Jesus kept dividing His multitudes in order to conquer them. His popular movement would have been otherwise impossible to control. His constantly shifting headquarters made it difficult for anyone to capitalize on crowd fervor.

It is a distinguishing mark of Jesus' true greatness that, at the height of this popularity, **He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed** (Lk. 5:16). He could have done an excellent job as rabbi at Capernaum alone. He had the masses literally in the palm of His hand, but He recognized how near to being in THEIR hands He was! He deliberately escaped the noisy crowd of well-wishers to slip into the presence of His Father to pray about this crisis.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is there any necessary (especially temporal) connection between 8:1 and 8:2?
2. What additional information regarding this event do Mark and Luke contribute?
3. Describe the kind of leprosy proscribed by the law of Moses. Tell where the legal descriptions are to be found, what examinations are to be made and, how those definitely diagnosed as lepers were to be regarded by the Israelites.

4. What are the similarities (or differences) between the leprosy described in the Mosaic legislation and modern leprosy?
5. Does the Bible teach that leprosy, as an obvious physical disease, is a symbol or type of sin? Prove your answer.
6. If you deny that leprosy is a type of sin, then, what instruction may be derived from this passage by way of application?
7. In what way(s) is the fact that Jesus touched the leper to be viewed by the then-current Jewish mentality as unthinkable, disgusting or even revolting? Is there any Mosaic legislation against touching a leper? Cite the passage.
8. Why does the Bible speak of "cleansing" of lepers, instead of "healing" them? What, if anything, is the difference?
9. The leper "worshipped" Jesus. Is there anything implied in this word more than simple, natural, oriental obeisance of humility rendered to a respected superior? Prove your answer.
10. Explain the psychological contrast between the original approach that the leper made to Jesus and his later response to Jesus' specific command not to tell anyone but the priests about his healing.
11. What, according to Mark and Luke, was the result of the leper's disobeying Jesus' command to "tell no man"?
12. What do Mark and Luke report as Jesus' reactions to the results of the cleansed leper's spreading the news of his cleansing far and wide?
13. For whom was the leper's offering to be a testimony? And, what was the "testimony" to testify to "them"?
14. Though the nationality of this leper is not stated in the text, as sometimes the nationality is given for other people whom Jesus helped, yet we can confidently affirm that this man was Jewish. What clue in the narration leads us to this conclusion?
15. Is there anything in the account to indicate whether the man advertized his healing *before* or *after* his examination by the priests? (Cf. Mk. 1:45; Lk. 5:15)

### Section 13

## JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

(Parallel: Luke 7:1-10)

TEXT: 8:5-13

5. And when he was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,
6. and saying, Lord, my servant lieth in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.
7. And he saith unto him, I will come and heal him.
8. And the centurion answered and said, Lord; I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.
9. For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
10. And when Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
11. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:
12. but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.
13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the special significance of this centurion's request of Jesus in light of Roman-Jewish relations?
- b. Why do you suppose the centurion objected, for Jesus' sake, to Jesus' "coming under my roof"?
- c. If Jesus knows all things, why did He "marvel" at the faith of the centurion?
- d. Why was the centurion's faith so outstanding as to be above all the believers of Israel?
- e. What does his faith indicate about the nature of faith as it contrasts with national heritage, blood lines, or family relations?
- f. In what sense are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "in the kingdom"?
- g. Who comes "from the east and west" to be in the kingdom?
- h. Do you think that Jesus found "great faith" among the godly Jews who truly had sought God's kingdom and will?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus had finished addressing the people in the "Sermon on

the Mount" He descended from the mountain and entered Capernaum. Great crowds followed Him there.

There was a Roman army captain who had a slave whom he valued highly but the servant was ill, in fact at the point of death. When the captain heard about Jesus, he came forward to Jesus in the person of Jewish elders whom he sent, asking Him that He would come and completely cure his slave. When they came to Jesus, they pressed Him earnestly, saying "The captain says, 'Lord, my boy is lying paralyzed at home and racked with pain;' He deserves to have this done for him by you; for he demonstrated his intelligent good will toward our nation. Why, he has even built our synagogue out of his own pocket!"

Jesus said, "I will come and cure him," and with this He went with them. When He was not far from the house the captain sent friends to Jesus with the message: "Sir, do not trouble Yourself: I am not fit to have You come into my house—I did not deem myself worthy even to presume to come to You in person. Just give the order and the boy will be cured. I too know the meaning of authority, being under it myself, with soldiers under me. I order this one to go, and he goes; to another I say, 'Come,' and he comes; and I can say to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, He admired the captain. Turning to the crowd of followers, He exclaimed, "Believe me, nowhere, not even in Israel, have I met with such faith as this! I'm telling you that many Gentiles shall come from all over the earth to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Messianic kingdom of heaven. But those to whom the kingdom belonged by hereditary descent will be banished to the darkness outside; there men will weep bitter tears of disappointment and grind their teeth in helpless rage and self-reproach."

To the captain Jesus said (through those who had been sent by him), "Go; as you have believed, so let it be done for you!" The servant was healed at that very moment, for when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the boy in perfect health.

## SUMMARY

### THE RELATIONSHIP AND HARMONY BETWEEN MATTHEW AND LUKE

*The Problem:* Why is it that two independent testimonies of an event cannot agree on the obvious facts of the case? Matthew was purportedly an eyewitness; Luke received his information through careful research; yet neither tells this story like the other. (Read the two

accounts to appreciate the differences of detail!) Matthew represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus but includes no mention of Jewish intercession or friends hastily directed to halt Jesus. Luke's narration includes these latter details, but gives the distinct impression that Jesus never saw the centurion.

*Several solutions:* if it can be demonstrated that there is a possibility to harmonize all known facts, no charge of inconsistency or contradiction can be lodged against the authors.

1. Intentional difference in emphasis even though both authors knew all facts concerned. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 544) notices the following distinctions in the historical emphasis of Matthew, who seems to be addressing himself to Jewish readers primarily, and that of Luke, whose narrative may have been intended for wider readership:
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Matthew's "Jewish" Gospel gives the pro-Gentile presentation of the event.</li> <li>b. Matthew sketches the event as Christ's direct, personal dealing with the heathen centurion.</li> <li>c. Matthew quotes Jesus' declaration that offers faithful Gentiles a blessed equality with Israel's future hope, putting aside Israel's merely fleshly claims, dooming unbelieving Jews to certain judgment.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The "Gentile" narrative gives the pro-Jewish presentation of the event.</li> <li>b. Luke narrates Jesus' dealing with the Gentile indirectly by Jewish intervention and on the basis of the centurion's spiritual sympathy with Israel.</li> <li>c. Luke omits this.</li> </ol>
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2. In both accounts Jesus deals directly with the centurion, the delegation of Jewish elders and personal friends being essentially irrelevant to the central point: Jesus healed the centurion's slave. That is, Luke presents the fuller, more detailed account, whereas Matthew summarized the account of the centurion's request without specifying his manner of presenting it to Jesus. What a man gets another to do for him he may be said to have done for himself. Thus Matthew's account is to be interpreted as impersonal and indirect, according to Luke. The one

difficulty with this view, obviously, is that, while all of the centurion's speeches reported by Matthew may be merely the quotation of his words by the Jewish elders, what of Jesus' command to the centurion (Mt. 8:13)? If the centurion were not physically present in front of Jesus, how is this command to be interpreted?

It should be noted that the command in Greek is but one word: "Go!" (*hupage*) the verb as well as "you" (*soi*) are both singular, both of which point to one person being addressed.

It might be possible to interpret the last part of Jesus' words ("as you have believed, be it done for you.") as Jesus' answer to be carried back to the centurion by the elders, but what of the command in the singular ("Go thou!")?

3. Another often-offered theory of harmonizing is to view the two Evangelists' narratives as essentially referring to different phases of the total incident. In this case, Luke is regarded as relating the sending of the Jewish elders and later of the centurion's friends and omitting the coming of the centurion to Jesus as He neared his house. Accordingly, it is said, Matthew mentions only the latter event, omitting the others. But this view has two weaknesses:

- a. This explanation fails to explain how the Jewish elders and friends could have "returned to the house and found the slave well" (Lk. 7:10) unless they went to the house another way and Jesus unexplainedly arrived there first, spoke directly with the centurion and sent him home confident of his slave's healing. The impression conveyed by the text, although not stated, is that the elders accompanied Jesus back to the house, were halted with Jesus not far from the centurion's house by the second group of friends and, after Jesus' healing word, returned to the house with the friends to find the centurion and his slave well and probably rejoicing.
- b. This explanation fails to explain how Jesus could "marvel" twice, once when the friends reported the centurion's words expressing great understanding of Jesus' authority, and once again when, according to the theory, the centurion himself came out to meet Jesus. Is this psychologically credible? A possible answer might be found in the meanings of the word "marvel:"

- (1) When the friends brought the centurion's expression of



great comprehension of Jesus' authority, Jesus was surprised, amazed by his almost incredible faith; hence, Jesus "marveled."

- (2) When according to this theory, the centurion himself expressed his understanding in identical words, Jesus was not surprised, for He had heard these words before from the friends. Now, He *admires* the awe-inspiring understanding of the Roman; hence, Jesus "marveled" a second time.

While these problems may seem to be inconsequential to the common person, yet they are of moment to the critical reader who sees the Gospel of Matthew and Luke for what they are: two independent historical testimonies of actual fact. If they can be changed with faulty or contradictory reporting even in this one event, their record of other events, which all readers would consider of utmost importance, is thereby rendered suspect.

While it is difficult to decide which possible harmonization best expresses all the known facts of the event under study, due to the details omitted by both Evangelists, this difficulty has a positive outcome. Had Matthew or Luke copied from each other or from some "earlier tradition," they could have been more careful to eliminate these apparent difficulties. Because of these difficulties we are driven to the conclusion that each represents an independent testimony, a fact that helps to guarantee the truthfulness of the facts related. It becomes obvious, therefore, that there is one fact left out by both Evangelists, a fact which would solve the apparent dilemma. Each told his own version without including the fact we need to harmonize the accounts. But each told the truth insofar as he wrote. The notes which follow as well as the PARAPHRASE HARMONY precede along the lines suggested in the second possibility for harmony mentioned above.

## NOTES

### I. THE CARING CHRIST

#### A. THE CRY OF HUMAN NEED (8:5, 6)

**8:5 And when he was entered into Capernaum.** Luke (6:17—7:1) identifies the Sermon on the Mount as the event immediately preceding Jesus' return to Capernaum. Jesus had already moved to Capernaum earlier (Jn. 2:12; Mt. 4:13; Mk. 2:1) and apparently shared a house there with His mother and brothers. His sisters, possibly married yet lived at Nazareth. (Mk. 6:1-5) Or else

He lived with families of His Apostles, since many were of Bethsaida (see on 10:1). But Capernaum (of which Bethsaida was but a small suburb) was Jesus' headquarters, "his own city" (Mt. 9:1; Mk. 2:1), even though He could point to no fixed dwelling place (Mt. 8:20).

**There came unto him a centurion.** If our assumption is correct that the centurion spoke with Jesus only through intermediaries; all that follows, then, is to be interpreted as Jesus' dealing with the centurion via that line of communication. A centurion was an army officer roughly equivalent in rank to our captain. These long-service, regular officers were responsible for the discipline of 100 men, a "century". These men were literally the moral fibre of the army, able to command, having character that was unyielding in fight and reliable in peace-time operations. This centurion was possibly the captain of the century stationed in or near Capernaum for the maintenance of law and order on one of the main East-West caravan routes from Egypt to Damascus. A centurion did not necessarily have to be Roman by national origin but must be a Roman citizen (See *ISBE*, 256), inasmuch as Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, 8, 3) reports that Herod indeed used foreign troops for the maintenance of order, but of German and Thracian origin over whom were muster-masters and centurions. These were definitely not Romans, as later they went over to the Romans in a strictly Jewish-Roman battle (*Ant.*, XVII, 10, 3).

Study the character of the centurions mentioned in the Bible, remembering that they were men living on the fringe of the knowledge of God (this man; the centurion at the cross, Mt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47; Cornelius, Acts 10; Julius Acts 27).

What sort man is this centurion? His character is seen inductively from his deeds:

- a. He had a more tender heart than was generally found in a mercenary soldier occupying the land of the vanquished, for he occupied himself with generous concern for the welfare of the Jews so often that their leaders could honestly affirm: "He loves our nation." His goodwill had expressed itself intelligently when he paid for the building of the Capernaum synagogue (Lk. 7:4, 5).
- b. He understood the value of human life, be it slave or free. Luke (7:2) informs us this "slave was dear to him."
- c. He possessed a humility that authority had not spoiled and that accomplishments could not puff up. Although he had done much for the Jews that gave him real standing, he said not a word about it.

- d. His courteous discretion puts more brazen believers to shame, for he sent Jewish elders, not presuming to be good enough to present himself before Jesus. (Luke 7:7)
- e. His intelligent faith caught Jesus' eye. He did not even ask Jesus to come to heal the slave; He just lays before Him the story, confident that such great love as Jesus possesses could be reached merely by a knowledge of the facts of the case.
- f. He was a wise administrator, because he had probably passed up the temptation to build something more impressive in Capernaum instead of a synagogue. A theater, hippodrome, or public baths would have been a more impressive expression of his beneficence. However, Plummer (*Luke*, 195) notes that Augustus had recognized the value of synagogues in maintaining order and morality. But the centurion's construction of the synagogue was probably not prompted so much by an interest in good civil order as motivated by a genuine sympathy for the God of Israel, as his later faith seems to indicate.

**beseeking him.** Although the Evangelists do not inform us with what words the centurion urged Jesus, it is clear that he did not intend for the Lord to come into his house, as his later objections to Jesus' coming demonstrate, unless those objections represent a change of position on his part.

- a. Luke's report (7:3) that the Jewish elders were sent to ask Him to come, may be understood to state what the Jews themselves thought the centurion's commission meant, rather than what he had actually told them to say.
- b. Another possible harmonization of the facts is the suggestion that he sent the elders to call Jesus to come near the centurion's house; then, upon seeing the success of his first messengers, he sent his friends to stop Jesus not far from his house to inform Him that he was an unworthy Gentile for whom but a word from Jesus would suffice.

It is worthy of note that Luke (7:4, 5) describes the elders as "beseeking" Jesus (*parekáloun autòn spoudaios*), Matthew's word (*parakalôn*).

How much did this centurion know about Jesus? Jesus' ministry had been concentrated around Capernaum (Jn. 4:46-54; Mt. 4:13-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Mt. 4:23, 24; Mk. 2:1, 2; Lk. 5:17; Mk. 3:7-12). It is hardly likely that the centurion would depend entirely upon hearsay information regarding the cause for greatly aroused public gatherings in an area over which he was personally responsible for maintaining

law and order. Could he afford to ignore this popular Leader in a land tormented by social unrest fomented by self-styled messiahs? Had he, as member of governmental circles, heard of Jesus' healing of the royal officer's son (Jn. 4:34f.)?

Who are these elders of the Jews? They were no strangers to Jesus, since they had already personally observed in their synagogue His demonstrated authority over the demon-world (Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:31-37) and His undeniable right to forgive sins on earth, however blasphemous this seemed to them (Mt. 9:2-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26). Is it necessary to assume that these elders were among the habitual critics of Jesus, who, by the unquestionable generosity of the centurion are thereby put in debt to him, and, thus, cannot deny his present request for their intercession? May not these have been sincere Jews, ever friends of truth and righteousness, whether that be found in Judaism, Gentiles or Jesus? It is not necessary to assume that the centurion sent, or could even persuade, all the elders. Their own urging (Lk. 7:4, 5) reflects their real appreciation of this centurion's true spiritual sympathy with Israel as well as their understanding of Jesus' Person and work.

Viewed from a purely Jewish standpoint, the centurion's coming raises a crucial question regarding the nature of Jesus' ministry itself and His relation to the entire Gentile world. Up to this point no Jewish request had been refused by the Nazarene. But is it possible that God be a God of the Jews only? (cf. Ro. 3:29, 30) Is Jesus an exclusively Jewish Messiah? Must Gentiles be barred from the blessings of His reign as somehow unworthy? Whether, at our distance, we can appreciate it or not, Jesus' ministry is facing an immediate crisis:

- a. If He is but a Jewish Messiah from whose Kingdom unworthy Gentiles are barred, then, philosophically speaking, He represents no God Who can be the Father of all men. If there is a segment of mankind for whom Jesus is not the Messiah, even His claims to be an adequate Jewish Messiah are thrown into doubt, for the very prophecies which had taught us to expect a Messiah at all, promised that "he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles . . . in his name will the Gentiles hope." (Mt. 12:15-21 from Isa. 42:1-4)
- b. On the other hand, His hobnobbing with the outcasts of Israel, the pagans who "were without hope and without God in the world," (cf. Eph. 2:11, 12) could not help but occasion the stumbling of many of Israel. It is fine to promise Gentile participation in the Messianic Kingdom in the figurative lan-

guage of the abstract future, but let none actually help any in the concrete present!

**8:6 and saying, Lord.** *Lord*="Sir," since even with his apparent clear insight into Jesus' unlimited power, it is not necessary to suppose that this centurion clearly comprehended, or believed, Jesus' Deity. This first, person-to-person encounter with Jesus may certainly have led him to conclude Him to be a true Prophet of the true, living God of Israel; but without further revelation he may have gone no further. An understanding of the Deity of Christ comes upon the basis of evidence found in the deeds of Jesus (Jn. 14:11; 5:36). This conclusion may have been dawning upon the Roman. Jesus here furnished him clear evidence that would lead the centurion to grasp Jesus' identity.

**My servant lieth in the house.** The centurion's choice of words indicates his sensitive taste, *servant*; but Luke states the man's actual social position, *slave* (*doúlos*). Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 307, 308) collects the following ancient world viewpoints:

Aristotle: "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."

Gaius, *Institutes*: "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave."

Cato, on agriculture: "Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave and whatever else is superfluous."

Peter Chrysologus: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

We are aware that some ancients possessed slaves of even greater ability than the master, as, for example, educated Greeks became slaves of the victorious but less cultured Romans. But this does not prepare us for Luke's description: (7:2) "This slave was dear to him." *Dear* (*éntimos*: "honored, respected, esteemed; valuable, precious". Arndt-Gingrich, 268) The centurion's overt anxiety over the slave's recovery may also speak well for the slave's previous conduct by which he had

earlier so devoted himself to the Roman that his thoughtfulness and obedient service merited him this concern.

The servant **lay in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented**. **Palsy** is a synonym for *paralysis* (*UWRE*, 3711; *ISBE*, 2236). The centurion emphasized that the slave is **in the house**, thereby suggesting the patient to be unmoveable, since the sick were frequently brought to Jesus. While the specific disease cannot be catalogued with accuracy, the fact that "he was about to die," (Lk. 7:2), **grievously tormented**, points to the conjectures of spinal meningitis (*ISBE*, 2207), progressive paralysis with respiratory spasms (*ISBE*, 2236) or tetanus.

Observe that the centurion leaves Jesus free to decide what was best to do about the problem, because he believes that whatever Jesus chooses to do, He **CAN DO!**

#### B. THE CONFIDENCE OF DIVINE POWER (8:7)

**8:7 I will come and heal him.** Jesus volunteers to go immediately to the centurion's house, because this man's faith is sure that the living force of Jesus' word is so irresistible that His physical presence is not necessary to produce its effect (cf. 8:8). On other occasions, as for example, that of the Capernaum royal officer (Jn. 4:46ff) when faith is weak and He is asked to go, He refused in order to strengthen the confidence of the petitioner. But sometimes He went anyway even in the face of weak, faltering faith, as in the case of Jairus (Mt. 9:18-26). This statement of Jesus is loaded with a powerfully confident assumption! Jesus did not say, "I will come to see what I can do for him," but "I will heal him!" This is the quiet voice of dignified authority proceeding about its normal business.

**I will come.** Did the centurion actually ask the Jewish elders to seek this decision of Jesus, or did the elders, being of weaker faith and less insight, suppose that Jesus' physical presence were essential and therefore put this interpretation into the centurion's words (see Luke 7:3), or did Jesus just decide mercifully to accommodate this needy Gentile in this manner? The key that answers this question is the motive for the centurion's sending friends to halt Jesus not far from the house:

- a. He halted Him there because, to his happy surprise, his earlier mission had achieved more success than he could have hoped, for the wonderful Jewish Teacher is actually coming to his house, but perhaps under a misapprehension as to the nature of the house he is about to enter, i.e. it is that of an "unclean"

Gentile. Thus, he sent his friends to apprise Jesus of this fact. He had expected Jesus to speak a word without coming. What he would not have revealed to Jesus before, he must now confess (8:8).

- b. Or, he expected Jesus all the time, but changed plans when the great reality seizes him that the Teacher is actually about to enter the house. But is he, the careful planner, psychologically caught "off guard"?
- c. He expected Jesus not to say a word at a distance, but to come to the house, stop in front of the house and speak the word. Contrast THIS King's confidence with that of king Jehoram (2 Kg. 5:7). A prophet that knows he is commissioned by God talks this way (2 Kg. 5:8).

## II. THE MARVELING MASTER

### A. THE COURTESY OF GREAT FAITH (8:8, 9)

**8:8 I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof.** This humble objection was brought to Jesus by friends (Lk. 7:6-8). Whether he had expected Jesus to come to his house or not, he feels he must now confess his unfitness, since He is actually coming to enter his house. Either the centurion can now see the group approaching his house, Jesus and the Jewish emissaries in the lead, or else perhaps a runner brought him the joyful word of the success of the elders' intercession and Jesus' coming. Now the centurion, aware of the Jewish viewpoint concerning Gentile houses, must react decisively and rapidly to avert the possibility that Jesus contaminate Himself by contact with Gentiles.

This centurion, alert to Jewish taboos (cf. Acts 10:28) that to associate with a non-Jew, was religiously contaminating, whatever he may have thought of these Pharisaic distinctions, apparently ascribed to Jesus a holiness worth protecting. For this same reason he decided not to approach Jesus personally (Lk. 7:7). He was almost certainly not a proselyte to Judaism (cf. *ISBE*, 2467-2469) for the following reasons:

- a. **I am not worthy** (8:8; Lk. 7:6) *bikanós* = "fit, appropriate, qualified, able, "with connotation of 'worthy'", Arndt-Gingrich, 375.) This language is perfectly consonant with Jewish prohibitions regarding Gentiles (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 546), since a full proselyte would probably consider himself equal to Jews. Luke's expression (7:7) "I did not consider myself worthy to come to you," (*axiós*) also speaks of the centurion's feeling *undeserving the right* to approach Jesus.

- b. Were the centurion somehow Jewish, Jesus' response to his remarkable faith would be inexplicable, since His elevation of Gentile faith above Jewish unbelief would be less relevant in this situation (Mt. 8:10-12).
- c. Plummer (*Luke*, 195) urges that "He loves our nation," could hardly be said of one who was actually a proselyte and would more likely have been said of one in the service of the Herods than that of heathen Rome. However, this has less weight since Josephus (*Ant.* XX, 2, 5) records the remarkable story of a series of benefits brought the Jewish nation by the proselyte king Izates of Adiabene and his mother, Helena.
- d. The more general truth that Jews, even those who were Roman citizens, did not serve in Roman military duty (*ISBE*, 2622) being exempt therefrom, might also corroborate the suggestion that the centurion was in no sense a Jew.

**I am not worthy.** Though Matthew is a Christian, he records the facts true to life as they occurred: as far as the Jewish elders (Lk. 7:4) and the centurion were concerned, Jesus was a purely Jewish rabbi-prophet. Neither had glimpsed Jesus' universality, for they hoped He would set aside whatever anti-Gentile sentiments He might possess, in order to respond to the centurion's need. Else, why should the elders argue the centurion's worthiness in just those terms used: "He is worthy . . .?"

What a remarkable, practically unique concept of our Lord's qualification and abilities that this centurion possessed! This uncommon confession is the freely offered expression of a representative of the conquering rulers of the vanquished people whose nationality Jesus shared! It is said by a ROMAN officer to an itinerate JEWISH Teacher! This courteous regard for Jesus probably goes beyond the simple discretion of a gentleman. Nobody really believes much in Jesus as Lord until he learns humbly to recognize his own worthlessness and un-hypocritically to await Jesus' pleasure. This real man's man is convinced of the great dignity and power of Jesus. This produced in him a counter feeling of equal dimensions of his own unworthiness and inadequacy. This is a normal psychological reaction and a necessary spiritual experience if we are to please God. (cf. Lk. 5:8) Edersheim (*Life*, I, 549) rightly notices:

But in his self-acknowledged 'unfitness' lay the real 'fitness' of this good soldier for membership with the true Israel; and his deep-felt 'unworthiness' the real 'worthiness' for 'the Kingdom' and its blessings. It was this utter disclaimer of all claim,



outward or inward, which prompted that absoluteness of trust which deemed all things possible with Jesus, and marked the real faith of the true Israel.

In this connection see notes on Mt. 5:3. Compare Lk. 15:21.

**But only say the word and my servant shall be healed.**

This is supreme confidence in the omnipotence of Jesus: Jesus' Word is to be the instrument by which the healing is to be effected. The centurion's personal experience in the military had taught him the axiom of authority: a real authority needs only a word. (cf. Ps. 33:6-9. Contrast Jn. 4:49; 11:21) His physical presence is not needed to assure the carrying out of his wishes. These words of the centurion, though stated in the imperative mood (*eipè lógo*), must not be interpreted to make him commanding Jesus to use this method or that, for Jesus does not so construe his words. The Lord views these words as expressing the highest comprehension of His power He had ever encountered.

8:9 These expressions offered by the centurion from his own career illustrate but one point: "I understand the principal of *authority*. You have but to give the command and the sickness will leave. If I, an inferior can give orders and they will be unquestionably carried out, how much more can You do so?"

**I also am a man** (*kai gàr ego ánthropós eimi*). Why did the centurion use the word **man** (*ánthropos*), for it was not strictly necessary in Greek to include this word in the phrase "a (man) under authority." In Luke 7:8 this is made more obvious by the addition of "being set under" (*tassómenos*) a masculine present participle. Is the centurion meaning to suggest, by antithesis, "You are more than a man," i.e., that Jesus were superhuman? The use of "I" *kai gàr ego* is generally emphatic and here antithetic (Dana-Mantey, 123) and suggests that the centurion's antithesis is: "But you are not a man under authority, hence, over all things." The "I also" might also mean "you too," suggesting that the centurion believes Jesus to be "under authority" in a higher sense than that in which the centurion obeys orders of his superiors, for the "also" may merely connect his illustrations with the principle point he is making ("But a word will suffice.") There is a sense in which Jesus was "under authority" (see Jn. 5:19, 30; 14:28; I Co. 15:24-28) and it can be fairly argued that the centurion comprehended by deduction this much of the truth about Jesus.

**I say to my servant, Do this and he doeth it.** Is this merely a general illustration of the centurion's understanding of author-

ity, or also an unconscious, incidental allusion to the now-suffering servant? If also the latter, then we have a bit larger concept of the slave's personal fidelity which so endeared him to his master.

### B. THE JOY OF THE LORD (8:10)

**8:10 When Jesus heard, he marvelled.** This verse shocks those who, having spent many hours arguing the Deity of Jesus, have lost sight of His true humanity, for, how could Jesus marvel? Does not marvelling include the element of surprise and surprise require the element of previous ignorance? How is it possible for Jesus, who could read the hearts of men as an open book (cf. Jn. 2:25), to be suddenly caught off guard by this sudden display of strong, intelligent faith? The problem may rest in the unproven assumption that Jesus was always omniscient, whereas the obvious meaning intended by Matthew and Luke is that He did not know that the centurion would respond as he did. Jesus had accepted ordinary human limitations, except whereinsofar He needed to act in His character as Deity. Though He possessed supernatural powers He chose not to use them. This means that where ordinary means could not be used to arrive at supernatural knowledge, He used supernatural means, but where ordinary knowledge was needed to carry out His mission and could be obtained by common means, He used them. (Study the following texts as further evidence of Jesus' choice not to know certain things: Mt. 26:40; 24:36; Lk. 2:52; Mk. 11:13; Heb. 5:8)

Our own psychological insight into our own spirit should teach us Jesus' wisdom in choosing to know only what He had come to earth to reveal. There are some things it were better for us not to know, for from a strictly human viewpoint, the joy of surprise would be impossible to the man who knows literally everything. Conversely, all the nightmares of a thousand to-morrows would be no secret to the man who knew everything, and *that* knowledge would be unbearable. Unless we are prepared to be God, Who, knowing the future can do something about its outcome, let us not fret to know a future that God has left out of our ken. Jesus chose in His incarnation not to know some things, in order that His human reaction be genuine, not faked, because of unadmitted knowledge supernaturally acquired.

The question of Jesus' ignorance is, then, a question of extent. If this conclusion is surprising, let us just admit that we have never seen a God-Man before, and we are likely never to see another. Jesus was

unique Son (*monogenes huiós*, Jn. 3:16) and unique God (*monogenes theós* Jn. 1:18). Since none of us have ever tried being God, let us not be too quick to judge what is possible for Him who knows everything, yet chooses to empty Himself of His omniscience and all the rest of those attributes which are His glory (Jn. 1:14; 17:5; Phil. 2:5-11) to be born in human flesh, hemmed in by all the limitations that go with the definition of being human! That is a unique experience that only a God could understand. This may be something of the meaning of Jesus' cry: "No one knows who the Son really is except the Father!" (Mt. 11:27a) So let us just put this fact, that Jesus could marvel, into our understanding of His earthly ministry and accept it. The Apostles who became firm believers and fervent preachers and ready martyrs for Jesus' Deity do not flinch at this suggestion of Jesus' authentic humanity.

It should give us pause to realize that the two factors recorded by the Apostles over which Jesus marvelled are: great faith (Mt. 8:10) and persistent unbelief (Mk. 6:6). Both are intimately linked in Jesus' thought which follows.

**I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.** Jesus thought it necessary, in order to give adequate expression to His amazement, to cast the centurion's monumental faith against the backdrop of Jewish misgivings about His Messiahship. Vital faith always excited Jesus, probably because it was so rare. This was a moment of great joy for Him. He had been looking for faith, but had not to that moment found any example so noteworthy. Jesus is still looking for faith (Lk. 18:8), for He holds men responsible for what they trust as their real God. This means, obviously, that God does not produce faith in men by some mysterious action of the Holy Spirit without their knowledge and will. For had Jesus produced faith in this centurion, He could not have marvelled at its existence. Further, He could not have blamed the Jews for their unbelief or weakness of faith, because their failure would not be their fault, but His. The centurion's great faith was the result of his apprehension of the evidences Jesus had given men of His identity, plus his personal willingness to act upon what he knew.

**No, not in Israel.** No more tragic lines have been penned! Where should one expect great faith if not among the heirs of the promises, the chosen nation particularly belonging to God? Yet all Israel had no one, in Jesus' judgment, to match this straightforward, uncomplicated Gentile who trusted Jesus implicitly. Israel had encountered God's mighty acts head-on; their very existence was living

proof of His personal concern. They had every reason to believe God, but were outstripped in actual practice by this faithful foreigner. (See also Mt. 15:21-28). Jesus' joy is tempered by the human tragedy and loss that Israel's failure represented.

**Great faith** is Jesus' estimate of the man's understanding upon which his faith is founded. Let none suggest that his grasp of Jesus' identity and work is somehow sullied by gross pagan concepts bordering on magic. Not a few commentators suggest he may have even been what later Judaism termed "a proselyte of the Gate," i.e. a Gentile not entirely converted to Judaism by ritual initiation, but still quite sympathetic with Jewish religion and practice. For suggestions how his faith was great, see *Expository Sermon Chapter Eight* over this section.

Study the following texts that reveal that faith is a measurable reality:

Mt. 17:20 The disciples could not cast out a demon "because of their *little faith*" and were culpable because a small amount of real confidence in God could have accomplished relatively greater results.

Lk. 17:5 The apostles requested Jesus, "*Increase our faith!*" as if His stiff requirements required an even superior faith. Instead, Jesus replies again that the smallest amount of real faith would render significant results. What was needed was not more faith, but more humble obedience (Lk. 17:7-10). Faith is a moral phenomenon for which the believer himself is responsible. Jesus evidently did not actually answer the disciples' request as they had stated it, but rather He increased their understanding about what they could expect from God. There is thus a certain point at which God does not need to increase our faith, indeed, cannot, for that is just the point where our own responsibility begins and we must ACT on the faith we possess based on the evidence He has given us all. We grow in faith by doing His will.

Mk. 9:24 The father of the demonized boy recognized the involuntary doubt in his life that questioned even Jesus' ability to help: "*I believe: help thou my unbelief.*"

Mk. 4:40 Jesus rebuked the believing disciples for their fear

Mt. 8:26 during the storm: "Why are you afraid? Have you *no faith?*"

- Lk. 18:8 Jesus seems to despair of finding *any faith* on the earth upon His return.
- Mt. 15:28 Jesus praised the Canaanite woman for her dogged instance that He heal her demonized daughter: "Woman, *great* is your *faith*!"
- Lk. 22:32 Jesus prayed for Peter that his *faith not fail*.
- Mt. 6:30 Jesus attacked worry about food, clothing and shelter as evidence of *little faith*. (also Lk. 12:28).
- Mt. 14:31 Jesus rebuked Peter for being afraid to walk on the water after he had so well begun to do so: "O man of *little faith*, why did you doubt?"
- Mt. 16:8 Jesus rebuked the Twelve because they so quickly forgot the miraculous division of loaves and fishes and were worrying about the fact that they had hardly any bread for the whole group: "O men of *little faith* . . ."

### III. THE JUST JUDGE

#### A. THE HOPE OF FAITHFUL FOREIGNERS (8:11)

8:11 The figure which Jesus used is typically Jewish in language. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 549f) Out of many OT texts the commonest idea of the Messianic rule was the enjoyment, by reassembled Israel, of the joyful banquet at which the patriarchs of renown would be honored guests. (cf. Isa. 2:2; 25:6-9; 45:6; 49:12; 59:19; Zech. 8:20-23; Mal. 1:11. Other NT uses of similar language: Lk. 13:27-29; 14:15f; Mt. 22:1; Rev. 19:9) Edersheim points out that it never crossed the minds of the Jews that any Gentile would ever be permitted to sit down at that feast.

**Many shall come from the east and the west.** These are Gentiles from out of all nations of the world whose real belief in God exceeded that of the standard Judaism that rejected Jesus. Notice the gentle sensitivity of Jesus as He describes the Gentiles without actually naming them, lest the Jewish bystanders, victims of their own prejudicial views of OT promises regarding the heathen nations, find His choice of words unbearably offensive. (cf. Acts 22:21, 22) Still, the prophets had not been unintelligible in their expression of their expression of God's interest in Gentiles. (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Ro. 15:9-12 where Paul collects some together. NT texts that further indicate Gentile entrance into the Kingdom are: Mt. 12:18-21; 21:43; 22:9; 24:14; 25:32f.; 28:19; Jn. 10:16.) In fact, the whole history of the Church down to the present has vindicated this prophetic word of Jesus, in that the Church has known a Gentile majority almost before the end

of the Apostolic age. What started as a mere trickle (Ac. 10—11:18) has grown into the mighty river of Gentile believers John saw in the Revelation. (Contrast Rev. 7:1-8 with Rev. 7:9f.)

**They shall sit down with Abraham: Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom.** Jesus is looking at the kingdom as God's reign finally perfected at the end of time when the judgment will have revealed the true relationships that earth's national distinctions tended to obscure. The true sons of the ancient patriarchs are, not those whose only claim is physical descent, but, rather, those who trust God. This truth forms the real basis for Christianity's claim to be truly universal. Note how often this theme permeates Christian teaching: Lk. 19:9; Ro. 2:25-29; 4:11, 12, 16-18; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; 4:29; Eph. 2:11—3-9.

#### B. THE HOPELESSNESS OF DISBELIEF (8:12)

**8:12 But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth. Who are these sons of the kingdom?**

- a. "The son of anything" is Hebrew parlance for some characteristic quality or relationship of the person thus described (*ISBE*, 2826; cf. Eph. 2:2). The meaning would be, then, those people, whose main distinguishing feature would be their supposed fitness for entrance into the Kingdom of the Messiah, have suddenly been found very unfit.
- b. If Jesus means the word "sons" in a non-technical sense, the emphasis is upon the legal heirs to the Messianic Kingdom as physical inheritors of Abraham's legacy transmitted through the Messiah. (Ro. 9:4)

In either case, Jesus refers to those descendants of Abraham who rejected the One descendant of Abraham through Whom God intended to bless all nations.

From the Pharisaic standpoint, Jesus is heaping insult upon injury! Not only will Gentiles be welcome guests at the great feast, but the "people of God's own peculiar possession," the Jews as a whole, will be not at all welcome to attend that banquet to which they supposed themselves to have most right. (cf. Mt. 21:33—22:10) The only valid passport to the blessing of God is not membership in a particular nation, family, club or church: it is trust in Jesus, that God wants!

But this biting ironic declaration of Jesus should prove that He was not mere "creature of his time, expounding the highest hopes of contemporary Judaism." Let the unbeliever, who would thus reduce the Lord, explain this fundamental difference between Christ's judgment upon His nation and the thought of His contemporaries. Jesus can

not even be called a mere reformer of current Judaism, for **He** is hereby smashing its most cherished notions of the privileged place of Israel in the economy of God!

Nor is Jesus merely elevating the Gentiles in importance before God above Israel, for this would controvert the clearest revelations of God's plans for Israel to be the nation through which He would bless all the Gentiles, (cf. Ro. 9-11) Rather, the faith of Gentiles is placed on a par with that of believing Jews. Jesus flatly rejects Israel's merely fleshly claims and obvious, obstinate unbelief. (cf. Mt. 3:7-10; Ro. 9:6ff; 2—4; Jn. 8:37-47) According to Jesus, Gentile faith does not however occupy a position unconnected with or above the true Israel, but rather shares with all Christian Jews the realization of the promises made to the patriarchs on the basis of their faith. (Gal. 3:6-9) This Jewish universalism that admits God-fearing Gentiles is the only true interpretation of Israel's hopes for the messianic Kingdom. (Ac. 10:34-43) This simple sentence pronounced by Jesus must have crashed upon the ears of His audience with the force of an atomic blast. Rather than predict Jewish world domination under the leadership of the Messiah, Jesus describes the fate of unbelieving Israelites: "They will go to hell!"

**Outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth:** this Jesus envisions as the clear alternative to being **in the kingdom**. These vivid metaphors picture in short, rapid strokes a terrifying reality that dares human language to attempt its description, God's final punishment of the wicked. (cf. Mt. 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28) **Outer darkness** calls up three possible visions, all possible:

- a. Banquets, usually being held at night, the invited but unbelieving guests are shut out of the festal gathering to regret their rejection.
- b. Gehenna was spoken of by the Jews as "darkness." (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 550) Accordingly, Jesus' expression becomes a Hebraistic expression for that place of punishment.
- c. Or, perhaps He gives us a picture of a tomb-like dungeon where the imprisoned while away useless hours in total darkness.

Whichever His meaning, the words picture an unbeliever shut out from the light of God and the joy of His fellowship as well as the companionship of the best men of all ages, shut up only to hopelessness and frustrated anger for eternity.

Interestingly, the expression **gnashing of teeth** was not used in OT for "anguish," as one might suppose, but for "anger." (cf. Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Job 16:9; Acts 7:54)

Lenski (*Matthew*, 330) reminds that the phrases "sons of the kingdom" and "shall be thrown out" do not necessarily imply that the Jews were actually in the kingdom, for one can be thrown out when he attempts to enter a place to which he had no right without ever getting into it.

Whether our prejudices will allow us to admit it or not, Jesus has just pronounced God's judgment upon the whole earth. Believers, regardless of their national origins, will enjoy the light and blessings of the Father's house forever; those who refuse to believe Jesus are damned, regardless of previous national privileges or relationships. This revelation of the outcome of God's verdict is valueless unless Jesus knows what He is talking about and has the authority to reveal it!

### C. THE POWER OF REAL AUTHORITY (8:13)

8:13 However angered any Jew might have been by the complete controverting of contemporary Jewish beliefs, Jesus vouchsafed the truth of His assertions by the instantaneous cure at long-range of the servant. If the work of Jesus be God's power operating in Him to restore life and health to that centurion's "boy", He shall have no difficulty saving any believer, Jew or Gentile, out of spiritual paralysis and death for eternity! If Jesus' word is effective in accomplishing that which no other man could do, then His judgment of those who accept or reject Him will stand! (cf. Jn. 12:44-50)

**Go; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.** Unless we assume that the centurion has come out of the house and is now standing before Jesus, this is a message conveyed back to him by the elders. Luke (7-10) reports that upon their arrival at the house, they confirmed the immediate cure of the slave by the powerful word of Christ.

**As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.** This phrase on the surface is charged with joy because of the great amount of faith possessed by the centurion. But it also has ominous undertones expressed in its exact logical obverse: to the extent you have not believed, what you have asked will not be done for you." (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Mk. 9:23; 11:23, 24; Mt. 17:19, 20) Jesus is still talking about the quantity of the centurion's faith: "To the extent you believed I could heal your slave, I shall do it."

However, Arndt-Gingrich (905) describe *as* (*hōs*) as a relative adverb made from the relative pronoun "he who" or "that which" (*hōs*), a fact which speaks of content more than



comparative extent. "Hós and the words that go with it can be the subject or object of a clause." If so, Jesus is saying, "the real content of your faith is what will be done for you, or, may what you have believed be done for you."

Lenski (*Matthew*, 333) warns against a wrong application of this declaration to our own experience of faith:

We should not generalize this word of Jesus so as to make it mean: whatever we believe he will grant us he will grant, or that the degree of our faith insures the gift we desire. A wrong faith may be ever so strong in expecting a wrong gift; Jesus will not meet that faith and expectation, he will first correct it. And often he will do wondrous things where there is no faith present in order to produce faith.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What was a centurion? State their comparative rank and responsibility.
2. Why was one stationed in Capernaum?
3. Describe the apparent character of the four Bible centurions.
4. Explain how this centurion could have both known much about Jesus and thus come to so great faith in Him as to make this plea.
5. Explain in what sense "Jesus marveled at him" is to be understood. Was Jesus in any way surprised by the centurion's great faith and understanding? Is there anything wrong with Jesus' being caught off guard by actions of other men?
6. Who is meant by the phrase "many will come from east and west"?
7. What is the feast referred to by the expression "they will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"? Cite the passages that so identify it.
8. What is meant by the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in this context?
9. Who are the "sons of the kingdom who will be thrown into outer darkness"?
10. What is the "outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth"? How is this phrase to be understood? For instance, what if by bad dental care, men do not have teeth any longer?
11. Explain the difference between Matthew's and Luke's accounts wherein the first represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus with his request, while the second asserts that the centurion never faced Jesus directly but sent Jewish elders and other friends instead.

12. What about the centurion caused the Jewish elders to intercede so willingly to Jesus on his behalf?
13. It is usually assumed that this centurion was probably Roman, but certainly non-Jewish. What are the indications in the text that lead to this assumption?
14. Cite other incidents or texts that indicate that Jesus chose to be particularly unwilling to see the Jewish-Gentile distinction, and helped other Gentiles or praised them, directly or indirectly.
15. State in literal language the meaning of Jesus' metaphor regarding the Messianic feast "in the Kingdom" (v. 11)

### Section 14

## JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Parallels: Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:31-41)

### TEXT: 8:14-17

14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick of a fever.
15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto him.
16. And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus came to Peter's house? Was this a friendly social visit or something more?
- b. What is Matthew's purpose in the quotation of the prophecy?
- c. How did Peter's mother-in-law "minister" unto Jesus? Why?
- d. Why does Matthew connect these cures of diseases and casting demons out that Jesus is doing with Isaiah's prophecy?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus arose from the seat in the Capernaum synagogue where He had been teaching and left the building and entered the home of Simon Peter and Andrew. Accompanying Him were James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill and had been put to bed with a high fever. At once they told Him about her, seeking His help for her, and so Jesus came and saw her. As He stood beside the pallet on which she lay, He rebuked the fever. Taking her by the hand, He lifted her up, and as He did so the fever left her. At once she rose and began to wait on them.

That same evening, just as the sun was setting, everybody in that neighborhood who had any friends or kinfolk suffering from any sort of disease, brought them to Jesus—even those who were demon-possessed were brought. The whole town was crowded into the narrow street in front of Peter's house.

Jesus laid His hands on every one of them and healed the sick ones but the spirits He cast out with a word. The demons came out of many, screaming, "You are the Son of God!" But He spoke sternly to them and refused them permission to testify what they knew to be true: that He was truly the Christ.

This whole incident resulted in the fulfilment of Isaiah's inspired prediction (53:4), "He took our infirmities on Himself, and bore the burden of our diseases."

## NOTES

With this section Matthew describes Jesus' incomparable love for another group of Israel's outcasts. But this time he does not choose those who by the Law are somehow proscribed or actually banned by the rabbis. Rather, he concentrates the reader's attention on God's interest in unknown, humble folk whom the rich, the elite, the higher circles, the religious aristocrats would rather have snubbed as "those provincial nobodies," sometimes sneeringly referred to as "this crowd, who do not know the law" (Jn. 7:49 cf. Lk. 7:29). Matthew now gives the specific examples he had promised earlier (See Notes on Mt. 4:23, 24).

The background, and partial explanation of some of the expressions in this section find their origin in the events of the entire day on that "Great Day of Miracles in Capernaum" (study parallel texts, Mk. 1:21ff.; Lk. 4:31ff.). Jesus had returned to Capernaum from the seashore whence He had just called the four fishermen brothers and partners, Peter, Andrew, James and John, to become His close disciples, since Mark's sequence is apparently tighter than that of Luke who

places Jesus' return from Nazareth in that general time-context. With His newly committed disciples, Jesus goes to the regular synagogue meeting on a Sabbath, where His teaching had special impact equal in power to His forcefulness in the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Mt. 7:28, 29 with Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32) But Jesus was interrupted by a demoniac's raving, whereupon Jesus rebuked the demon, cast him out and freed the man. The onlookers were amazed that Jesus' authority lay not merely in forceful words but also on thrilling deeds. News of this event spread everywhere, a fact which explains what follows the conclusion of the Sabbath rest that day. Immediately Jesus arose, left the synagogue and, with James and John, joined Peter and Andrew as guests in the home of Peter.

**8:14 Jesus was come into Peter's house.** This simple house probably located in Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), apparently also the home of Andrew also (Mk. 1:29) excites our intense curiosity about the lives of the men whom Jesus had just called to close discipleship. If these men are still living in Bethsaida, this fishing village must be so much a suburb of Capernaum as to remain nameless in our text, while Capernaum is the only city named in Mark (1:21, 29) as gathering about the door to Peter's house. (See *ISBE*, 451, 452, article "Bethsaida") However, the town, Bethsaida, remains distinct from Capernaum in Jesus' mind (see Mt. 11:20, 23) and Capernaum's sick might have been brought the short distance to Bethsaida. This strange silence about the passing from one city to another as our text has been interpreted by some as indicating the moving of Peter and Andrew to Capernaum.

Wherever this house was located, its very existence at this point in Peter's discipleship indicates that he did not regard his service to Jesus as requiring the selling of the house, dispersion of his household effects and ascetic life with the Lord. To the contrary, this very house proves Peter's intelligent regard for the central patient of our text, his mother-in-law, (See Notes on 4:18-22) since he maintained this house even in his absence in the service of Jesus.

**He saw his wife's mother** because the other members of the family told Him of her (Mk. 1:30) and requested His help on her behalf (Lk. 4:38). Does this mean that Peter's mother-in-law were lying in another room out of sight of the company in the front room? Not necessarily, for immediately upon their entering the house the family begins animatedly to describe her attack of fever, urging His help. His mother-in-law's very existence, plus a later reference in Christian history (I Co. 9:5), demonstrates several interesting facts:

1. That Peter, the first so-called Roman pope, was married.
2. That Peter did not necessarily leave his wife to enter Christ's service. She might have even accompanied Peter on some trips with Jesus, inasmuch as other women also followed Jesus and ministered to His needs and those of the group. (See Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 15:41)
3. That having a wife was no apparent objection to Peter's apostleship, since this incident and Paul's remark certainly follow Peter's call.
4. That Peter's wife accompanied Peter in later journeys, as did the other apostles' wives work alongside their mates.

We know practically nothing about the wife of Peter herself except a notice or two in tradition. But her importance cannot be ignored, as she lends more flesh-and-blood reality to the person of her more illustrious husband. It is too easy emotionally to reject the apostles as somehow a motley collection of effeminate old bachelors quite out of touch with life problems.

Contrary to some opinion, a woman did not really count for very much in almost every society, except the Jewish in the world of that day. (See *ISBE*, article "Woman," 3100). In Judaism the woman's position was high, almost that of the man, although somewhat inferior. (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, Chap. IX) While this healing performed by Jesus is significant for its privacy, having been done in the home of a disciple, it is not necessarily significant in its being done for a woman, for whom the usual Jewish rabbi would have had less concern than for a man. (cf. Jn. 4:9, 27)

**Lying sick of a fever.** Luke (4:38) notices that she had a "high fever" (*puretô megâlo*). This may not be merely a thermometer reading but a specific medical term (Arndt-Gingrich, 738), possibly malaria due to the proximity of her home to the Jordan Valley and mosquito-infested marshes. Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 486) notes:

The Talmud gives this disease precisely the same name, . . . 'Burning fever', and prescribes for it a magical remedy, of which the principal part is to tie a knife wholly of iron by a braid of hair to a thornbush, and to repeat on successive days Exod. 3:2, 3, then ver. 4, finally ver. 5, after which the bush is to be cut down, while a certain magical formula is pronounced.

Contrast the then-current Jewish standpoint, then, with Jesus' approach to the problem:

**8:15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her.**

The other Synoptic Evangelists describe Jesus also as "standing over her, He rebuked the fever" (Lk. 4:39) and "taking her by the hand, He lifted her up" (Mk. 1:31) Jesus used various methods of healing, as did His apostles after Him. (Ac. 3:7; 28:8; Jn. 4:50-52; Mk. 5:41; 9:27; Mt. 9:25) Luke's expression "Jesus *rebuked* the fever" must not be regarded as proof that Jesus shared popular superstitions which held diseases as malevolent personalities in the sufferers, somewhat like demons.

1. Jesus is merely addressing the impersonal fever in the same way He shouted at winds and waves. (8:26)
2. The Gospel writers themselves saw and recorded a clear distinction between sickness or disease and demon-possession.

**The fever left her**, not weak and exhausted from the illness, as we would expect to see after a recovery finally comes by natural means, after a slow convalescence. *Immediately*, says Luke, she was strong. All three Evangelists unite in emphasizing the intensity of her restored strength, evidenced by her immediately arising to serve Jesus. (Lk. 4:39) This stubborn immediacy is a fact which destroys the naturalistic explanations of this miracle that suggest that the magnetic personality of Jesus, the warmth of His personal touch or perhaps the psychological suggestion of His words caused people to think themselves well, (when really were not), whereby Jesus set in motion perfectly natural psychosomatic laws which later actually cured the sick.

**And she arose and ministered unto him.** *καὶ ἐγέρθη καὶ διεκόνει* Note the change of tense: "She got up and began serving and kept it up." Mark and Luke remember that she served everyone present too. It is not difficult to imagine how she so ministered: what would you do if you had just been a sick woman put to bed with high fever when a houseful of company walks in? Peter's wife was there too possibly, but this remarkable mother-in-law, fully conscious that all of God's power had just been expended in her humble case, has no time for hallelujahs that just bring Jesus more sick people and unwanted publicity. (contrast Mt. 8:1-4 Notes). Rather, being fully aware of the completeness of her cure, being lovingly grateful to Jesus who had miraculously brought her back to immediate vigor and yet, being sensitively aware of His unmentioned but obvious needs, she busied herself in practical service! What a wife Peter must have had, if she were anything like her mother!

In this two-verse vignette Matthew holds up, not Peter's mother-in-law for admiration, but Peter's Lord! In Peter's humble abode where

there was no admiring audience to keep Jesus at His best, Jesus could hear the call of human need and expend all His love, care and power in the service of humble, unknown, unheard-of folk whose only claim to fame was their contact with Jesus of Nazareth. It is this kind of close-up study of Jesus that convinced His disciples they had found the real Messiah: He was the same at home as before the cheering, admiring crowds. He deserved privacy, rest and relaxation as much as any other man, and they know it. Yet He never considered human need a nuisance nor was He too tired to help.

**8:16 And when even was come.** Matthew gives no reason why these folks should delay their coming until sunset (Mk. 1:32; Lk. 4:40). The two other Evangelists plainly declare the day to have been a Sabbath, a day on which stricter Jews considered bearing burdens to be illegal (cf. Jn. 5:10-18) as well as healing (cf. Lk. 13:14). The day legally ended at sunset (Lev. 23:32). These combined facts not only clear up otherwise obscure questions and render unnecessary ultimately unsatisfactory guessing about the delay, but also point up one of the undersigned coincidences among the Gospel writers that show they are independent. They did not contrive their story.

**They brought unto him.** Mark and Luke describe the scene as a spontaneous, almost-mass movement that began when the second star in the sky could be seen, which signalled the end of the Sabbath. Since Matthew had not described the demon-experience in the synagogue, in keeping with his simplicity of style, he omits also the size of the crowds, for since he had not mentioned them, he feels no obligation to explain their assemblage. Why was the whole city of Capernaum gathered at Simon's door? All day long since the synagogue service conversations in the homes kept running back to Jesus' power to heal and cast out demons. (Mk. 1:27, 28; Lk. 4:36, 37) Thus, what Matthew reports is all the more psychologically credible, because grounded in the exciting events in the synagogue earlier that day.

**Many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word.** Again, Mark and Luke are more explicit regarding Jesus' dealings with these sinister beings from the spirit world.

For special studies on DEMONS, EVIL SPIRITS, UNCLEAN SPIRITS, see standard Bible dictionary and encyclopedic articles; especially the Special Study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson, *THE GOSPEL of MARK*, Bible Study Textbook Series, p. 509ff.; Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*.

**He healed all that were sick.** Note how carefully these supposedly "superstitious," hence, uncritical people of Jesus' generation, especially the Gospel writers, recognized a clear distinction between sicknesses, on the one hand, and demon possession, on the other. Jesus is pictured here by Luke (4:40) as patiently moving through the entire group laying His hands upon each and every one, (*heni hekàsto*). Beware Capernaum: multiplied blessings brings multiplied responsibility for the quantity of the Light against which you sin! (See Notes on 11:20-24)

**8:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet.** For general discussion of Matthew's use of prophecies, see Volume I, pp. 81-86. Matthew's citation of Isaiah 53:4 raises the important question: how does Matthew intend to apply this prophecy to Jesus' work? Does he mean to limit its application to the closing events of this one "great day of miracles in Capernaum," of which he does not actually narrate the exciting events in the synagogue (a fact which might not affect our conclusion)? Yet is it possible that our author should presume to apply so grand a prediction to such limited circumstances?

1. Why not? Matthew may merely be calling up one verse from the entire prophecy to suggest to the Jewish reader's mind, familiar with the Isaianic prophecy, the entire figure of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. Isa. 53:7, as context for this text used by Matthew, applies so fitly to Jesus, who carried more than our human affliction, by bearing away especially its ultimate cause, human sin. (See Jn. 1:29, 36; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pe. 2:24) Even though Matthew himself does not furnish the complete picture, the other Evangelists, who do record the synagogue scene, but not the prophecy, unintentionally provide the necessary pieces that complete the picture:
  - a. God's revelation through Jesus' preaching in the synagogue;
  - b. God's power over the evil spirit-world;
  - c. God's power at the humble hearth of common people;
  - d. God's mercy and help for unlimited varieties of diseased folk.

It might be objected that the most significant part of Isaiah's prophecy, the vicarious suffering and death of Jehovah's Servant, finds no parallel in Matthew's application. But to this objection, two answers are necessary:

- Of course not, because Jesus' death is yet a question for His future revelation to His disciples, even though He had given



veiled hints already. (cf. Jn. 2:13-21) It does not need to be mentioned that His suffering and death itself is yet wholly future.

- Further, Matthew is trying to teach us something in addition to, or something that goes beyond, our accustomed interest in Jesus' Last Week Passion. Levi wants us to see that Jesus' suffering really began with His incarnation and continued through His earthly preaching and healing ministry. His vicarious, sympathetic suffering not only culminated in His death and resurrection, but was His whole merciful life-work as He worked reasonably unhampered by hostile leaders too!
2. Matthew is deliberately understating his case, applying only that portion of the prophecy that is actually appropriate to the situation at hand, but at the same time suggesting to the thoughtful reader to begin to look for more applications of Isaiah's words in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth. For had Jesus significantly fulfilled these words of the prophet, but fallen dismally short of Isaiah's further description of the vicarious death of Jaweh's Servant, He would still be unworthy of further attention, in our search for the REAL Messiah.

Matthew is saying, "If you think, dear reader, that these events I have just mentioned are wonderful for their revelation of a supernatural God at a particular point of time and space in His creation, you must remember the ancient prophecy which prepared our minds to look for just this kind of miracles. While, in the days of Isaiah, the prophecy might have had less force with those who heard him utter these words, for whom the fulfilment were yet future, yet for us, who are living in this day of Jesus' ministry, this confirmation of God's ancient promise through the healings performed by Jesus, actually doubles the force of each miracle. Each sign performed by Jesus is but the echo of Isaiah's voice repeated over again. The ancient prophet's prophetic authority is vindicated in our day as his prediction comes true before our eyes; Jesus' authority is doubly demonstrated both by His wonderful signs, which prove that God is working through Him, as well as by His fulfilment of Isaiah's promise uttered 800 years ago!"

But, as even anyone reading the text can see, Matthew did not say all the above in so many words. This seems, however, to be his emphasis. It would perhaps seem strange to the modern apologist that Matthew should draw no more of a conclusion, adducing arguments

and further proof. Yet, our author merely submits one sentence out of the prophecy introducing it into the middle of two chapters of miracles (Mt. 8, 9, but it is not until Mt. 12 that he returns to similar prophetic applications) to alert the reader not only to the fulfilment of the prophecy involved in those miracles of that one day, but also to similar fulfilment by those miracles which follow.

**Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.**

This phrase could have been translated into clearer English by rendering the first word, *autòs*, with a clearer English pronoun:

1. *Unemphatic* personal pronoun: "he", Isaiah's emphasis lying with the enormity of the deeds accomplished by Jaweh's Servant;
2. *Emphatic* personal pronoun: "he himself" Isaiah's emphasis being upon the enormity of the fact that this great, despised Servant actually identified himself so completely with OUR weakness, as actually to bear Himself what we alone deserved.

*Autòs* is capable of both emphases. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 122) Either emphasis carries the amazed wonderment of an Israel, which bears witness against its former blindness, having seen the actual fulfilment of Isaiah's words in the mediatorial suffering and humiliation endured by Jesus, who, it turns out historically, is the exact counterpart of the prophet's vicariously suffering Servant. Like Job's friends, Israel had thought Jesus to be suffering humiliation and punishment for His own great sins, if His sufferings might be used as the measure for His supposed sinfulness. Matthew's words merely suggest the shock the true Israelite would feel at the discovery that Isaiah's great Bearer took OUR human weaknesses as His own. He personally took upon Himself the whole crushing moral responsibility for the underlying cause for all our sin and sickness.

But, as Delitzsch (*Isa.*, II, 316) points out regarding this text cited by Matthew, "It is not really sin that is spoken of, but the evil which is consequent upon human sin, although not always the direct consequence of the sins of individuals (John 9:3)."

Matthew in citing this text so early in Jesus' ministry, quite out of connection with Jesus' mediation and vicarious bearing our sins in His own body on the cross, shows us that Jesus is already by His own powerful life taking sickness and infirmity away. He remained uncontaminated by personal sins, and presumably never sick a day in His life, but personally assumed and actually removed our burden from beginning to the end of His earthly incarnation.

But is there no sense in which Jesus took **OUR infirmities and bare OUR diseases**, i.e. from us who are Gentile Christians living today? Certainly, a comparatively few miracles in Palestine wrought over a three-year period do not exhaust either the meaning of Isaiah or the purpose of Jesus' identification with us in our sickness and infirmity. This should be clear from the observation that the very few He healed in comparison to the world's ill could again contact further diseases later and, presumably, the fewer still whom He raised from death died again. Matthew's use of this prophecy merely draws our attention to Jesus' perfect command over all human weakness which He can restore to perfect soundness. These few samples are convincing proof that His promises to remake us completely are based in historic fact, predicted by inspired prophecy and guaranteed valid for eternity. (cf. Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 21:3, 4; Ro. 8:18-25)

Matthew's deliberate use of a prophecy too big for the examples he cites as its fulfilment draws our attention to the broader general outline of what Jesus was actually doing. Certainly Jesus was working miracles of undoubtedly wonderful dimension, but we must also see beyond them to comprehend the conclusion that Jesus really intended us to draw: "Jesus can make us completely whole in soul and body, because He personally bore away what had destroyed us through disease or sin."

**He took and bore** our weaknesses and sicknesses. These two verbs (*élaben kai ebàstasen*) also preach Jesus' merciful understanding love for us: He can be touched with a feeling for our weaknesses! (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16) This one line of Gospel has more power in it to support suffering Christians than all the writings of all the philosophers that ever dealt with the problem of pain. To us, Jesus has conquered sickness and transformed our viewpoint regarding it, making it mere "little temporary troubles that illustrate once more that the outward man suffers wear and tear and decays, while their outcome is an eternal glory that far outweighs these shortlived difficulties." (cf. II Cor. 4:16-5:9)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus just been, when He entered Peter's house?
2. What is the importance of where Jesus had been, previous to His coming to Peter's house, with regard to the events that follow?
3. Who was particularly sick in Peter's house? What was the specific symptom mentioned by Luke?
4. Describe the manner in which Jesus healed this sick person.

5. Give the evidence that the person was really healed.
6. State the time when the second series of events, included in this text, began to occur.
7. Explain the reason for the Capernaum citizens' waiting until just that moment to bring the sick to Jesus.
8. State the precise location where the sick were brought for healing.
9. Contrast the manner by which Jesus healed the sick with the manner in which He cast out demons, as seen in this text and its parallels.
10. What was the unusual cry of the demons as Jesus cast them out? By comparison with normal human comprehension of the ministry and Person of Jesus seen in the Jews of that period, what does that cry indicate about the demons?
11. Explain why Jesus would not permit the demons to speak "because they knew He was the Christ." Both Mark and Luke offer this quotation as the reason Jesus silenced the demons. Show how this reason is the proper explanation of Jesus' action.
12. What kind of connection does Matthew indicate between Jesus' activities and the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah?
13. How does Matthew mean the word "fulfil" in this connection indicated in the previous question?

11

## Section 15

## JESUS CALLS TO DISCIPLESHIP

(Possible parallel: Luke 9:57-62)

## TEXT: 8:18-22

18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.
19. And there came a scribe, and said unto him, Teacher, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.
20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.
21. And another of the disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.
22. But Jesus saith unto him, Follow me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On other occasions when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him He had compassion for them and helped them. Why does He on this occasion try to get away from them? Compare verse 18 with its parallels in Mark 4:35, 36 and Luke 8:22.
- b. Why do you think Jesus tested this scribe who offers to be a disciple? Did not Jesus say that any who came to Him He would not ever cast out?
- c. What did Jesus mean by "the Son of man hath no place to lay his head"? First, what did He mean by it as regards Himself and, then, how was the scribe to understand and apply it? Did He really mean to indicate that one who follows Him should not expect to have a roof over his head? Explain.
- d. Should we try to obey Jesus' order: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead"? How should it apply to us?
- e. When or under what circumstances is someone "turning back" and, thus, "not fit for the kingdom"? (See Paraphrase and Harmony)
- f. Have you ever wondered what kind of impact these blunt replies, Jesus made to these potential disciples, upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? Certainly, they must have been listening as Jesus said this. How do you think they felt about what He said to each inquiring follower? How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the Apostles?
- g. How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the potential disciple of Jesus? What if it were your religious respectability, your dying father, your dear ones at home, you had to leave for Jesus sake?
- h. What do Jesus' words envision as a future for His self-seeking, glory-grabbing disciples who, clear down to the end of Jesus' ministry, struggled for prestige and priority in Jesus' Messianic Kingdom? (Study Mt. 18:1-5; Lk. 9:46-48; 22:24-27)
- i. Is "was the father of the would-be disciple already dead?" a necessary question to answer before being able to interpret Jesus' command to "leave the dead to bury their dead"?
- j. What is the one clear difference between Jesus and the Church that shows up immediately when someone comes to become a follower of Jesus? How does this difference between us and our Lord affect how we deal with would-be disciples?
- k. Do you think it is possible for us to issue the same challenges of sincerity and commitment that Jesus gave to these men in our

text? If so, how should this be done, in view of our fallibility of judgment, our ignorance of motives, etc.?

- l. What is wrong with a man who finds Jesus' requirements heartless and shocking?
- m. How is it possible for us to become "unfit for the Kingdom of God"?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him that day, after He had finished preaching the Great Sermon in Parables (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), when evening had come He boarded a boat with His disciples. He then gave orders for the departure to the other side of the lake of Galilee.

But before they got under way, a man of letters, a scribe, came up to Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have their lairs; birds in the sky their roosts but the Son of man has nowhere to call His own."

To another man, Jesus called, "Follow me."

But this disciple said, "Lord, first give me leave to go bury my father."

"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead," was Jesus' answer, "but as for you, you go and preach God's kingdom."

Another volunteered, "I will follow you, Sir; but permit me first to say good-bye to those at home."

But Jesus told him, "No man who regrets his decision, after beginning the life he had chosen, has the right understanding of God's rule."

## CONNECTION BETWEEN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE AND LUKE'S

There might be no connection whatever. Life is just unpredictable enough to make possible the repetition of two totally unconnected series of events so very much alike that anyone not immediately familiar with the connections and relationships, names and places, would almost swear that the two events, as narrated by completely competent eye-witnesses, are but two accounts of the same facts. But the two eye-witnesses, were it possible to recall them from the dead to testify, could verify the difference between the two similar incidents.

The problem before us is the practically verbal similarity between these two accounts, so verbally exact in the Greek text (with but

minor variations) that these authors are accused of copying a third unknown author, of having made personal variations according to their personal style and taste, and of having completely forgotten the original circumstances under which these events actually transpired. Here are some of the facts of the difficulty:

Matthew located this account early in Jesus' ministry quite some time before the feeding of the five thousand. (Mt. 14)

Luke locates this incident later in Jesus' ministry after Peter's confession, the Transfiguration and Sermon on Real Humility (Lk. 9)

Matthew says the first potential disciple was a "scribe", a fact that might be suggestive were the man's motives known. Some attribute to him selfish ambition in relation to Jesus' rising political popularity. But Jesus' answer does not necessitate this.

Luke omits this detail.

Matthew omits this disciple.

Luke adds the challenge Jesus placed before a third potential disciple (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Matthew omits the whole ministry performed by the seventy in Perea.

Luke seems to connect Jesus' response to the first potential disciple with His rejection of a Samaritan village; however this connection is tenuous. Luke points out that the second contact was actually commanded to follow Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom; Luke next mentions the mission of the 70. Does he intend any connection by it?

Plummer (*Luke*, 265) is probably correct in reminding us that, although Luke also lists these three stories together, he too may be editing, bringing them together, not because they all occurred the same day, but may be grouped together because they are similar in content.

Whatever is decided about the contrasting connections between Matthew and Luke, it is very clear that Matthew, as he arranges his own material, is giving some of the finest cases in point to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. Each of these would-be disciples

must decide whether he really wants to be "pure in heart" or not (5:8), whether he is trying to "serve two masters" or not (6:24), whether he is seeking earthly treasure and fulfilling merely secondary duties or whether his first interest is the spiritual joy of God's kingdom regardless of the personal expense, suffering, privations or death for Jesus' sake. (6:25-34; 5:10, 11). The *logical* sequence of Matthew's chapters leads to this observation.

However, if Mark's sequence is the *chronologically* correct one, then, chronologically, this section follows the great sermon in parables. Accordingly, if the scribe approached Jesus at the conclusion of that message, it may be that *that* sermon influenced him instead of anything Matthew includes immediately in this context. (Mk. 4:1-34 recorded by Matthew 13; Compare Mt. 8:18, 19, 23-27 with Mk. 4:33-41)

### WHAT IS THIS TEXT DOING HERE?

Would that more preachers of the Gospel ordered their material after the orderly style of this former publican, Matthew-Levi of Alphaeus! As pointed out earlier (Introduction to Chapter Eight), Matthew arranges the miracle stories in groups of three with a line or two recording the response of people to Jesus. This time, however, he puts two responses into the same text and masterfully throws OUR conscience into a crisis. Observe how he brings the two would-be disciples into their own crisis of faith: each must decide what he really thinks of Jesus. There may be other clear reasons why neither Matthew nor Luke record the final choices that each disciple finally made. But it seems as if by a deft use of silence these Gospel writers have thus brought into trial our motives for following Jesus. As would a persuasive preacher driving for decision, so Matthew too is not merely telling enjoyable miracle-stories with a happy ending; rather, he is leading the reader psychologically to DECIDE about Jesus. And, to be true to his task, Matthew must insist that we decide about Jesus in a manner that so deeply affects our lives that our whole reason for existence be altered. Many would follow Jesus, but on conditions! If they can remain king of their lives, they will follow Jesus to the end of the earth. But the basic principle behind these compact crises of conscience is this: the Kingdom of God is the rule of God that requires all there is to a man, not all of God that man's rule can require. (See Notes on 5:8; 6:19-34) May we paraphrase Matthew's purpose, if we have correctly inferred it, like this: "Friend, you have seen pictured the Son of God identifying Himself as the rightful



authority to speak for God to you. You have seen His credentials through these miracles just recorded; He cleansed a leper, restored life and power to the centurion's servant, rebuked the fever that had attacked Peter's mother-in-law, and healed all of Capernaum's sick. On the strength of this evidence, are you willing to turn your life over to His direction? Decide! But remember: your reasons for following Him must be pure, unmixed. Your commitment must neither be shallow and hasty nor reluctant and procrastinating. But you **MUST** decide!"

## NOTES

### **8:18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him.**

This, Matthew says, is the explanation for Jesus' departure. But why would Jesus deliberately try to get away from popularity at any time in His ministry? Mark (4:35) definitely links this sentence with the conclusion to Jesus' great sermon in parables, and consequently finds its explanation in that situation. (See Notes on Mt. 13) Matthew's connection does not draw as much attention to the popular ministry of Jesus that had already developed, requiring that He keep a tight rein on the mistaken excitement of the crowds who would go to war at the indiscreet mention of the word: "Messiah."

The day is over (Mk. 4:35) and Jesus is worn out after a hard day of preaching, arguments and miracles (cf. Mk. 3:19b-35; Lk. 8:23), this being an entirely different day than that on which Peter's wife's mother and many others were healed at sunset. (cf. Mk. 1:21-34) Hence, Matthew omits the mention of the time as being sundown, lest this different day be confused with that. At the conclusion of that day Jesus had remained in Capernaum overnight and next morning the crowds were ready to mob Him again almost before He hardly had begun to pray in private. This time He intends completely to escape the multitudes entirely.

**He gave commandment to depart unto the other side** of the Sea of Galilee by boat. (Lk. 8:22; Mt. 8:23) Peter's former fishing boat may well be the one intended, since Zebedee's boat may still be in service as a commercial fishing boat. (See Mk. 1:20) Since Jesus has just finished a day of ministry probably at Capernaum (Mk. 3:19b), His command means to sail east across to the less populous eastern shore for some privacy and rest. The following section concerning the Gadarene demoniacs also confirms His intent.

To some, this deliberate "escape" ordered by Jesus may be surprising, for we would have expected Jesus to continue day in day out mercifully ministering to multitudes of needy people. But Jesus, we

often forget, was every bit a Man who really tired, really hungered, really needed time to get away from the pressures of constant public attention to be alone with His disciples. (See Notes on 4:1-11 and special study on Jesus' Temptations, Vol. I) Not only must Jesus have privacy to teach His disciples and privacy to seek the Father's face, but He must also cool the ignorant zeal of the multitudes. He often used this "tactic of unavailability" to hold them where He could thus control them and keep His own schedule with as few interruptions as possible. (cf. Mk. 1:36-38; Lk. 4:42, 43; 5:15, 16; Jn. 5:13; Mk. 3:9; Mt. 14:22, 23; Jn. 6:15; Mk. 7:24; Mt. 15:39; 16:4; Mk. 9:30) Jesus did not forsake the multitudes because He did not love, but precisely because He DID love them. He knew that their salvation depended upon their understanding His revelation of Himself, but they insisted upon His healing all their sick. This very insistent clamor drowned Jesus' self-revelation to them. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that if Jesus kept healing their bodies, feeding their stomachs with miraculous bread and fish, raised their dead, if He kept serving their material needs, they would miss that very truth which would save their souls! Their attention must not be centered upon the earthly reign of a worldly messiah who can pamper everyone's appetite and keep all men healthy, wealthy and worldly wise but ignorant of the Rule of God! At all costs, Jesus must concentrate their attention upon His real mission to earth.

### THE LURE OF THE LEGITIMATE

#### A. THE LONGING FOR LODGING AND LEISURE (8:19, 20)

**8:19 And there came a scribe.** As at the conclusion of a lecture some of the students crowd around the instructor to ply Him with questions or pursue a question further, so this scribe seeing that Jesus had dismissed the crowds and was immediately preparing to embark for some unknown destination, elbowed his way through the group bustling around him in all directions till he found himself at water's edge where the Lord was just hurrying the last of the Apostles into the boat for the lake crossing.

The scribes, as a class in Jesus' time, had grown from careful students of Mosaic legislation among the priestly class into an honored upper-class occupation of professional lawyers, zealous defenders and teachers of the Law beyond the bounds of the priestly group of earlier days. As experts in OT Law and exposition, application and instruction to the people, they were classed as professional rabbis with nobility.

(See *ISBE*, 2704 and Bible dictionary articles on their origin and position in the nation.)

*Heis grammateus* ("one scribe") is said to be emphatic, practically stating that this is the only scribe that ever followed Jesus, a fact which is undoubted insofar as the record shows. Perhaps so, but *heis*, "one" is also equivalent to the indefinite article, "a scribe" (Arndt-Gingrich, 230). Or, regarded as equivalent to the indefinite pronoun *tis*, there being no definite articles, *heis* is the real subject of the participle and *grammateus* is a noun in apposition with *heis*: "Now there came a certain man to Him, a scribe, . . ."

These texts indicate Jesus' relations with the scribes: Mt. 22:35; 23:1-36; 15:1-20 (See Notes); Lk. 5:17; 10:25-29; 11:45-52; 14:3; Ac. 5:34) This scribe may already have been a disciple, since the next man Matthew mentions is "another disciple." He is possibly a secret disciple, like Nicodemus, now coming out into open confession of his willingness to follow Jesus. (Note Jn. 12:41-43) But, considering the almost universal condemnation of the scribes as a class by Jesus, and their monolithic rejection of His message and ministry, we may well ask what caused this particular man to flaunt tradition, throw away his friends and brave the censorship of his former colleagues?

1. It may be that this scribe's own inadequate or selfish motives were not yet clear to himself. So Jesus drives straight to his heart's motivations, causing him to examine his real purpose for following.
2. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 79) argues that this scribe seems to have desired to go along with Jesus as a guest, but Jesus gently declines his company since he has no shelter and can not entertain His friends. But does it seem likely that a scribe would be so frivolous as to identify himself with this uncertain, popular movement led by one who so persistently contradicted "the assured results of modern rabbinical thinking," without thus cutting himself off from all that he held dear among the other rabbis as a class?
3. We may be seeing here the sheer impact of Jesus upon the life of this Jewish doctor. This man, thoroughly educated in the method of the rabbis, must have seen in this itinerate rabbi from Nazareth an Authority and excellence that went far above and beyond that of all scribes that he knew about. (cf. Mt. 7:28, 29; Mk. 1:22) Jesus' miracles had identified

Him to THIS scribe at least, as a Teacher come from God (cf. Jn. 3:1, 2) and His message had the ring of true authority in it. This Jewish rabbi, wealthy in the memory of hundreds of OT Scripture texts, heard in the voice of Jesus exactly that kind of doctrine that might be expected from a spiritual Messiah predicted by the prophets. Had he gone this far?

If we reason backwards from Jesus' answer, we shall be better able to see the man as Jesus saw him.

4. Was this scribe unconsciously but clearly compromised by his station in life and preconceptions about the messianic kingdom? And this, even though he be completely sincere, insofar as he is aware of his motives? Perhaps, as Foster suggests, he expected a great earthly messianic kingdom, is now thoroughly convinced that Jesus can bring it about, and now comes forward to assure himself a glorious position and honor when that kingdom becomes reality. And yet, in his own mind, this is the right move to make, consonant with his own understanding.

**Teacher I will follow thee withersoever thou goest.**

His approach is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that he was himself an accepted teacher among the Jews. **Teacher** speaks of function but, as a word addressing Jesus, does not necessarily mean it was spoken in sarcasm or loaded flattery, as at other times. (See Mt. 22:16, 23, 36) Here is the honest confession of one rabbi who was literally overwhelmed by the supernatural wisdom of this REAL Rabbi to whom he now enthusiastically offers himself as willing follower.

**I will follow thee withersoever thou goest.** Rereading this sentence, we see in it the perfect expression of that unconditional commitment Jesus really sought from every disciple. And no man can come to Christ until he is ready to make this declaration. And yet, Jesus sees something in this particular disciple that is hidden from many:

1. The danger of momentary enthusiasm. (Mt. 13:20, 21) How would this confession sound when the going got rough, as Jesus tangled more and more bitterly with the scribes?
2. The danger of rash over-confidence: "Without knowing precisely where you plan to go, Jesus, I am prepared to travel that last mile with you!" (Cf. Mt. 26:31-35; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37)

3. The danger of deep ignorance of the issues involved. This man will probably be shocked to learn the real future of Jesus and His disciples. (cf. Mt. 16:21-28; 17:22, 23; Lk. 9:45)

How would we have reacted to this man's generous offer of his life and influence to our movement, were we Jesus? The man is one of the finest prospects for church membership we have seen in a long time; he has influence, position, learning and, best of all, a willingness to cast in his lot with us in the service of God. The measure of difference however, between our response to him and Jesus' response indicates how little we really understand our mission to bring men to Christ.

8:20 **Jesus saith unto him.** Tired as He was and anxious to get away from people for awhile for various reasons, still Jesus did not treat this excited scribe as a troublesome nuisance interfering with His plans. The Lord may have well known that this scribe had wrestled with his conscience and emotions before, to decide whether to link himself with Jesus at all. Now he rushes up to Jesus at the conclusion of a trying day for Him, right at the very moment after He made the psychological break with the crowd. Having dismissed them, He is busy hurrying the disciples into the boat for immediate departure, when before Him stands a man whose spiritual crisis had reached its zenith, whose eternal salvation was at stake. Besides, this generous enthusiast has bared his heart and life to Jesus. Undoubtedly, Jesus cannot but be moved by this offer. On the other hand, He could not compromise His honesty even to gain this disciple.

**The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests:** even the simplest animals of God's creation are provided with more or less permanent homes, **but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** This mercifully homely response shows Jesus baring a secret of His heart to His would-be disciple that He did not talk about with others. However unworthy his real motives might have been, Jesus does not scold him or crush his zeal. Still, in view of so sweeping a proposal, Jesus must challenge the scribe to consider the cost of discipleship. He will have no unrealistic disciples who have never heard what it is they must confront in His service. Jesus did this over and over:

1. To this scribe: "Do you really want to follow me? Listen, it will cost you more than you dream! My service will not be comfortable to say the least, but come along if you think you can take it."

2. To the rich young ruler: (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22, esp. v. 18) "Do you really mean 'Good Teacher'? Only God is good: do you really mean to call me 'God'? Are you then willing to sell all and follow me as God?"
3. To Nicodemus (Jn. 3) "Do you really think I am a teacher come from God? Good, then why argue with me about the possibility of new birth, as if I were but a rabbi on your level? I am not *discussing* this with you, Nicodemus; I am *telling* you!" (Jn. 3:9-12)
4. James and John (Mt. 20:22)
5. An enthusiastic woman (Lk. 11:27, 28)
6. Peter (Lk. 22:31-34)

Why did Jesus cool men's enthusiasm? In order to deepen their understanding.

1. They must count the cost of discipleship; (Lk. 14:25-33)
2. They must learn to live with the fact of Jesus' Lordship; (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)
3. Then, having made them fully aware of the sacrifices involved, He would call forth the heroic in them that would drive them to offer seemingly impossible sacrifices for Him.

Jesus HAS to offer blood, sweat and tears to get these excited people to grasp even the smallest conception of where Jesus is going, i.e. to suffering and death. He fully knows how shocking to this scribe would be a full revelation of His future opposition by the scribe's own colleagues, suffering the misunderstanding of His own disciples and horrible mockery of justice and criminal crucifixion that would be His. Rather than destroy this scribe's glimmer of real faith by baring these horrifying facts, Jesus considered it enough to say: **the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** But what does this mean?

1. Literally, this was not true, because, undoubtedly, Jesus and the Twelve rested somewhere every night. Further, He would be welcome in hundreds of homes across the country on any night He chose to visit. (cf. the oriental hospitality of Lk. 24:29) Again, He seems to have had a fixed dwelling at Capernaum to which He returned from His evangelistic trips. (cf. Mk. 2:1) Add also the fact that at different times and in different ways, Galilean women contributed to the financial expense of His life and ministry (Lk. 8:1-3). His group also had a treasury with enough money in it to help others and tempting enough to steal from (Jn. 12:4-6; 13:29).

Admittedly, there may have been several occasions when Jesus and His closest followers were probably too many guests in homes every night, and so must have camped out. This leads us to ask: exactly what was Jesus' emphasis and intention for saying this then?

2. Figuratively: Jesus deliberately exaggerated His case for emphasis to impress the scribe with the nagging uncertainty and constantly moving character of Jesus' service. The scribe, accustomed to the comforts of a fine home, needs to realize that, if he would follow Jesus, these must be sacrificed at once. Jesus is saying: "Because of the demands of my unsettled, wandering ministry, I have no time for regular home life."

In this text Jesus is confessing to a poverty equal to the poorest of His day and yet claims allegiance like the most autocratic oriental despot over the tenderest, dearest sentiments of man! Only a Jesus can unite these extremes, for His relative poverty was self-chosen, that none of us may ever despair of His comprehending our sorrows, even though Jesus now reigns at the right hand of the Father that none may presume to believe His Lordship can be lightly dismissed. Every tie that binds us and hinders our service to Him must be crucified! Jesus would have us all see the sinful lure in legitimate things, things that are right, good and often necessary. So He contrasts in this vivid way the sheer uncertainty of His earthly existence with the normal human desire for roots and security.

**The Son of man** is a title that Jesus used to indicate Himself more than any other that He might have chosen. But where did He find this title and why did He use it, as opposed to better-known expressions of Messiahship? Attention is called to James Stalker's article "Son of Man" (*ISBE*, 2828) which summarizes the answers to these questions:

1. Jesus used this title in full consciousness of His Messiahship, even as Daniel had used it (cfr. Dan. 7:13, 14 with Mt. 24:30; 26:64. See also Rev. 1:7; 14:14. Note Keil, *Daniel*, p. 269-275 on Dan. 7:13, 14)

Keil: "He thereby lays claim at once to . . . a divine pre-existence, as well as to affirm true humanity of His person, and seeks to represent Himself, according to John's expression, as the Logos becoming flesh."

This is most startlingly clear from the form of the oath by which the high priest bound Jesus to commit Himself to say

"if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. 26:63). Not only did Jesus respond in the affirmative, but added the promise that pointed directly to Dan. 7:13: "You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

2. But Jesus did not merely use this title of Messiahship as an overt revelation of His true character, since this title apparently was not commonly used among the Jews for "the Christ," even though they had some understanding thereof. (See Jn. 12:34)

<sup>312</sup> That the Jews did understand the words "the son of man" to be messianic is proved by the nature of their question for clarification of Jesus' cryptic declaration that "the Son of man must be" crucified: "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (Jn. 12:33, 34; see notes of Hendriksen, *John*, Vol. II, p. 203ff)

In this true messianic title lay half-concealed, half-revealed His identity, and as a term, would not expose His ministry, so readily as would other terms, to the excesses of nationalistic messianism, giving Him time, thus, to develop in the minds of His closest followers the true character of the suffering Christ. Since "son of man" was also a title with which both Ezekiel and Daniel are addressed in their prophetic office, Jesus' application of the term to Himself, without clear and obvious christological intent or explanation, might suggest no more to the uninformed listeners than that Jesus was speaking of Himself as belonging to the same prophetic line. Or else, since "son of man" related the bearer of this title most intimately to the human race (cf. Ps. 8:4), the uninformed hearer could well be held at a distance by its use. However, as indicated before, Jesus' intention was ever to indicate His Messiahship almost as eloquently as if He had said, "I am the Christ." Yet He does this without unnecessarily exciting the wrongheaded political ambitions of national messianism.

3. A third suggestion why Jesus should make use of this title rather than so many others by which to characterize Himself, is His identification with the human race. While His title



"Son of God" emphasizes His unique and unshared relationship with the Father, this title, even though messianic and specifically originating in a context that unquestionably establishes His divinity, still speaks of the human form in which His ministry to man took place (See on 9:6; Cfr. Heb. 2:5-18 as commentary on Psa. 8:4-6; Jn. 5:26; Mt. 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8)

But which of these views indicates best what Jesus was saying to this excited scribe? Any one of the choices is fair enough, although the irony involved in thinking that the Messiah of God is so reduced as man as to have no place to call home, is as heart-breaking as it is tremendous!

Before we feel too much pity for Jesus who had no comfortable, permanent home or earth, we must ask ourselves who is really to be pitied: Him who knew how to detach Himself from home so as to be free to prepare Himself and men for God's eternity, or us who are so attached to the loved and known, to home and family that we cannot respond to Jesus' call to service as we ought? So in the long run, Jesus' answer is less cruel because He will not let this scribe be disappointed after rushing in where he did not understand what he would have to suffer. Still Jesus does not refuse the man. He is now left to decide whether he too is free from earthly attachments to follow the Master, in such unhesitating, whole-souled service as he had at first offered. He must decide whether he will cast in his lot with this homeless Rabbi whose Words alone led men home.

#### B. THE LATENT LAWLESSNESS OF LEAVING THE LORD TO THE LAST (8:21, 22)

8:21 **Another of the disciples said to him.** This phrase seems to clarify two points: one, that the scribe before him was actually a hidden disciple who was coming out into open commitment to Jesus, and, second, that this follower is already numbered among the openly committed disciples of Jesus. This gives point to Luke's account of this man's call: To another he said, "Follow me." (Lk. 9:59) For what special purpose did Jesus wish this known disciple to enter His special compassion? This is precisely the same wording used by Jesus to call Matthew to apostleship (Mt. 9:9), the fishermen-Apostles (Mt. 4:19) and Philip (Jn. 1:43). Did Jesus want this man to enter some special service like that of the Apostles? Was he to become one of the evangelists who would later evangelize Perea? (See Lk. 10:1-23) If so, it is not surprising that

Jesus would need considerable manpower to stir up popular interest in His message among the many cities of Perea and Judea where He had not previously labored with the intensity with which He had practically mobilized all Galilee behind Him. Maybe this invitation was but a general mission to which Jesus called this man, as He had so done with others. (See Mt. 10:38; 16:24; 19:21)

Here is the tragedy of the unseized opportunity: **Lord, let me first go and bury my father.** This man's excuse is reasonably valid within itself, so reasonable in fact that any further argument about his refusal seemed to be eliminated. Not only is his reason normally quite justifiable, but beautiful and honorable, if anyone else but Jesus were calling him.

What was the actual condition of the father?

- a. Perfectly well? Then this declaration of the son may be interpreted as an oriental expression of dependence upon the father until the son becomes his own master at his father's death. Nothing is clearer than this fitting exhibition of oriental filial duty. If this is the case, perhaps the young man is bargaining for time.
- b. Sick unto death? Then this plea is to be interpreted as requesting perhaps months of delay before taking up Jesus service.
- c. Actually dead? This again is oriental filial duty to give proper respect to his departed ancestor.

Some might feel that it would make some great difference were we to choose one of these interpretations as against another. But the fault of the request is still present in all three possibilities: "Let me put anything else first, before serving You." Further, Jesus' refusal is applicable to all three situations. This is proof that the actual death of the father makes no difference: following Jesus is our duty higher than duty to family alive or dead!

Why should the young man wish to remain with his old father, instead of following Jesus immediately?

- a. His father was probably an unbeliever in Jesus: a believing father who understands Jesus' ministry would have insisted that the son serve Jesus. Apparently the young man did not wish to be rejected by his family who would misunderstand his higher calling to serve Christ. They would be too blind to understand what he was doing. Probably, he had every intention of entering Christ's service later

when he became master of his own destiny at the death of his father.

- b. The young man himself did not recognize that his reluctant or hesitating request contained a deadly principle, which, if admitted, would prohibit any further effectiveness as a disciple, if not his very discipleship itself: "any other duty may be put first."

8:22 But Jesus said to him, **"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."** Jesus refused his request in the most imperative language. (cf. Jn. 21:19-22) Jesus knew the human heart's desire to procrastinate, to put the hard duties off until later. In the strongest terms, Jesus urges His disciple: "My friend, it is now or never: be mine!"

By the time the man's father's funeral was over Jesus would be gone on more important evangelistic activity and this disciple will have missed his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be the personal colaborer of Jesus of Nazareth! Worse yet, the man, having not taken this one great opportunity might be convinced by his own complacency or by unbelieving relatives not to return to help the Master.

**Leave the dead to bury their own dead.** This interesting figure used by Jesus has but one point but many applications. Without mentioning the emotionally touchy word "your dead father," Jesus makes the highest demand upon this young man: "let those who are spiritually insensitive to the high call of the kingdom of God take care of those things that might be called the highest duties of human life." There are people enough who have not caught your vision of God's service: let them attend to those affairs which, in comparison with my service, are clearly secondary.

Jesus does not intend for us to neglect normal human responsibilities. (See Notes on 15:1-20; cf. I Tim. 5:8; Eph. 4:28; 6:1-4) Jesus Himself went to the funeral of Lazarus, but He did not require that Mary and Martha leave the tomb to begin an evangelistic journey with Him. Of course, it might be objected that, in all the connections Jesus had with the dead, He intended to raise them. But this is not true, for He did not raise John the Baptist. Raising some of the dead people in scattered parts of Palestine was the least often repeated of His miracles, if the few instances we have is any indication.

Note that Jesus does not mention great sins that cause our hearts to be polluted with hatred, malice, jealousy, dishonesty, selfishness, falsity, murder and the like. Rather He raises the standard: He regards only total commitment to Him as righteousness. Any other reason-

able, useful, justifiable, good duty that is used to keep a man from following Jesus is SIN! (Mt. 10:34-38; 16:24-26; Lk. 14:26-33) Jesus does not intend nor does He insist on our denial of some things. Rather, He insists on our total commitment to Him that will sacrifice anything to be free to do His bidding. (See Notes on 5:29, 30) No man, having heard the direct call of Christ to any work and is sure that Jesus means him (and not merely infers that he is meant on the basis of reasoning based upon Jesus' words), has a right to make reservations or limitations on his service. Jesus wants the whole man. Too often we are none of us all of one piece. More than one man dwells within us, often in uncomfortable association with his fellows. We are "walking civil wars." Thus, anyone who commits himself to follow Jesus and delays, temporizes or reminisces about the desirability of the life or relationships he is leaving behind, is not fit for the kingdom. His heart is still tied to the world. (cf. Lk. 17:32) No family tie or social relationship may have any competitive compulsion over a disciple of the Lord. (Mt. 10:36, 37) And yet, tragically, some do go home to discuss their conversion with unbelieving relatives and never return. Jesus demonstrated what He meant by this principle. (Mt. 12:46-50; Jn. 2:4) Did He love Mary and His brothers any less than when He walked out of Nazareth never to return "home" again? That higher ministry, for which He left them behind in Nazareth and refused to let their fleshly relationship hold Him or influence His ministry (cf. Mk. 3:21), revealed a higher, deeper love for them than all the remaining at home and serving them there could have ever shown. Paul too understood Jesus' meaning. (Phil. 3:5-10)

Lk. 9:60 **But as for you . . .** Jesus recognizes in this man a true disciple in spite of his hesitations: "You are not a dead man you are sensitive to the needs of Israel, you have heard the call of God. The ministry to which I have called you is so important and this discipleship so holy that you have as much reason as any high priest to leave the burial of your family to others in order to do your duty to me!" (See Lev. 21:11; Nu. 6:6, 7) The ministry to which I have called you is no less than the proclamation of the kingdom of God!" Foster (*Middle*, 101) points out that, once a man is dead, there is little more that can be done for him, while there are living souls in eternal danger for whom much can be done by urgent preaching. He sees Jesus' words as implying a contrast between the relative unimportance of funerals when compared with the urgency of saving the living.

Why did Jesus give different people different answers? Because they were different people. His admonition depended upon the situation, the circumstances and the person's hearts:

1. To one He says, "Follow me" (Mt. 8:22; Lk. 9:59; Jn. 1:43 etc.)
2. To another He says, "Return home to friends and declare how much God has done for you." (Lk. 8:39)
3. To cleansed lepers: "Go show yourselves to the priests and offer the gifts . . ." (Mt. 8:4; Lk. 17:11-19)
4. To an enthusiastic scribe: "Consider the hardships." (Mt. 8:20)
5. To a rich young ruler: "Sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and come, follow me." (Mt. 19:21)
6. To a compromiser: "I accept no lukewarm service." (Rev. 3:16; Lk. 9:62)

This hard saying of Jesus is perfectly in harmony with the hard terms of discipleship He set before the multitudes. Plummer rightly gives us pause with the question (*Matthew*, 130): "Who is this One who with such quiet assurance makes such claims upon men?" Unless we are willing to answer this question and unflinchingly surrender even the most justifiable, and most useful occupations that hinder obedience to Jesus, we cannot properly call ourselves His disciples!

#### C. THE LIABILITY AND LOSS OF A LAST, LINGERING LOOK AT THE LOVED AND A LAMENTATION OF WHAT IS LEFT (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Even if the two accounts of Matthew and Luke are not the same, let us study Luke's third man as additional commentary on Jesus' attitude toward shallow commitment. Here is a disciple facing the danger of unfinished commitment. Hear his dallying temporizing: **"I will follow you, Lord, but let me first . . ."** It does not really matter what words follow for he has already pronounced those two words that may NEVER be used in the same sentence when addressed to Jesus: "But Lord . . ." If Jesus is LORD, then there can be no but's, if's, and's or maybe's.

#### **Permit me first to say farewell to those at my home.**

In contrast to the man just before him, who might have been requesting much time, this disciple assures Jesus of his willingness to take up His service, with the very small request, the very small proviso, that he be permitted to take leave of his loved ones. What could be more reasonable? Is this not a proper respect for those whose society has been our familiar environment and for whom we have

been pleasurable companions? Yet, Jesus sees in this man's plea a mind, a heart that is still on the past, the loved, the dear. He must enjoy them once more before giving them up permanently. He had a "Lot's wife mentality." (cf. Lk. 17:32) Jesus' service was not yet for him his highest joy, nor was Jesus yet dearer than the home folks. We can best understand Jesus' attitude toward this man's weakness by studying contrasting illustrations of men who grasped this truth:

1. Compare Elisha's call to the prophetic ministry (I Kg. 19:19-21)
2. See Paul's attitude toward the relative value of ALL ELSE (Phil. 3:8f.)
3. Contrast Matthew's attitude when he gave a farewell feast. Rather than enjoy the company of his former associates a little longer before making the final break, he apparently intended the occasion to be used to introduce his old cronies to the new Lord of his life. It was obvious to Jesus and to Matthew's friends that he had already, permanently and unequivocally broken his emotional ties with the publican life from which Jesus had called him. (See on Mt. 9:9-13)

Lk. 9:62 **Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.** This dreadful warning of Jesus—"None who begin my service and look back are FIT!"—must cause us to sense the lofty, imperative character of Christ's call. We must learn to live with the FACT of His Lordship.

**Put his hand to the plow**, taken as an expression, probably has nothing at all to do with plowing, as if in the act of looking back, the plowman should be thought to fail to plow a straight furrow. Jesus is not discussing plowing at all, but ENTERING INTO DISCIPLESHIP. If Jesus' words in the first part of this conditional clause are considered metaphorical as well as those in the conclusion, why should the intervening words be taken literally? What are we to suppose the plowman to be looking at? It is just better not to regard this admonition as a "parable of the plowman," and, instead, take His words simply in a metaphorical sense. The point Jesus is making, i.e. undivided loyalty and concentrated, committed attention to the tasks of the Kingdom, can be understood from His words without first reducing them to a parable. This is but a proverbial expression meaning: "anyone who begins the task."

**And looks back.** If you take your allegiance to the Christ as a settled matter, do not die a thousand deaths struggling to decide whether you will do what He wills or not. (Cf. Phil. 3:13; Jn. 6:66, 67; Heb. 10:32-39) The reason Lot's wife was destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah is that her look back revealed that her heart, her life, her love lay with the cities that God had determined to destroy. Her act of looking back unveiled an unwillingness to forsake all for God's sake, not even if her life depended upon it.

This passage is no reference at all to those who, having become Christians, engage in "secular" work for their living, for so-called "secular" work may enable one to publish the gospel much more effectively from a standpoint of financial independence. At the same time, such "secular" work can give power to one's preaching, not only by personal example on the job, but also as proof that "we seek not yours, but you!" (Cf. 2 Co. 12:14)

### WHO ARE THESE MEN?

There have been commentators that have sought to identify these men willing to follow Jesus under certain conditions. (See Plummer, *Luke*, 266, for illustrations.) The most notable suggestions are usually Apostles, who, out of deference for their later office, remain anonymous, according to the view of those who search for the identity of these totally unknown men. It is certainly useless to waste time trying to learn what the Bible did not say.

But it is of profound importance to remember that the lives of the apprentice Apostles was not all light and beauty. They struggled with real prejudices. (Cf. Mt. 16:21-23) They wrestled their misinformed consciences while Jesus' requirements and views continued to batter their own cherished notions. Foster (*Middle*, 98) provokes imaginative thought by asking: what kind of impact did Jesus' blunt challenges to these would-be disciples make upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? They would yet, even until Jesus' last hours, debate their own relative merits for high positions in Jesus' Kingdom. (Cf. Mk. 9:33-37; Lk. 22:24-27) How must the Apostles have understood these hard-line answers Jesus gave these other men? They could not remain unaffected by the shocking treatment Jesus gave the others. (Cf. Mt. 15:12) His words could not but affect their later judgment regarding the relative value of social position, wealth and family.

As for these would-be disciples, we know nothing about what decision they made when their conscience was thrown into crisis.

But we do know and thank God for what the Apostles decided. Thus is our own conscience faced with the burning question of Jesus' Lordship. How shall we respond?

Jesus is endeavoring to impress, sift and confirm His disciples. He had already arrested their attention by so vividly describing the nature and conditions of His service, that they might be clearly aware of what they would face if they follow Him. These words sift and eliminate some who are too unwilling, or too fearful to undertake His service. These words inspire and confirm the determination of those who, though also frightened, desire service under Jesus above all else. His words stir the hero in their hearts and call him forth.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. State the problems involved in trying to harmonize Matthew's account and the circumstances to which it was related, with that of Luke in the circumstances in which this latter tells us this same basic story.
2. Do you conclude that these are two accounts of the same event or two separate events? Upon what basis do you decide this?
3. If you have not already done so, in answer to the previous questions, state the different circumstances which precede Matthew's account, and then those which Luke states as immediately preceding this event. These must be known, since our understanding of the author's intent for including them will certainly affect how they are to be interpreted. Where was Jesus going just as the scene begins, according to Matthew? According to Luke?
4. According to Matthew, who was the first disciple to approach Jesus requesting permission to accompany Him in His ministry and travels? What is so significant about this man's offer? Describe his social position which makes his offer so unusual.
5. State and interpret Jesus' answer. Was Jesus' answer strictly true? Did Jesus have a home, whenever He was "at home", to return to?
6. Is it known whether the father was dead, for whom one invited disciple desired to delay his service?
7. Who are the "dead" who must be left to "bury their own dead"? Explain Jesus' use of the word "dead" in each case.
8. What does Luke report as Jesus' antithesis of His command to leave the dead to bury their own dead? That is, what does Jesus state as being the direct opposite, in this case, to ministering to one's dying or dead relatives?
9. Did Jesus regard the disciple, whom He ordered to leave the dead



to bury their own dead, as being "dead" too? How do you know?

10. What is meant by the expression: "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God"? What is this "kingdom of God" that Jesus wanted proclaimed by that disciple? How does that concept differ (if it does) from the kingdom of God realized in the Church today?
11. What additional situation does Luke record in connection with these challenges Jesus gave others to count the cost of their discipleship to Him?
12. Was the third man committed to Jesus? If not, why not? If so, in what way?
13. What did Jesus think was wrong with saying farewell to those at home?
14. What is meant by Luke's expression: "put one's hand to the plow"?
15. In Jesus' warning, what does He mean by the expression: "look back"?
16. Does Jesus mean these expressions literally or figuratively?
17. In what way is one, who begins service in the Kingdom of God, accepts the responsibility to follow Jesus and then tempts himself to reconsider his decision by evaluating all he is giving up for this service, so particularly unfit for the kingdom of God? What does Jesus mean by the expression: "not fit for the kingdom"?
18. Is Jesus using the expression "kingdom of God" in this admonition exactly with the same force or meaning as earlier when He charged the other disciple to "go and proclaim the kingdom of God"?
19. Explain the absolute necessity for Jesus' challenging of the sincerity and commitment of these enthusiastic followers. Show the contrast between the open-arms reception we feel constrained to give any contact who manifests an interest in Christ, and the blunt, almost stand-offish approach actually used by Jesus Himself here.
20. List other cases where Jesus cooled the enthusiasm of a would-be follower, in order to deepen his understanding and strengthen his commitment.

## Section 16

### JESUS STILL A TEMPEST

(Parallels: Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)

## TEXT: 8:23-27

23. And when he was entered into a boat, his disciples followed him.
24. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, inasmuch that the boat was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.
25. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Save, Lord; we perish.
26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.
27. And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think made Jesus sleep so soundly as to remain unawakened by the tossing of the boat during the tempest?
- b. How did fear of the great tempest prove that the disciples had "little faith"? Explain what is so faithless about fear.
- c. If the boat was "covered with the waves" why did it not sink? In what sense was it "covered"?
- d. What do you think is the answer to the men's question (vs. 27)?
- e. If these men were so faithless as Jesus says, why does He pass over their faithlessness with no more than a rebuke? Why did He not rather punish them?
- f. Have you ever been as frightened as these Apostles, just as scared by your circumstances as they were in theirs? If so, you can understand something of the fear they felt. They certainly had a right to be afraid. But Jesus rebuked them for their fear. Why?
- g. If Jesus were merely tired at the end of a busy day needing rest, why do you think He would dismiss the crowds and rush away in a boat where they could not immediately follow? Would it not have been just as good for Him to dismiss them formally at the conclusion of His work-day, rest the night through there in Capernaum, finding Himself fresh for another full day's work? Does it not appear that Jesus does not wish to be available that next day? If so, how do you account for His strange actions? In deciding upon your answer, you need to look both forward to the events that follow as well as the particular events which immediately preceded this precipitate departure.
- h. If these disciples were completely without faith, as Jesus' rebuke suggests then what does this appeal mean to Him? If they did

not believe that He could do something, why did they even bother to wake Him?

- i. Why were the disciples not as sleepy as Jesus? Had they not also spent the full, busy day with Him? Would they not also be tired? What effect would this possibility have upon their response to the storm?
- j. Put yourself in the place of the disciples during the storm before they awakened Jesus. State clearly the alternatives that lay before these men. Be especially clear in outlining what the disciples could have done besides crying out in such great fear to awaken Jesus. Should they have awakened Jesus?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him that day, about evening He borrowed a boat with His disciples and gave orders for the departure to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. So, leaving the crowd, the disciples took Jesus with them, just as He was, in the boat with them, and set out for the other shore. Now other boats accompanied Him. As they got under way, He dropped off to sleep.

A heavy squall swept down off the Galilean hills down upon the sea (which is itself 682 feet below sea level) causing the wind to rise driving wave after wave into the boat until it was being swamped. They were taking in water and were in grave danger. But Jesus Himself was in the stern still asleep on the cushion. The men came and roused Him, shouting above the wind, "Lord! Master! Save us! We are going to drown! We are sinking! Don't You care?"

Jesus awoke and shouted to them, "What are you afraid of, you men with little faith?" Then He rose to His feet and rebuked the howling wind and raging waves, "Silence! Be quiet!" and the wind dropped and there was dead calm. Again Jesus said to them, "Of what were you afraid? Have you no faith? Where is it now?"

Mixed emotions of fear, awe, and marvelling filled those men, as they kept saying to one another, "Who can this be Who commands even wind and sea, and they obey Him?"

## SUMMARY

After a particularly exhausting day of miracles, arguments and preaching Jesus ordered His disciples to take the boat in which He had preached across the lake and away from the crowds. During the voyage Jesus fell into deep sleep. A great storm threatened the life of all out on the sea. Jesus, awakened by the cries of His Apostles, arose

and, with a word, completely removed the storm, restoring perfect calm over the entire scene. The happy surprise mixed with fear expressed by the Apostles, suggested something of their appreciation of the true nature of the Lord.

## NOTES

### I. STRATEGIC SHIFT OF THE SCENE OF HIS SERVICE (8:23-26)

Matthew said in 8:18: "Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him, He gave orders to go over to the other side." Mark reports (4:35) "On that day when evening had come, He said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" Luke indicates (8:22): "One day He got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.'" In order adequately to appreciate this unusual movement by Jesus, one must assemble clearly all the facts that occurred on that day. For these events explain why Jesus would deliberately sail away from obvious popularity. If we may be sure of our chronological connections, Jesus' activities on this busy day of ministry may be summarized as follows:

1. No sooner had Jesus arrived home from His second preaching tour of Galilee (Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 3:19b-21), than a crowd gathered, interrupting any possibility of eating. His own sought to lock Him up for His own good, since it seemed to them He was going mad.
2. A special committee of scribes from Jerusalem attacked Jesus' miracles attributing His power to Satan (Mt. 12:22-37; Mk. 3:22-30). Although Jesus deftly refuted their charges with unanswerable logic proving Himself to be God's Son by deeds that only God's Spirit in Him could do, yet some of the Rabbis unreasonably demanded a sign from God that would prove His claims (Mt. 12:38-45).
3. In the midst of these attacks and responses, Jesus' mother and brothers try to interfere with His ministry (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21), but Jesus openly refused to let human fleshly ties bind Him, claimed special relationship to God shared by no man and placed discipleship on a higher plane than all fleshly relationships.
4. Leaving the house where the "very large crowds" and committees had Him cornered, He boarded a boat beside the shore so as better to handle the throng. (Mt. 13:1, 2; Mk. 4:1;

Lk. 8:4) Since they could not push out into the water to mob Him, He was able to teach them. But He deliberately taught them for hours without telling them anything except interesting stories that half-revealed, half-hid unpleasant truths they needed to learn. (See Notes on Mt. 13:1-53)

5. Apparently, Jesus dismissed the crowds and returned to the house (Mt. 13:36) where He gave private instruction to His own disciples.
6. Since the crowds did not go away (Mt. 8:18), Jesus did. (See additional notes on Mt. 8:18)

These facts lead to the conclusion that Jesus was not merely departing for awhile to rest, something He could easily have done at Capernaum. Apparently, this strategic shift of the scene of His service is intended to accomplish these three results:

1. He needed to separate His disciples for private instruction from the wildly excited but ignorant crowds who were more interested in having their sick healed and seeing wonders than in understanding His message. His Apostles **MUST** understand that message.
2. He needed to take the pressure of the increasing attacks of the Jerusalem scribes and Pharisees off the Apostles. Even though He Himself can out-argue the fiercest opposition of the religious authorities (cf. Mt. 21, 22), the very existence of this opposition cannot help but effect the emotions and conscience of the Apostles who from childhood had been taught to respect those very elders who now so vehemently oppose their Master. (See Notes on 15:12 and 16:5-12)
3. Looking forward to the later evangelization of the Decapolis area (see note on 8:34b; cf. Mk. 5:20), Jesus could have chosen the particular course He did, in order to make contact with that largely unevangelized population. Through the former demoniac, Jesus would be able to advertize, and thus, to prepare for His Decapolis ministry next year.

The unresolved question remains: if all the above is true, why then did Jesus meekly leave the Decapolis when the Geresenes begged Him to do so? Why did Jesus submit His will to the ignorant fears of a few superstitious townfolk? Even if He, in divine deference to human weakness, chose to wait for a better opportunity in which to teach them, why did He sail directly back to Capernaum instead of landing further south down the eastern coast of the lake? Several answers are possible:

1. Because of this miracle performed on the sea, the Apostles themselves had much more reason to believe Jesus, against whatever opposition the Jerusalem leaders might offer.
2. Jesus actually accomplished much in Decapolis by sending the freed ex-demoniac through that area telling what God through Jesus had done for him. (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38, 39)
3. Perhaps Jesus also knew that His answers had silenced the Pharisees at least temporarily, and that the Jerusalem scribes had left to make their report. (They do not reappear until later in the first six month of the third year. Mt. 15; Mk. 7) When Jesus returned, however, there remained a few Pharisees around to mutter the same old hackneyed argument (Mt. 9:32-34).
4. Also, if He had merely gotten away from Capernaum for some rest after that fatiguing day, He was now rested, accomplished His other purposes for getting away for awhile and can now return to finish His Galilean ministry (Mt. 9:35-38).

Why bother with all these seemingly "unedifying details" out of the records of Jesus' ministry, some might ask. After all, are not Jesus' teachings of much more importance? Granted, and one of Jesus' most important doctrines clarifies the point that we can learn most about a man by studying his deeds, the fruit of his life. (Mt. 7:15-21) If this principle is true about men, how much more significantly is it in reference to Jesus? By His actions He too revealed His viewpoint, His way, hence God's way, of dealing with human problems. To understand Jesus is to have studied how He Himself put His message into practice. He had to work out practical problems. He too must live with the physical weakness of this human flesh. He must plan the tactics of His evangelistic campaign while ministering to people's personal problems.

Jesus had said, **"Let us go across to the other side of the lake."** (Mk. 4:35; Lk. 8:22) In contrast to Galilee, the eastern region across the Sea of Tiberias was much less populously settled, (cf. Mk. 6:31 with Jn. 6:1) although nine of the ten famed Greek independent cities of the Decapolis lay scattered throughout that territory. This command of Jesus to embark can hardly be interpreted, as do some, as Jesus' deliberate leading His disciples into the danger of the storm merely in order to put their faith in Him to the test.

**8:23 And when he was entered into a boat. Can this be**

Peter and Andrew's fishing boat held in readiness for Jesus' frequent use and trips across the lake? (cf. Mk. 3:9; Lk. 5:2, 3; Mt. 9:1; 13:2; 14:13, 22ss; 15:39; Jn. 21:8 shows that there was always a boat ready and available when Peter just "felt like" going fishing.) It was a boat small enough that it could be propelled by rowing (Mk. 6:48; Jn. 6:19) but large enough for Jesus and the Twelve.

This verse is in perfect agreement with the facts narrated in Mt. 13 which, according to the chronological order of Mark and Luke, preceded this event. Mt. 13:36 clearly indicates that Jesus had left the boat after dismissing the crowds and gone into the house. Now He reenters the boat for a sudden departure. The suddenness is suggested by the following circumstances:

1. **His disciples followed Him.** He led them, getting into the boat first. But were the disciples reluctant to follow Him in a boat trip across that lake without any special provisions for a journey when they had hardly time to eat all day? It would perhaps have been more comfortable for them to have refreshed themselves in Capernaum. Or had perhaps the expert eyes of the Galilean fishermen spotted the weather signs of an imminent tempest? But Matthew is clear that Jesus had commanded this trip (8:18), so perhaps in the rush to leave the crowds, none of the fishermen could get together to discuss how to dissuade Jesus from going out on the lake that night. If they did have any objections, they showed their discipleship by following Him!
2. Mark (4:36a) uses a cryptic phrase: "Leaving the crowd, they took Him with them, **just as He was**, in the boat." The presence of the crowds made it inconvenient to procure the necessities for a boat trip toward sparsely populated country at the end of the day. This probability merely underlines the reality of the uncertainty in Jesus' discipleship as represented to the scribe (8:20)
3. **And other boats were with Him.** (Mk. 4:36b) Why? One boat was usually large enough for Jesus and the Twelve. Who are in those other boats—other followers trying to keep Jesus from going away without them? Are they part of the very crowd Jesus would leave behind on the shore, intent upon following Him? (See note on 8:27) Whatever the answer, the owners and occupants of these boats became witness both of the terror of the storm and the miracle.

**His disciples followed Him.** This fact is remarkable in light

of the stern challenge of the cost of discipleship to the would-be followers (8:18-22). The prospect of a night out on the lake in nothing but a fishing boat was probably not the idea of comfort for the landmen among the Apostles. But though they too were to have "no place to lay their head," they sailed, because Jesus had commanded it.

Luke (8:23) inserts here the observation that "as they sailed He fell asleep." As soon as the boat began picking up speed moving through the water, the milling throngs on the shore began to fade into the distance and Jesus could now relax, leaving the handling of the boat to Peter's direction. The gentle motion of the boat was sufficient to entice Jesus' tired body to submit to sleep. Resting on the cushion in the stern, He dropped into deep sleep (Mk. 4:38).

**8:24 And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea.** Luke says that the storm "came down on the lake," a fact that arises out of the topography of the sea itself and the surrounding mountains. The sea, or better, lake (see note on 4:18), lying already 682 feet below sea level, is surrounded on the east and west by hills some rising as high as 2000 feet above sea level, intersected by plains and gorges. These latter function as funnels concentrating any significant wind movement upon the surface of the lake, whipping the water into waves even six feet high. (ISBE, 1166; Rand McNally, 37, 381) Mark and Luke both use a term (*laillaps*) that perfectly justifies the strongest translation, "whirlwind, hurricane, fierce gust of wind." (Arndt-Gingrich, 463)

Matthew's term *seismòs* is a term used most frequently to denote *earthquakes*, and could even refer to an earthquake under the Sea of Galilee, which lay in the geological fault of the great el Ghor rift. Hot springs and the presence of lava indicating volcanic activity around the lake, plus frequent and sometimes destructive earthquakes, leave open the possibility that such an earthquake occurred out of which tidal waves are born. Yet, Arndt-Gingrich (753) point out that *seismòs* means literally, a *shaking* and can be used for a sea storm with waves caused by high winds (cf. vs. 26f where *anemoi* is found with *thalàsse* . . .) Both Mark and Luke emphasize the wind (*anémou megàle*).

Luke's sober conclusion (8:23) declares that these men were not merely imagining their peril; their danger was real.

**Insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves.** The ASV of this passage as does the KJV rendering of Mk. 4:37



gives a particularly bad translation at this point and creates a clear inconsistency with reality: "the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full." If the boat were "full" why did it not sink then? The Greek construction (*hóste* with the present passive infinitives *kalúptesthai* in Mt., *gemízesthai* in Mk.) does not state either that the boat was already covered or already filled. The construction states only that this tendency was certainly in progress. The infinitives are present infinitives, speaking of the action as in progress, but *not* completed, as suggested by the ASV and KJV in these texts. (cf. ASV on Mk. 4:37.)

Waves towering several feet high as the boat plunges into the trough, makes this description no exaggeration. Depending upon the direction of the wind, undoubtedly the boatsmen among the Apostles would have strained their mightiest to head the boat into the wind, rowing to gain steerageway. This maneuver would help the already heavily loaded boat to resist the pounding of the monstrous waves and keep from capsizing. This orientation, incidentally, would put Jesus, asleep in the stern, farthest from the immediate blast of water as the waves smashed into the bow.

**But he was asleep.** It is probable that Jesus was not on the stern seat itself, as that would be occupied by the disciple operating the tiller, fighting, along with the others who were rowing, to keep the boat under control. Yet it is difficult to imagine how He could have escaped the cold veil of spray from the surface of the white-caps, or from rain lashing the open boat from above. By this time, the boat was probably rollercoasting, careening more wildly with each wave and taking in more water.

How could Jesus remain asleep as that boat bucked and plunged into the trough, wallowing through each wave, threatening to swamp with each successive minute of tempest? Our Lord was utterly exhausted! The great fatigue, produced by the constant demands of the multitudes, emphasize the reality of Jesus' human nature. Jesus was NO angel, but a sharer in the flesh and blood of the descendents of Abraham! (Heb. 2:14-18) He had preached, healed, argued and mercifully ministered to people all day. This kind of work wears MEN out. Jesus had completely collapsed into that dead sleep that comes to the thoroughly exhausted. Some commentaries affirm without reason that Jesus slept with the deliberate purpose of trying the patience and faith of His men. He had no discernible intention of delaying His help in order merely to bring them into a crisis He could get them out of, merely to show off His glory and power.

If it be objectively true that **they awoke Him**, as all three Evangelist affirm, then He was really asleep, not merely feigning sleep until the right moment. (See comments on 4:1-11 and the special study: "Temptation," which deals more in depth with the human nature of Jesus.)

**8:25 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying Save, Lord; we perish.** From the completely naturalistic view, these ARE facts relative to a swamping boat in hurricane-force winds. But their cries reveal not only the bare facts of the situation. They lay bare their almost complaining reproach, almost bluntly accusing Jesus of not caring. They must have been very greatly terrified to have permitted themselves to address Jesus like that! These disciples had been watching the storm since its inception, leaving Jesus to rest peacefully, so long as they could handle the situation. But now the danger is increasing much too rapidly. Now, rather than see Jesus' sleeping as typical absolute consciousness of safety however great the storm, these Apostles, not fully aware of Jesus' nature and identity, were tempted to regard Jesus' sleep as typical human weakness and inability to conquer the demands of the human nature, especially in this moment. Jesus was asleep, so they must have thought, because He is just another man after all, hence His sleep betrayed a real indifference to their terror, not because He could not understand their fear, but because He could do nothing about it. "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38) How could anyone spend **THAT** much time with Jesus and yet ask that exceedingly thoughtless and presumptuous question?

Lk. 8:24 "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Their repeated cries betray their desperation. All three Evangelists use present tense verbs or participles (*légontes, légousin*), indicating the repeated appeals to Jesus to wake up. Was this no time for prayers? Just because Jesus was sleeping, did God sleep also? Did they actually believe that a sleeping Jesus could not save them, but would also Himself drown? Or is their cry "we perish" meant to include only themselves? Did they suppose that Jesus could save Himself and leave them to a watery grave? What a reflection upon His love and merciful care for them! The answer to these questions depends upon the view they held of Jesus expressed in their amazed question: "Who then is this? What sort of man is this?" Did they suppose that the ship could sink "wherein lies the Master of oceans, earth and skies"? However great this gale, the storm has not yet been made than can sink God's Son!

Here is the self-revelation of Jesus' disciples. The true nature of their character, their comprehension of Jesus' message and nature, their faith and their doubts are all exposed by this life-and-death crisis. So long as the going was relatively easy and there had been no peril to life and limb, with only an occasional skirmish with the Pharisees, the discipleship of these men had not been so severely tested nor so closely bared in its weakest form. And yet, however imperfect these followers may be shown to be, they are a comprehensible picture of the nature of the Church: imperfect subjects being perfected. Who were these men? I wonder if we do not read our name written between the lines here.

1. They were loyal men. They had gone with Jesus whatever the cost. Now they come TO JESUS and, however brusquely they awakened Him, lay before HIM their plight. But they were only half-trusting "Save us!" is the voice of faith, but "We perish!" is the cry of doubt. Considering the desperation of their cries and the pity of Jesus' response, what did the disciples really expect of Him when they shook Him awake? It is certain that they did not expect what actually occurred. Is it possible that they possessed an unreasoned, undefined, almost blind, desperate hope that Jesus possessed an unlimited power? Or rather, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 601) suggests, there existed in them a belief that coexisted, not with disbelief nor even with unbelief, but with the inability to comprehend His full nature. It is certainly true that Jesus' revelation of Himself gradually emerged through what He said and did. Each new, unique piece of evidence declared His identity or, better, filled in the outline of his true personality in the character of the God-Man. The presence of some faith in these terrified disciples is proved by the fact that these expert sailors who had wrestled with Galilean storms before, appeal to Jesus who had never handled boats. How could a former carpenter be of any help when these knew that all their skill had found a crisis completely beyond their poor, frail powers? Their half-believing, half-fearful appeal is not directed only to the human Jesus, but has some reference to His divine ability, even if the men themselves are very ignorant of His identity.
2. They were afraid. Why? Because of the human habit of depending completely on their own means and solving their problems by their own wits alone. They had tried to battle that storm by themselves and were not depending upon Him.

Now they HAD no other alternative! He had been merely their last resort, their escape hatch, their emergency exit. Though He wanted to be their constant companion, sharing and helping with their problems and fears by giving them answers, inward peace and calm, they had kept Him on the fringe of their lives, holding Him in reserve until they had tried all else.

3. They were doubters. How simple it would have been to crawl over to Jesus, arouse Him and in perfect confidence say: "Lord, this storm has gotten beyond our small powers to cope with it. But you, who possess all power over sickness and disease, you can do something about this tempest too."

## II. THE SOVEREIGN STILL THE SAVAGE STORM, SHOWING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STEADFASTNESS UNDER STRESS (8:26)

**8:26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?** Both Mark and Luke record a rebuke after the calming of the storm, while Matthew places this reproof before that fact. It is more than likely that Jesus said it both times: before, to draw their attention to what He was immediately about to do; and then after, to show them the moral implications of their fear. It would seem, therefore, that we have before us a marvellous example of absolute serenity and composure in the face of what threatens to destroy everything. Before moving a muscle to deal with the storm, Jesus dealt first with the panic of His men. **Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea.** Then (*tôte*) seems almost emphatic in revealing the deliberateness with which Jesus acted. Anyone else could have objected: "But Lord, this is no time for sermons! Please, do something about this storm!"

**Why are ye fearful, o ye of little faith?** Whatever the tone of Jesus' voice or the look in His eyes, these words clearly constitute a rebuke. His rebuke is full of:

1. Absolute assurance that in matters that are really important, even this Force 9 or 10 gale was nothing! If there is a God in heaven whose word cannot fail, even death in the waves may be calmly awaited or else His immediate aid may be humbly asked and confidently expected. Here is the courage of faith: these men should have kept their fear under control with an unshaken confidence in God that keeps them doing their best to keep the boat rightside up, when there is every

good human reason to panic. Jesus' clearheaded indifference to circumstances, that had torn these lesser men's reason and faith from the moorings, could not help but begin to restore order in their hearts. He deliberately let the storm rage on, while He rebuked their faithlessness.

2. Loving pity, because in crisis these HIS men had failed. They were the men who one day would unflinchingly face trials, harrassment, persecution, and death. And Jesus would not then be physically "in the same boat with them." Here, however, their growth in faith is insufficient to pass the trial by storm.
3. Sovereignty over their souls. No rabbi could have demanded such unwavering trust as did the Lord. Any religious teacher could have rebuked his students for failing to trust God, but Jesus responds to His disciples' rebuke for His seeming indifference and inability by scolding them for their failure to trust HIM! This rebuke finds its fullest expression when Jesus did what no rabbi would have dreamed of attempting: the stilling of the storm. Thus, He showed in what sense He intended His rebuke, repeated also after the storm, to drive the point home.

It is obvious that the purpose of Jesus' question was to cause these men to see for themselves the seriousness of their moral stature, but why ask THIS question? Fear is God's blessing created into man's nature to trigger his instinct for self-protection. Otherwise, total fearlessness breeds that imprudence that lays the unsuspecting open to all that can harm. Why, then, are the disciples so wrong to fear? It was not that they had no faith at all, for they did have a "little faith". Nor was it that they should not have feared at all, else they would have been psychologically untrue to the nature God gave them. Nor was this rebuke given for seeking Jesus' help. Why did Jesus say it then?

1. Trench (*Miracles*, 90) cites Mk. 4:40 thus: "Why are you so fearful?" According to a number of Greek readings, *so* (*houtos*) belongs in the text here. (See *Synopsis*, 120) This suggests that their culpability lay in the excess of terror displayed. Fear was important to their self-preservation, but it should have prompted them to pray for God's preservation, rather than cause them to forget His care. Fear is proper, but it must never be allowed to destroy the rationality of genuine confidence in God's goodness. (Study Isa. 26:3; 43:2; Psa. 46:1-3)

2. Lenski (*Matthew*, 347) reduced this question of Jesus to an exclamation "How frightened you are!" based on the use of the Greek *tì* as a translation for the Aramaic *mah*, "how." Just as Jesus had marvelled, exclaiming the greatness of the centurion's faith (Mt. 8:10 comments), now His exclamation implies that He had the right to expect more faith and understanding of His own disciples. Accordingly, Jesus is marvelling at their failure to grasp His true nature. (cf. Lk. 2:49)
3. They were much too afraid to die in Christ's company and service. As long as HE is safe, so are His followers! All who sail with Jesus are safe, regardless of the greatness of any tempest that may come!

The further rebukes of Jesus after the storm, as recorded by Mark and Luke give a bit more insight into Jesus' meaning:

4. "Why are you so afraid? Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40)  
This suggests that Jesus, while admitting that these disciples possessed some faith, is deciding that they were not yet arrived at that point in their discipleship where they should have been able to arise in unshakeable trust in God to meet the challenge to their very lives.

The translation "not yet" is justified from the reading followed by Aland, (*Greek NT*, 137) who selects this reading with reasonable certainty. (*oupo* against *pôs ouk*)

"Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25) challenges these men to discern the true character of their discipleship, if under these circumstances, their confidence in Jesus and dependence upon Him had been so easily forgotten.

5. It might just even be that the disciples HAD prayed to God, but their continued terror betrayed a lack of confidence in the result of their prayers. Worse yet, they fear that their prayer is useless. Where is the faith of Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Elijah and countless others who faced death in the service of the invisible God? These disciples had not only the undoubted history of God's great deliverances of those men of faith, from which to profit, but they had lived and walked personally with Jesus. Even if they yet saw in Him no more than a great prophet, their failure to trust God is nonetheless to be rebuked, if not outright condemned. (Psa. 107:23-32; see comments on Mt. 6:19-34 esp. 6:30b)

**Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.** His words of rebuke: "Peace! Be still!" (Mk. 4:39) One act alone was worth an encyclopaedia full of philosophical discussion regarding Jesus' sovereignty over the sea and men's souls. One magnificent proof immediately cleared all doubts. And to produce this great wonder, Jesus' word alone was enough. He needed no special instruments through which His power was exerted to effect the stupendous result. (cf. Ex. 14:16, 21; 2 Kg. 2:14; 4:29-37)

**Rebuke the winds and sea:** is this simple personification of these natural elements in order to emphasize Jesus' full control over them, as if they were but domestic animals before their Master and Owner?

**And there was a great calm.** This calm is defined by Mark and Luke by the specific notice: "the wind ceased and the raging waves ceased." A multitude of experiences has taught one to expect a sudden drop of the wind on Lake Tiberias, but this would not immediately calm the rolling sea. Yet, contrary to nature, these eye-witnesses testify to the immediacy of the miracle as a direct result of Jesus' words. Their evidences:

1. The *sea* obeyed Jesus; it did not keep rolling after the wind died.
2. The verbs used by the witnesses are aorist, i.e. not specifically defining the time of the action involved (Mt.: *egéneto galéne*; Lk.: *epaúsanto*), whereas if the writers intended to convey the impression that the sea gradually calmed in a natural way, they would have been expected to have used the imperfect tense. This latter tense would have expressed the continuity of the dying down. As the text stands, the wind and the sea ceased their raging at Jesus' word.
3. The impression upon these men well acquainted with the ways of the sea is totally inexplicable, were there no miracle. Yet they were convinced by what they saw that this was indeed a supernatural act of God. The incontrovertible reality of their experience was too obvious to allow these disciples the sort of naturalistic rationalization indulged in by professors of theological or philosophical faculties who spin fine theories miles and centuries from the facts actually seen by the apostles.
4. The rebuke for faithlessness seriously reflects upon the supposed inventors of this fiction, if there were indeed no real miracle. Were there no immediate sign which took place at Jesus' word, He could not have possibly rebuked their failure to

imagine what staggers the imagination! Further, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 604) suggests, the narrative very markedly expresses that the apostles certainly did not expect Jesus to react to the storm in the way He did. This is a fact, incidentally, which proves also that there was nothing in the popular messianic expectations nor apparently in rabbinic thought to supply a parallel idea out of which some unknown Christian author could have created the legend out of which this "story" is supposed to have come. (See Edersheim, in *loc.*)

5. The witnesses say that Jesus addressed the natural elements, commanding them to be still. Jesus' integrity is brought into question by this fact: either He is a madman or an imposter, if He said what these men testify: "Peace! Be still!" and if He could not compel the wind and waves to submit to His will. A truly honest, self-effacing Jesus would also have had to correct the false impression created in the minds of His disciples, for their leading questions in response to whatever happened (if there were no miracle) definitely place Him on a par with divinity. If the Evangelist have falsified the record by declaring that Jesus actually spoke words He never intended, then we have no basis for certain knowledge about this event at all.
6. The unusual but perfectly credible question: "what manner of man is this?", given as the conclusion to this section by all these Evangelists, further evidences the trustworthiness of the narrative. Inventors of gospel fiction would have been tempted to conclude the record with an extended argument or at least with a stated conclusion regarding the deity of Christ, something to the effect of: "by which, we have now demonstrated the supernaturalness of Jesus."
7. Another evidence of the accuracy of the facts narrated in this section is the general representation of Jesus. All three Gospel writers picture Jesus, whom all apostolic testimony declared to have been "in the form of God", as surrendering to the pangs of hunger, and the demands of exhaustion upon His human body. Now, as Edersheim argues (*Life*, I, 600), if the Apostles had set about to devise this fiction to exhibit Jesus' supernatural power by ascribing to Him power to calm the tempest with a single word, how is it that they do not sense the glaring contradiction between this conclusion and the circumstances with which they introduce the situation? There Jesus is



imagined as exhausted and asleep because of His great fatigue. Edersheim concludes:

Each of these elements: (Jesus' humanity and His divinity) by themselves, but not the two in their combination, would be as legends are written. Their coincidence is due to the incidence of truth. Indeed, it is characteristic of the History of the Christ, and all the more evidential that it is so evidently undesignated in the structure of the narrative, that every deepest manifestation of His Humanity is immediately attended by the highest display of His Divinity, and each special display of His Divine Power followed by some marks of His true Humanity. Assuredly, no narrative could be more consistent with the fundamental assumption that He is the God-Man.

### III. THE SEAMEN SEEM TO SENSE THE SECRET OF HIS SUPERNATURAL SUPREMACY (8:27)

**8:27 And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?** Mk. 4:41: "They were filled with awe." Lk. 8:25: "And they were afraid and marvelled . . ." This evident surprise of the Apostles is evidence of their inadequate comprehension of Jesus and His powers, for had they comprehended the towering stature of His divine nature, they could not have been surprised at anything He did. So, there is nothing at all incredible about this question.

Study the disciples' growth of faith from the question posed in the Capernaum synagogue: "What is this?" (Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:36), to this question: "What sort of man is this? . . . Who then is this?", to their later affirmation: "Truly you are the Son of God." (Mt. 14:33). We grow so accustomed to inspired Apostles who inerrantly proclaimed Christ's message, that we can easily forget that these same men had been exactly what the word "disciple" implies: "learners who can make mistakes before their ignorance and prejudice begins to diminish before the advances of knowledge and comprehension of their Master's message."

**The men.** Why does Matthew use this expression instead of "the disciples" or perhaps "the apostles"? Is he intending thereby to intimate the distance between these awed witnesses of the miracle and the supernatural Jesus who effected it? The sensation of the awesome presence of God in their midst begins to settle down over these

men. (cf. Lk. 5:8) They had witnessed great and marvellous cures and miracles before, but this was a supernatural event in their own element. It touched them personally. Another difference that marked this miracle is its display of Jesus' supremacy over nature in so large a degree. And even though objectively it requires no more power perhaps to rebuke a hurricane than it does to change water into wine, yet the emotional impact upon the observers was much greater. Here also is painted the sagacity of the Master: by producing so great a variety of <sup>21</sup>miraculous evidence of His identity, nature and power, He leaves no room for doubt even in the weakest disciple that Jesus can do ANYTHING that God can. Even though one of the extraordinary characteristics of Bible miracles, that distinguish them from heathen prodigies, is the notable absence of the love of the marvellous in the matter-of-fact tone in which the Gospel writers narrate these events, yet the astonishment registered in the reaction of these disciples to this miracle rings true psychologically. (See A. B. Bruce, *Training*, 49) Had they NOT been surprised, we might have wondered at the truth and authenticity of the story. As it is, Matthew and Peter (through Mark) both faithfully record their own unbelief and surprise, even though it pictures them yet less developed, less mature than their later offices required. As Bruce accurately observes, by the time they wrote these facts into our present Gospels, their sense of wonder at these tremendous deeds had been deadened by being satisfied. They had seen too many miracles while with Jesus to be able any longer to react to them as we find them doing in this text. But even though their sense of wonder at the power of Jesus did not continue, they never ceased to be deeply moved at the marvel of His grace.

**The men** reminds us also of the **other boats** and pricks our curiosity about their occupants and owners too. If, as suggested above (8:23), they survived the storm to witness the miracle, how did they react? Foster (*Middle*, 111) asks: "Did the men in these boats turn back after the storm feeling they had had enough for one day and seen enough for a lifetime? There is nothing to indicate that they were present when Jesus and the Apostles landed at Gergesa." If they turned back to Capernaum after the calm, their account of the news would have whipped Capernaum's excitement to fever pitch. What a story they would have had to tell! This explains the "great crowd" (Mk. 5:21) that gathered about Jesus to "welcome Him" (Lk. 8:40) immediately at the seaside when He returned next day.

**What manner of man is this?** What indeed! (See Psalms 89:9; 107:29) Have we learned better what these men had not yet

fathomed, that of which they were but then beginning to catch a glimpse: the voice which the wind and sea obeyed was the voice which spoke the world itself into being? Although the Evangelists record only this puzzling question as the only one uttered, the very question itself was probably the cause of many others: Indeed where WAS our faith? Why did we ourselves fail? How could we have questioned His control over this storm? Perhaps the more reflective among them pondered: when or how will we fail Him again? Note how deftly the three Evangelists conclude their narration with this thought-provoking question. They add no answer that might have been uttered that night. This splendid literary device is rhetorically perfect to kindle fires of thought and set the thoughtful reader to musing.

#### LESSONS TO OBSERVE FROM THIS TEXT:

1. When Jesus is in the boat, it is SINFUL UNBELIEF to say: "We are perishing!" All who sail with Jesus are SAFE, however great the storm. Jesus' very incarnation was His way of "getting into the boat with us" by which He shares our storms with us. Though He is not physically present in the boat in our present storms, He is nonetheless sympathetic and powerful to save.
2. And since Jesus has been "in the same boat with us," it is just as presumptuously sinful to scream: "Do you not care if we perish?" His human suffering is God's evidence proving that Jesus cares more than we can ever imagine. He cared so much if we perish that He went to the extreme limit of the cross, worked the supreme miracle of the resurrection, just to show us just how much He cared! "Do you not care?" does not apply to Jesus!
3. Though fear as an instinct is fundamental, yet we cannot let fear destroy our confidence in His control. Let us abandon our total dependence upon human help, and failing resources, casting ourselves completely, confidently upon Jesus. No matter how great our trials, things are still in His control.
4. We dare not leave Jesus to last place in our life as a mere escape hatch for emergency use only. He wants to be our Companion and all-powerful Friend and Guide throughout life. Let Him be the FIRST one to whom we turn!
5. It is quite possible but just as inadmissible to mix doubts about Jesus with faith in Him. Jesus wants all or nothing.
6. Our shattered nerves, our broken hearts, our wasted energies,

our straining muscles, our haunted lives need this word of Jesus: "Peace! Be still!"

7. However imperfect our faith and prayers, Jesus is still waiting to answer our cry, strengthen our faith and justify our confidence in Him.
8. All these foregoing points have no significance unless we understand that Jesus is God whose word created and sustains the universe and in whose control our destiny rests.

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## FACT QUESTIONS

1. List all of the events that the Gospel writers clearly indicate as having taken place on this day which concludes with the storm on Lake Galilee.
2. What is significant about the quantity and nature of the events you have listed in question 1, that explains a detail described in this account of Jesus' stilling the tempest?
3. True or false? Jesus and His disciples were the only witnesses to what transpired on the lake that night. Prove your answer.
4. Describe the tempest, explaining both its nature, as described by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and its possible natural origin.
5. Quote the cries of the apostles as they awoke Jesus.
6. Describe Jesus' reaction to their cries.
7. Give all the words that the Evangelists use to describe the reaction of these Apostles to Jesus' stilling the tempest.
8. Justify Matthew's use of language when he describes Jesus as "rebuking the winds and the sea." Anyone knows that both the wind and the sea are inanimate objects with no conscience or soul to rebuke.
9. What is so remarkable, from a natural point of view, about the fact that, immediately after Jesus rebuked the storm, there was a dead calm?
10. Matthew and Mark say that "there arose a storm on the sea;" while Luke affirms that "a storm of wind came down on the lake." Show the perfect harmony between the narratives, that explains this apparent contradiction.
11. At what time of day did the storm start? What effect would this fact have on the disciples' nerves, if any?
12. Describe the probable type of boat Jesus and His disciples were in, how it was propelled, or maneuvered. Picture how it would react in this storm.

## Section 17

JESUS FREES THE  
GADARENE DEMONIACS

(Parallels: Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

## TEXT: 8:28—9:1

28. And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass by that way.
29. And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?
30. Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding.
31. And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.
32. And he said unto them, Go. And they came out, and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea and perished in the waters.
33. And they that fed them fled; and went away into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to them that they were possessed with demons.
34. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought *Him* that he would depart from their borders.
- 9:1. And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- From the information given in this text in the speeches of the demons themselves, what is revealed about their nature?
- Why did the herd of pigs react so violently?
- What is the value of the testimony of those who kept the swine in this incident?
- Why should people, whose public enemies numbers one and two had been completely "rehabilitated," request their Benefactor to leave? Why, do you think, did Jesus so meekly leave this territory without actively opposing His expulsion? Could He not have reasoned with this superstitious populace and have gained thus entrance into the Decapolis?

- e. Since it was apparently under Jesus' orders that the disciples took the boat back to Capernaum with Jesus on board, what does this indicate about Jesus' original desire to get away from Capernaum for awhile? (See Notes on 8:23) Did Jesus change His mind after He left Capernaum? If so, tell the sequence of events which may have led the Lord to decide to return to Capernaum instead of sailing further south on the east side or else landing on the western shore south of Capernaum.
- f. Do you think that we have anything today similar to the demon-possession as described in the Bible? What is the basis for your conclusion?
- g. Why do you suppose the demoniacs lived in the tombs?
- h. Could these demons foretell the future? What makes you think so?
- i. Explain why the men who tended the swine fled.
- j. Do you think the following question is fair: "If Jesus is truly just, why then did He permit this loss of property to the owners of the swine?" If you think it is fairly stated, answer it; if not, show how it does not justly represent the situation involved. In this latter case, how would you rephrase the question and then answer it?
- k. Why do you think the freed demoniac made the request that he did?
- l. Can you give at least one reason why Jesus sent the man back to his own city to tell them what God had done for him?
- m. How does Jesus' technique of sending the freed demoniac back to his own people in the Decapolis, harmonize with Jesus' own admission of the general proverb: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his own people"? (cf. Lk. 4:24; Mt. 13:57)
- n. From an objective reading of the three synoptic accounts of the demoniacs' approach to Jesus, can you decide whether the actions of these two are attributable to the influence of the demons or to the men themselves, as they struggle against the malign influence? For instance, what prompted them to "worship" Jesus? Would demons have been likely to worship Him? What makes you say so?
- o. If you decide that the demons actually worshipped Jesus through the outward actions of these demoniacs under their influence, what may be learned regarding the respective positions of Jesus and the demons in relationship to each other?
- p. If you decide that the men actually worshipped Jesus in a wild, desperate attempt to seek help in being rid of the demonic influence, then what may be deduced respecting the personal re-

sponsibility and control or freedom of anyone who is demon-possessed?

- q. Some suggest that the demons chose to enter the swine with hatred for Jesus and planned to drive the hogs to destruction in a deliberate attempt to discredit Jesus before the local populace through the eradication of the swine herd. If so, could not Jesus have foreseen this and forestalled the consequent rejection by the townspeople? Do you think Jesus was gullible enough to let Himself be tricked by the demons?
- r. Where do you think the ex-demoniacs found the clothes in which they were seen dressed, sitting at Jesus' feet, by the time the crowds from the town arrived? Considering their former manner of life under demonic control, their wild, naked existence, would they have been likely to have a suit packed away in one of the tombs? Where did the clothes come from?
- s. Whose idea was it to make the plunge into the lake, the demons' or the hogs'? Or was this the purpose of neither, hence, an accident?
- t. If you conclude that the demons upon entering the swine had no intention of driving them into the lake, but rather deceived themselves into supposing a peaceful habitation in those animal bodies in order to postpone being hurried into the abyss, are the commentaries right in suggesting that the demons' succeeded in thwarting Jesus' further work among these people?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then, after the calming of the tempest, they arrived on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (which is opposite the province of Galilee, as you look at it on the map), to the country whose chief Roman city is Jerash or Gerasa. Closer to the sea is the town of Gadara while Gergesa is located on the shore. All three towns have given their name to the territory.

As Jesus came ashore, there met Him two demoniacs from the nearby city who were coming out of the tombs where they lived. For a long time they had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house at all. They were men in the grip of an unclean spirit. They were so violent that none dared use that road anymore. No one had yet been able to subdue them, not even chains could hold them. Many had been the times they had been secured with fetters and lengths of chains but they merely snapped the chains and broken the fetters to pieces and made off for solitary places. No one was able to do anything

with them. And so, unceasingly, night and day, they would scream among the tombs and on the hills, gashing themselves with stones.

When they saw Jesus in the distance, they ran and flung themselves down on their knees before Him and worshipped. (Jesus commanded the foul spirit, saying, "Come out of him!") Then the demons began yelling at the top of their voices, "What business have You here with us; what do You want of us, O Son of the most high God? Have You come here to torment us before the appointed time? For God's sake, we beg of You, do not torture us!"

Jesus questioned him, "What is your name?" To this, the most prominent demoniac replied, "My name is Legion, for there are many of us," for many demons had entered the men. The spirits begged and begged Jesus earnestly not to banish them from the country into the bottomless pit.

In the distance on a hillside there was a large drove of hogs feeding. So the demons begged Jesus, "Send us over to the pigs and we will take possession of them!" So Jesus gave them permission, saying, "Go!" and the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs. The whole herd of about two thousand head stampeded over the edge of the cliff and down the steep slope into the sea, where they were drowned.

When the hog-feeders saw what had taken place, they took to their heels, and made for the town where they poured out the whole story, not forgetting the part about what had happened to the demoniacs. All over the countryside they told the news! Notice that the whole town came out to meet Jesus and to learn what it was that had happened. They saw Him and former demoniacs sitting at Jesus' feet clothed properly, and in full control of themselves—the very ones who had had the legion of demons! The crowds were afraid. Those who had seen the incident told them what had happened to the demon-possessed men and about the tragedy of the pigs. Upon this all the inhabitants of the surrounding country near Jerash began to implore Jesus to get out of their neighborhood; for they were terrified.

When Jesus was boarding the boat, one of the former demoniacs begged Jesus to let him go with Him but Jesus would not allow it but sent him away, saying, "Go to your own home and friends and tell them how much God has done for you and how the Lord has had mercy on you."

So the man went all over the town spreading the news of how much Jesus had done for him. He did this, in fact, throughout the Decapolis. Those who heard him were simply amazed.



So, Jesus, boarded the boat and crossed over the lake to the other side and came to His own city of Capernaum.

## SUMMARY

After the stilling of the tempest, perhaps even the same evening, Jesus and His disciples landed at Gergesa. They were met on the shore by two demoniacs who recognized Jesus for His divine authority. Jesus cast out the demons, giving them leave to enter a swine herd. The frightened swineherds alerted the local populace to come see what had happened. The superstitious folk unanimously begged Jesus to depart. The chief ex-demoniac pleaded to be permitted to accompany Him, but was sent home to testify to God's goodness in his behalf.

## NOTES

### I. THE VIOLENT

8:28 **And when He was come to the other side** of the Sea of Galilee following the stormy crossing, the events occur which follow. However, the time element is not clear since this event follows hard on the stilling of that tempest, which, in turn, took place after the disciples and Jesus set sail "when evening had come" (Mk. 4:35) This phrase used by Mark (*opsias genoménes*) must be interpreted according to context to determine just what time is meant, whether before or after sundown. (Arndt-Gingrich, 606) So, if the storm blew the disciples in an easterly direction, like the wind after the feeding of the five thousand (cf. Jn. 6:17 with Mk. 6:48), it would not be impossible for them to have arrived at Gerasene shore not too long before sunset. Thus, the freeing of the demoniacs possibly took place that evening. Rejected by the native population, Jesus and His disciples either slept in the boat for the return trip to Capernaum, or else slept on the beach where the local people found them the next morning and asked them to leave.

**to the country of the Gadarenes.** A quick survey of the parallel texts in various translations will reveal divergent names for this area. The Greek texts are not much more help, although there is a firmer consensus of opinion among the editors of Greek texts that Matthew's original wording was "Gadarenes" while that of Mark and Luke was "Gerasenes." This apparent confusion is due to the error of scribes, seeking to correct what was thought to be an error in an earlier manuscript, when they had the correct original reading in hand. **The country of the Gadarenes** is the political territory around

Gadara, the chief city having jurisdiction over the land on the south-east side of the Sea of Galilee. This could certainly include the lesser town, Gergesa, a name also found in the manuscripts at this place. Gadara was one of the well-known cities of the great Decapolis city much farther away from the Galilean Sea to the south-east about 30 air-miles. Or, this latter name may be a pronunciation variant of the word Gergesa, found in the manuscripts. (See *ISBE* 1217b) Barnes (*Matthew*, 91) notes that these different names simply prove that the Evangelists are not deceivers, since, were they imposters attempting a hoax, they would have sought to agree! But their testimony is the more valuable, since this divergency demonstrates that these independent witnesses knew their land!

One fact stands out clearly: as will be seen from the map, the Arabic name Khersa or Kurseh clings to the ruins of a city mentioned by McGarvey (*Lands*, 328). At the southern side of the mouth of a deep ravine through the eastern mountains called Wady Samakh are to be found these remains. McGarvey describes the area:

Immediately south of (Khersa) rises a rocky mountain penetrated by tombs, which extends more than a mile along the lake-shore, at first leaving a plain more than a quarter of a mile wide between its base and the water's edge, but finally projecting one of its spurs close to the shore. Here, as Captain Wilson has clearly shown, must be the place where the hogs into which the demons entered "ran violently down a steep place into the sea." (Mt. 8:32) He says: "About a mile south of this (Khersa), the hills, which everywhere else on the eastern side are recessed from a half to three-quarters of a mile from the water's edge, approach within 40 feet of it; they do not terminate abruptly, but there is a steep, even slope, which we would identify with the 'steep place' down which the herd of swine ran violently into the sea, and so were choked. . . . It is equally evident, on an examination of the ground, that there is only one place on that side where the herd of swine could have run down a steep place into the lake, the place mentioned above."

Angry, fear-filled eyes had been following the progress of the boat in which Jesus and the Apostles had crossed the Sea of Galilee. Apprehension grew in the two as the boat bearing the Son of God drew nearer and nearer the shore. As the Creator and Lord of heaven, earth and hell stepped ashore, the two watchers ran to accost Him. **There**

**met Him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass that way.** See the Paraphrase-Harmony for the full description of their terrible case. Mark (5:6) intimates that from their home in the tombs, from a distance, the demoniacs had watched Jesus and the disciples disembark. Now they run to Him, fling themselves on the ground at His feet and worship. (Luke 8:28) Here is tragedy: these men belonged to the city (Lk. 8:27), but they came **out of the tombs.**

**Out of the tombs** is probably not intended to suggest that the demoniacs became such by some league with the devil through communication or companionship with the dead, for Luke (8:27) states the natural antithesis of this abode thus; "He lived not in a house, but in the tombs."

However, see Isaiah 65:4 which connects base idolatry with sitting in graves. Is there some connecting link between idolatry, necromancy and demon possession? The gods of the Gentiles are called demons. (See Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:36-37; Rev. 9:20; I Cor. 10:20, 21) False religions are also connected with demons. (I Tim. 4:1; I Jn. 4:3-6; 2 Th. 2:2, 3, 9-12; I Cor. 12:10; Rev. 16:13, 14; I Kings 22:22, 23; Zech. 13:2)

The hillside between the ruins of modern Khersa (Gergeṣā?) and the spur closest to the sea is literally studded with natural and hewn caves which were used as tombs. These two demoniacs were able from their shelter in the tombs to hinder passage along the road that followed the seacoast by rushing out screaming, terrorizing all who attempted to use the road.

**Two possessed with demons.** This alleged contradiction with Mark and Luke who mention only one demoniac is a simple difference in style of writing, since there are several cases where Matthew speaks of two persons or things in a given situation, while the other two Synoptic authors, in describing the same situation, mention only one. (See McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, III, 57) Obviously, Mark and Luke mention only the more fierce of the two, while Matthew objectively describes the total picture. In addition, the other two authors do not affirm that there was only one demoniac; hence, there is no contradiction.

**Demons.** For fuller notes on Demons, see the special study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson in *THE GOSPEL OF MARK*

by Johnson-DeWalt, pp. 509-513, with its selected bibliography. The very mention of demons brings us moderns to an immediate crisis of conscience: here before us are records that purport to be true, which includes the assertions that Jesus Christ talked with, and cast out of their human victims, certain, spiritual beings of which there is very limited scientific knowledge today. Did Jesus really cast out demons?

A. Assuming the accounts which record this phenomenon are false, we can have no certain knowledge about Jesus, since there are no objective grounds whereby the accounts themselves can safely be excised from the total record without destroying the fabric of the whole testimony of each Evangelist that mentions Jesus' casting out of demons. Only the subjective presupposition that demons do not exist (a prejudice in itself) has been seriously offered. (See special study on miracles at the end of chapter nine.) Foster (*syllabus in loc.*) lists the following radical explanations offered by some:

1. "The whole story is a myth." But there is just not time historically available for the development of the legend between the supposed occurrence of the facts and the writing of the record and its reception by hundreds of witnesses who both knew the facts and could testify to the contrary, were that necessary.
2. "The freeing of the man from the demon and the people's rejection of Jesus are true but the swine detail is a later, untrue addition." Again, there is no objective evidence, textual or otherwise, of any addition.
3. "The demoniacs frightened the swine: thus the supposed transfer of the demons into the swine was imagined." But again Jesus' own words are proof against this: He permitted the demons to go. Nor is there any evidence that the demons left the men with such a paroxysm so great as to scare the hogs.
4. "The drowning of the swine and the casting out of the demons are simultaneous events with no connection between them." However the inspired Apostles record the connection, for they were eyewitnesses and could not confuse hearsay reports about the two events.
5. "The demons were just mentally insane, whom Jesus humored by granting permission to imaginary demons to enter the swine, giving rise to the fable of the demons entering the

swine so producing their destruction." Explain, please, the two thousand dead hogs bobbing up and down in the water.

Thus we are compelled to reject not merely the objectionable parts of the narrative that do not suit our preconceptions, but rather the narrative in its totality, since there is no sure method whereby we can safely reject one part of the eyewitness' testimony and accept any other part. Further, we must admit that the record is free from the influence of popular Jewish ideas. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 480-485, also Vol. II and appendix XIII, p. 748-763 and appendix XVI, 770-776) demonstrates that it is not merely deceiving, but totally untrue to assert that these reports are tainted with the ideas prevalent in that superstitious age. These reports are just as different from the ideas that Judaism expressed on demons and demon possession as the difference between empty superstition and what is sober, credible history. (See also *ISBE* article, 828, 829.) We are driven to:

B. Assume the accounts which contain the reports of demon possession and the casting out of demons are true. But even the assumption that the accounts are true, does not free us from responsibility to weigh carefully this evidence. For:

1. Either Jesus did not know demons did not exist.

a. In this case He was Himself deceived, for He actually thought He was casting them out, which, in fact, He never did.

b. And He is as ignorant and superstitious as the people He pretended to teach and help.

2. Or else Jesus knew that demons did not exist.

a. In this case He is a conscious deceiver, since He continually "went through the motions" of casting out demons, encouraged His disciples to believe that they too had the power to do the same (Mt. 10:8); scolded them for their failure to do so (Mt. 17:14-21). He Himself claimed to cast them out and gave God thanks for this power (Lk. 10:17, 18, 21) as well as argued on the basis of the actual fact, not the hypothesis, that He had so done. (Mt. 12:27-29)

b. Even a theory that describes Jesus as "accommodating Himself" to the popular superstitions of the day, in order to deal with what modern scientific knowledge would term "an unbalanced mental condition, manias, insanity, etc." leaves Jesus under the morally fatal charge of deception,

by permitting even His closest disciples to remain under the old delusion. He is hereby to be charged with withholding vital information from us on so important a subject in the modern period.

3. Or else Jesus knew that demons exist and dealt with them accordingly.

- a. But Jesus did not treat demoniacs as merely sick, nor demons themselves as another disease, although when the demons were gone out of their victims, who had shown also characteristics of disease, the demoniacs were well.
- b. Nor did Jesus treat demons as mere "sins". There is no evidence that He regarded demoniacs as particularly guilty, beyond other sinners.

However, Edersheim (*Life*, I, 481) argues that there is no evidence for permanent possession or that the demonized were under constant power of the demon. An illustration of this is the impression of a sudden influence in the demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue as if occasioned by the demon's reacting to the spiritual effect of the words or Person of Jesus (Mk. 1:21-28). Consider also the epileptic demonized boy (Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14:29, esp. 18; Lk. 9:39). The boy was possessed from childhood (Mk. 9:21). Accordingly, says Edersheim (*op cit.*, 484), this fact "establishes a moral element, since, during the period of their temporary liberty, the demonized might have shaken themselves free from the overshadowing power, or sought release from it." Is Jesus discussing demonology when He taught that "when the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none, whereupon he returns with seven other spirits more evil than himself"? (Mt. 12:43f)

- c. Jesus dealt with demons as spirits who inhabited the body and governed the mind of human beings. He addressed them as evil visitors from the spirit world whose malignant control over those made in God's image roused His indignation and sympathy.

**There met him two demoniacs**, but Jesus saw them as men:

1. Violently antisocial: "they lived not in a house but in the

tombs," "fierce," "night and day among the tombs and on the mountains," "driven by the demon into the desert."

2. Indomitable: "None could bind him any more with fetters and chains, no one had the strength to subdue him."
3. Extremely tormented to the point of brutal self-abuse: "he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones."
4. Unclean spirit (Mk. 5:2) Up to this point one might have pointed to natural mania or some other violent insanity. Here the line is sharply drawn, for the man was the vile home of other personalities who were destroying him.

**There met him two demoniacs, and Jesus met them.** He stood His ground calmly while the fiercest, wildest beings alive ran, screaming toward Him. He had earlier been charged by the Pharisees with being the very incarnation of Satan's power, but now is the moment of truth as He stands calmly awaiting the most terrifying conflict with naked evil. What thoughts race through the minds of the disciples as these frightening figures rush toward their Master? The Apostles' worst nightmare was occurring in broad daylight. They probably did not run because Jesus did not. When Jesus is in this thing, we are not to panic regardless of the danger or fear we feel! The Pharisees had snarled that Jesus had some secret agreement with the Devil. This calumny is about to be brought to its most startling test.

## II. THE VANQUISHED

**The two demoniacs ran and worshipped Him (Mk. 5:6).** But why? Who really did this: the demons or the men themselves?

- a. If the demons worshipped Jesus, then out of what motives?
  - (1) Recognition of their real Master, greater than Satan, and their final Judge for eternity? (See on 8:29)
  - (2) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 289) supposed two malignant purposes:
    - (a) The demons perhaps used cunning flattery and fawning to dissuade Jesus from casting them into the abyss;
    - (b) By pretending friendship between themselves and Jesus, they could hope maliciously to injure His cause, and show thereby that the wicked calumny of the Pharisees was true.
- b. If the men worshipped Jesus, then this could be seen as a desperate bid for freedom against the awful possession which seemed unending. But, how could two mere men recognize

in Jesus the potential Savior when they terrorized all others who passed that way? Or, did Jesus' personal calm tame their habitual fierceness by showing them a reaction never before experienced, and in their surprise they are reduced to abject submission? Did Jesus' moral courage temporarily restrain the demons, giving their victims opportunity to express themselves thus? Could it be that the demons' fear of God's Son was communicated to the harried minds of their victims?

In this same general connection, it will be seen in the Gospel narratives several apparently contradictory elements in the speeches of the demoniacs, both in frequent changes from singular to plural and vice versa as well as changes from the man who seems to be speaking, to the demons who use the man's voice to speak their will. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 608f.) deals with these phenomena thus:

In calling attention to this and similar particulars, we repeat that this must be kept in view as characteristic of the demonized, that they were incapable of separating their own consciousness and ideas from the influence of the demon, their own identity being merged, and to that extent, lost, in that of their tormentors . . . The language and conduct of the demonized, whether seemingly his own, or that of the demons who influenced him, must always be regarded as a mixture of the Jewish-human and the demoniacal. The demonized speaks and acts as a Jew under the control of a demon. Thus, if he chooses solitary places by day and tombs by night, it is not that demons really preferred such habitations but that the Jews imagined it, and that the demons, acting on the existing consciousness, would lead him, in accordance with his preconceived notions, to select such places . . . The demonized would speak and act in accordance with his previous (Jewish) demonological ideas. He would not become a new man, but be the old man, only under the influence of the demon.

This note argues the difficulty of deciding whether the men themselves worshipped Jesus or whether it were the demons, since their self-identity was lost in that of the other. As Mark (5:9) and Luke (8:30) say, Jesus endeavored to bring out the slightest possible trace of the demonized men's self-identity, but the answer reveals the depth of the confusion of the man's consciousness with that of the demons.

**8:29 And behold they cried out, What have we to do with thee thou Son of God?** The report of Mark and Luke



includes Jesus' personal name and describes God as "the Most High God." Plummer (*Luke*, 229) believes that this expression as a description of God given by the demons, "rather indicates that the man was not a Jew, and there is some evidence the owners of the swine were not Jews. 'The Most High' (*Elyon*) is a name for Jehovah which seems to be usual among heathen nations." His references cited are Gen. 14:20, 22; Num. 24:16; Mic. 6:6; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2, 24, 32; 5:18, 21; 7:18, 22, 25, 27; Acts 16:17. However, some of these are statements by Daniel not necessarily directed to heathens or spoken even for Gentile ears, even though stated within a Babylonian context, as Plummer notes. Further, see Stephen's thoroughly Jewish sermon, (Acts 7:48) and many other undoubted Jewish references in the OT (Psa. 7:17; 78:35; Dt. 32:8; 2 Sam. 22:14 etc.) Thus, the demoniacs could well have been very Jewish indeed.

**Jesus, thou Son of God.** It is remarkable that these denizens of hell refer to Jesus in terms totally contrasting with the common Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah. (See additional references to Jewish views made by Edersheim at 8:28 under A.) Further, they use terms that even Jesus had not publicized as often as His use of the title "Son of man," even though He accepted and used the term Son of God as true concerning Himself on other occasions. This fact immediately gives the lie to the possibility that these "anachronistic" terms were mythologically originated or else derived from supposed Jewish parallels. The point is that these demons, then, really did know Jesus! (cf. Mk. 1:24) They, however, are not the proper witnesses by which Jesus would have His identity proclaimed, even though these supernatural voices from the spirit-world provide corroboratory testimony.

**What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?** Here the personal testimony of the demons clarifies the true relationship between themselves and Jesus, and, at the same time, shows that they recognized Jesus' authority above that of Satan:

1. By their cries to be let alone. But, let alone to do what? They preferred their past course to be far better than any temporary or permanent judgment Jesus would bring.
2. By their denial of all connection with Jesus: **What have we to do with thee?** (*Ti hemîn kai sof*) means "what do we have in common? What is there between us that unites us in a common bond? Nothing!" (See other examples: 2 Sam. 16:10; Jn. 2:4) Here the demons implicitly declare

the total lack of connection between Jesus and themselves. Now none could make the mistake of supposing that Jesus casts out demons with Satan's blessing and aid.

3. By their expressed understanding that He had the right to cast them into abyss. **Have you come here to torment us before the time?** There is no question in their minds about the torment: for them it is but a question of timing. It is a fair question whether this pained question by the demons, which is reported by Mark and Luke as an earnest pleading and, ironically, an adjuration by God, be further illuminated by the demons' later entreaty "not to command them to depart into the abyss" (Luke). That is, are these latter requests an expression of the demons' understanding of the meaning of the "torment" feared? **The time** referred to can be no other than God's final vindication of His wrath against all rebellion in His creation. (cf. Mt. 25:41; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:12.) They are sure of the **torment**. (cf. Lk. 16:23, 25, 28; Rev. 14:10, 11; 20:10)

This adjuration, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." (Mk. 5:7b) probably represents the desire of the demons, but expressed in the conscious thought-form of the Jewish speakers, since the men are so confusedly identified with them. (For similar form of adjuration see Mt. 26:63. For an example of exorcism by use of this same formula, see Acts 19:13.)

**The abyss** (Lk. 8:31) is a figure used in the OT for ocean depths (Psa. 33:7; 77:16; 107:26) or even deep fountains (Deut. 8:7) which gives the figurative picture of anything deep out of which immediate or easy escape or access is impossible. Thus, by the time of the NT period, it became a figure of "the depths, of the underworld," in the sense of the abode of the dead (Ro. 10:7); the dungeon where the devil is kept (Rev. 20:3), abode of the beast (Rev. 11:7; 17:8), of Abaddon (Rev. 9:11). But in Revelation **the abyss** denotes only the abode of evil spirits, although not the place of final punishment, since it is apparently distinguished from the "lake of fire and brimstone" wherein the beast and false prophet are thrown alive and into which the Devil is to be finally cast (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). (See *ISBE*, article "abyss", 26, 27; Arndt-Gingrich, 2)

**Out of the country** (*éxō tēs chóras*) may be the antithesis in the demons' mind with "do not send us into the

abyss," meaning "do not send us out of the district of this earth into the abyss." But this phrase is also perfectly consonant with the confusion, in the demonized wretches, of their interests with those of the demons: he does not wish to leave his home country to be sent into the unknown. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) supposes this means that the **demons** desired to remain in Gilead too, and gained their purpose through the permission to go into the hogs. But the destruction of the hogs frustrated this, although it is left unknown whether the demons yet had to go into the abyss or were left wandering homeless throughout the Decapolis.

4. By their overt acts of worship, the demons vigorously expressed their recognition of Jesus' authority. This focuses more clearly an answer to an earlier question: who worshipped Jesus—the demons or the men? Perhaps both, but certainly it is the demons that expect the final triumph of Christ!
5. By their implicit knowledge that it was useless for them to fight or flee, though they were an obvious numerical majority, while He was only One against a Legion. Though they had easily overpowered humans and terrorized the countryside, they stood calmly bowed before Jesus of Nazareth, knowing that their only respite could be gained through parley.
6. By their parleying for another place of abode, in place of banishment to the abyss, they reveal the almost certain knowledge that He could and would cast them out. This is more than insanity: this supernatural knowledge comes out of the spirit world.

This protest shouted by the demons is the expressed admission that the demons themselves stand in the presence of God's Holy One, before Whom all the powers of moral destruction cannot hold their peace: they must speak and confess their subjection and doom. It is unnecessary for Jesus to discuss or debate with these evil spirits. It is sufficient for them that Jesus is the Christ: He had already won the victory. Now it was merely a question of what to do with the captives! James' words (2:19) ring true: "The demons believe—and shudder!" In another connection McGarvey comments: "Let the sinner listen to that cry and learn what is to be under the domination of Satan."

At this point, Mark and Luke report that Jesus asked the principle demoniac, "What is your name?" His answer was: "My name is Legion; for we are many," for many demons had entered him. Note

the changes from singular to plural. **Legion:** There is no necessary connection between the usual size of a Roman legion, 4000-5000 men, and the actual number of demons in the two demoniacs. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) offers as a suitable translation of "Legion" a purely Jewish expression representing a large number, an idea more general than, strictly, a Roman legion. Who answered therefore, the man speaking for himself or the demons? Probably the demons spoke, still being in control, since it was not until they were ejected that that man's own rationality returns, showing itself in reasonable speech. (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38, 39) But why did Jesus ask the man his name?

1. Perhaps Jesus was trying to draw out of the human being himself all the human identification He could possibly reach. Had this demoniac so completely lost his original identity with his family and the society from which he had come, that, as far as he was concerned, his own true name was completely blotted out from his disordered existence? If so, it is because he must see that he is a person, once free from, and even now not permanently bound to, the demons.
2. Perhaps to reveal the name of the demons to His Apostles. But if so, for what future purpose? Was it to expose the demons' vulnerability to His men, who would later cast them out? If so, these disciples must learn that even the fiercest of these spirits from the unseen world, however strong or numerous they may be, they are all subject to Jesus' world and to those who stand against the demons in Jesus' name!
3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 134), placing emphasis upon Jesus' human nature, suggests that He asked him for information, since Jesus may have chosen not to know by supernatural insight. If so, this question becomes another manifestation of the historical dependability of the narrative, since it would seem to imply some ignorance (even though willed) on the part of Christ, which the Evangelists, on the basis of apologetic motives, would have sought to remove. Any sharp-eyed critic can see the scandalous character that would be pictured for Jesus among those who do not understand His unique incarnation.

**8:30 Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding.** Two thousand head of swine (Mk. 5:13) were feeding on the hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee about a mile south of modern Khersa. (See map of the Sea and notes on 8:28) But what were so many pigs doing in Jewish country? But that is just

the point: this was not merely Jewish territory, but rather the sub-territories of the famous independent cities of the Greek Decapolis. (Mk. 5:20) It may well be that that herd of swine represents Greek contempt for Jewish prejudices. Yet, since this event occurred within the tetrarchy of Philip, the owners of these swine could well be Jews, seeking profits from Gentile purchasers. They could have justified themselves, whining, "But we don't eat the stuff! We just grow the hogs and sell the pork to the heathen neighbors!"

**8:31 And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine. If thou cast us out** is no expression of doubt, since Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to depart (Mk. 5:8; Lk. 8:29). It is rather a dickering device, whereby the demons can escape their worst fears and yet hope to pacify Jesus. They did not instantly obey Jesus' command, since they began to protest and barter instead of leaving. This fact, too, demonstrates the trustworthiness of the record, since the Apostles would probably have tried to cover up the obvious disobedience to Jesus' commands.

**Send us into the swine.** Why did they make this strange request? Several answers are possible:

1. They did not ask to be sent into other humans. Such a request would be self-defeating, as they would only be cast out again.
2. They apparently did not wish to remain disembodied. (cf. Mt. 12:43-45). If so, this suggests their inability to read the future, since they probably would not have made this request had they been able to foresee the outcome that ensued. Desperate to have a home, any home but the abyss, they seized upon those brute beasts which they probably must have surmised to be less precious to Jesus.
3. It might be that they requested this with malicious intent, surmising, from the damage that they had been able to do while inhabiting the two humans, that they could turn the swine into savage beasts, hence, damage Jesus' reputation. It would thereby appear that this Benefactor brings no unmingled blessings.

To any who would reject any of these reasons on the basis of the fact that the demons, in driving the herd into the sea, defeated their own supposed purpose, let it be noticed that nowhere is it stated that the demons "drove" the herd anywhere. What we see in the hogs' action is **THEIR** decision, not that of the demons! If it be asked why the demons, who had so obviously taken men under control, could not have prevented the swine from destroying themselves, thus disembod-ying

the demons again, it might be suggested that the demons could not control these beasts without as much intelligence or will power as men. The hogs turned savagely wild, ran the easiest direction i.e. downhill and the herd found the lake in its path and could neither turn nor stop.

**8:32 And he said unto them, Go. And they came out and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea, and perished in the waters.** Down the steep slope that fell away toward the road that skirted the seacoast. For a description of the land, see on 8:28 and *ISBE*, 1166a. This was not necessarily a sheer precipice, as some artists draw it. Mark notes that the herd numbered "about two thousand." There is no necessary connection between the number of demons i.e. "Legion" Roman legion of 4000-5000 men, and the size of the herd. Actually, just a few wild hogs could stampede the whole herd. There is no need to seek a harmony between "2000 hogs and 4000 demons", since no Gospel writer affirms the latter figure.

**And he said to them, Go.** Whether this word be construed as mere permission or as a repeated command (cf. Mk. 5:8 and Lk. 8:29), by its use Jesus unleashed the demons to go their chosen path. But by the same word, Jesus unleashed another storm of controversy among modern scholars about His right to say it. The moral problem, it is said, lies around the question: How could Jesus allow this destruction of personal property which did not belong to Him? How could Jesus have permitted the demons to have what they requested without becoming also morally responsible for the damage that was produced? Several answers have been suggested:

1. If evil blinds its victims to hinder them from considering all possibilities in a real world, could the demons have foreseen the reaction of the hogs, that, finding themselves in the fearful grip of this horrible power, rushed around in wild panic until, against the will of the demons, they plunged further and more wildly down the hill to their destruction? Thus, the demons, victims themselves of the deception of evil, had not foreseen the frustration of their desire, as Jesus could well have planned.
2. Would Jesus, thus, have been so short-sighted and gullible as to have accepted so apparently benign and harmless a plan as the demons proposed? Did He not, rather, foresee both the destruction of the herd and the frustration of the demons? Otherwise, would He not have simply demanded the immediate

passage of the demons into the abyss? As it is, He accomplishes a double purpose of His own, presuming that His permission was a judgment upon the swine owners too. If these latter were Jews, then they were violating the spirit of Moses' Law in keeping swine. (See Lev. 11:7, 8; Isa. 65:3-5; 66:3, 17) Jesus' permission to destroy the herd becomes to them a shocking reminder of duty to God.

3. Another suggestion describes Jesus' permission as like God's general permission of all evil and all evils till the end of all all evil. God permits tornadoes, floods, animal diseases and other natural disasters to destroy herds or portions thereof every year. Hence these owners had no more right to complain than other owners who lose animals to whatever cause.
4. Others say that, as Creator of the universe, Jesus had a right to do what He wished with His own. The local owners of the swine were but temporary stewards of their possessions, whereas the Owner of the world suddenly chose to "liquidate" His swine holdings. What is so unusual about this act of God incarnate? (See Psalm 50:10-12) Is it not He who gives and He who takes away, in order that thereby He may bless His children? (Study Job 1:21, 22) Why should He not decide to destroy the man's herd of hogs in order to give him a brother for whom to care? Plummer is right in saying (*Matthew*, 133), "Brutes and private property may be sacrificed where the sanity and safety of human beings is concerned." The slaughter of these brute beasts, were it personally willed by Jesus Himself (of which there is, of course, no proof), is of no relative importance compared with the saving of the souls of two men! As God, Jesus could dispose of His own possessions as He choose, and what human subject could object?
5. Those who see a real moral difficulty here and thereby endeavor to reduce Jesus to a mere man, face the equally great difficulty involved in succeeding. For if they can reduce Jesus to a mere man, He could not have foreseen this destruction and cannot be blamed anyway! Thus, the answer to the apparent dilemma lies elsewhere.
6. Trench (*Miracles*, 102) suggests an interesting principle that is worth studying:

To the evil all things turn to evil. The wicked Satan (Job 1:11) and his ministers are sometimes heard, and

the very granting of their petitions issues in their worst confusion and loss. (Num. 22:20, 35; Josh. 13:22; Psa. 78:29-31) So it is now: the prayer of these evil spirits was heard but only to their ruin. They are allowed to enter the swine; but the destruction of the whole herd follows . . . they defeated their own purpose . . . there reveals itself here the very essence and truest character of evil, which evermore outwits and defeats itself. . . .

In seeking applications of this principle, it would be well to be aware of the fact that not all evil turns to evil *immediately*. Some evil men seem to succeed to turning all things to good during their lifetime. (cf. Job 21) These inequities will, however, be rectified at the judgment.

### III. THE VILLAGERS

**8:33 And they that fed them fled; and went away into the city.** If our identification of the site of Gerasa, or Gergesa, as the location of the steep place is correct, then the herdsmen had about a mile to run. But why flee? What reaction is more natural, when the herd you are watching as it calmly roots or rests, suddenly begins to squeal and bellow, then rushes headlong down the slope into the lake below? You can give no normal explanation for this mad dash of the drowned herd now only so many corpses floating at the shore. You were charged with the safe care of this valuable herd. Why not run? But why flee to the town to shout the news of the herd's destruction? Who would believe the fantastic story about Jesus and the demoniacs?

1. They fled out of fear of the unknown: What had really caused the inexplicable actions of the hogs? Were they demonized? If there were spirits in the neighborhood, it is best to leave the place!
2. Fear of the consequences to the swineherds themselves if other mouths brought the owner word. It is better to tell it yourself than let him find out about it himself: he could hold you liable and punish severely.
3. But the swineherds were also eyewitnesses of the whole event. They had seen the whole proceeding. The still air of the quiet countryside had been pierced by the shrieks of the demoniacs as they approached Jesus, drawing also the interest and attention of these swineherds. So they **told everything and what was befallen to them that were possessed with** ---



**demons.** It was this message about the casting out of the demons that was foremost upon their lips as they rushed through the town shouting the news. It was the one fact that would lend credibility to their story about the swine.

**8:34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their borders.** All the city means the majority of its inhabitants, as we say, "Everybody and his dog was there," although we never mean the absolute totality of any population. The people had come:

1. **to meet Jesus**, because the swineherds had testified that it was Jesus that had cast out the demons. There could be no doubt that He possessed unlimited, supreme power.

2. **to see what it was that had happened.** (Mk. 5:14b)

This was for these citizens a time of severe testing even though they probably did not realize it.

- a. **To the demoniacs.** The very fact, that these their own fellowcitizens had been delivered from Satan's bondage, should have signalled beyond doubt to the gathered crowd that God's Kingdom had suddenly come among them. (cf. Mt. 12:28 and Acts 14:8-13 for a true pagan reaction) They were being tested whether they would hold all else cheap in comparison to the victory and joy at the release of two human beings, God's creatures and their townsmen. Was it to be nothing to them that the former demoniacs now freed, were sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in their right mind?

The expression "in his right mind" certainly implies that the demoniacs had been insane, which is correct. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 292) comments wisely: "This detracts nothing from the reality of demon possession; it only shows that the presence of the foreign spirit within a man disturbed, as from the nature of the case it must, the normal workings of his own spirit."

- b. **And to the swine.** The corpses bobbing up and down in the lake gave tangibility to the story told by the swineherds, who according to Mark and Luke, undoubtedly repeated their testimony to all comers.

**And when they saw Jesus, they besought him that he would depart from their borders.** They knew that He could not

be treated indifferently nor safely ignored: they must decide. They chose to ask Him to leave! Why?

1. Did they fear the loss of more property? Was it that they considered the loss of only two thousand hogs of more importance than the restoration of two men to useful life as citizens of their town? If so, what a horrid warped sense of values! Can it be that they would hold fast to the most forbidden sins, the most despicable life and the most perishable property, rather than rejoice in the presence of Jesus and the happiness, peace and blessing He brings?
2. Luke (8:37; cf. Mk. 5:15; Lk. 8:35) emphasizes the depth of their fear: "(they) asked him to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear." (Study Lk. 5:8; 8:25 for similar responses.) These sinners, when they had sized up the whole picture of Jesus, the freed demoniacs, the dead swine, they realized they were standing in the presence of naked supernaturalism, in the presence of sheer otherworld power. They stood on the battlefield of a spiritual-world and it unnerved them. These sinners stood in the presence of Jesus, the Holy One, the Son of the Most High God. But their gross ignorance of His mission of mercy and help to earth hindered them from understanding God's power and holiness. They found God's holiness incarnate, standing in their presence, intolerable, so they asked Jesus to leave. What other consequences would follow in their lives if He were allowed to remain? If illegal hogs could be destroyed in a flash, what would He do in their personal lives? Would they too soon be visited for their own many sins? Their own fear and guilt is the pain of their sinfulness in the presence of God's holiness, and it blinds them to God's mercy. (Cf. Job 21:14 where the same words reflect not so much fear as rebellion.) Perhaps the only reason none dare present Jesus with a bill for the payment for the destroyed swine is both secret acknowledgement of His right to have destroyed the animals and fear to admit the ownership of the illegal animals. Besides their suspicions, and proof He did it was circumstantial. Only the swineherds had seen the facts but perhaps had not heard the direct connection between Jesus' permission to the demons and the destruction of the hogs.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 134) points out that this "request of the inhabitants is a guarantee for the general trustworthiness" of the narrative. Fiction would have made the inhabitants

anxious to detain Him that He might work other wonderful cures, where He was regarded, not as a dangerous magician, but as a great prophet. . . ."

#### IV. THE VALIANT

Mark and Luke narrate the anxious clinging of the freed demoniac to Jesus. Just as Jesus was boarding the boat to depart, the man begged Him that he might accompany Him. Here occurs one of the starkest lessons of discipleship: Jesus refused his request, even though so natural and apparently so needful. Why did Jesus do it? Edersheim (*Life*, I, 614) puts it so poignantly:

It would have seemed to him, as if he could not bear to lose his new found happiness; as if there were calm, safety and happiness only in His Presence; not far from Him—not among those wild mountains and yet wilder men. Why should he be driven from His fellowship, who had so long been an out-cast from that of his fellow-men, and why again left to himself? So, perhaps, should we have reasoned and spoken; so too often do we reason and speak, as regards ourselves or those we love. Not so He Who appoints alike our discipline and our work. To go back, now healed, to his own, and publish there, in the city—nay, through the whole of the large district of the . . . Decapolis—how great things Jesus had done for him, such was henceforth to be his life-work. In this there would be both safety and happiness.

All of his fear, that the demons, in the absence of Jesus their Master, might return to repossess their former victims, then, diminishes in the man's confidence that Jesus' command to return home has become his assurance that Jesus' authority is complete. The demons will not return: he is safe even with Jesus gone. So long as the man is engaged in this mission on which Jesus sends him, his safety is guaranteed. If he fears the unfriendly populace which had rejected his Savior, then Jesus' command to evangelize them, to take the offensive, is his best defense. If his desire is to accompany Jesus as a close disciple out of deep gratitude for his salvation, Jesus indicates the direction his discipleship and gratitude must take: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord God has done for you and how He has had mercy on you." (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39)

Note that both Evangelists record that the man did go home and told how much JESUS had done for him. The theological connections

between God and Jesus might not have been crystal clear to the man yet, but he could speak in concrete terms about the power of Jesus.

Contrast this commission given by Jesus to this ex-demoniac to go tell what God had done for him, with the injunctions to silence given to others:

1. This area is not Galilee but Gilead, less thickly populated and less excitable by Messianic rumors. Also Jesus had not yet worked here and needed this man's enthusiastic pre-campaign advertizing here, not over in Galilee to which Jesus was soon to return.
2. The others healed by Jesus needed more inner reflection upon God's great action on their behalf in order to learn deeper appreciation of God's power and goodness. As Jesus' disciples, they needed to learn submission and self-control. But this ex-demoniac needed immediate association with people, to re-enter human society once more. He needed to be drawn out of himself, out of his lonely environment into usefulness to his fellows. Jesus knew that by his public proclamation of God's mercies this man could certainly maintain the spiritual health with which Jesus left him. (Psa. 66:16)
3. Jesus laid no unnecessary burdens of great, sacrificial discipleship upon the man. He restored him immediately to his family and friends. He sent him home (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39) and to go home and work for Jesus was just as much obedience as for others to leave home to work for the Master! (Lk. 9:59-62)

Read the enthusiastic reports of Mark and Luke about the man's ministry, or should we say, that man's obedience after the disappointment of not being permitted to join Jesus' immediate company! "He went away and began proclaiming throughout the whole city, nay, in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all men marveled." Oh my soul, can I take "no" for an answer from Jesus and still love Him and go right on preaching His Word where He is largely an unknown, rejected miracle-worker from Galilee?

It is easy to think of the valiant Twelve who remained by Jesus in His ministry and suffering; but they are also valiant servants of God who go it alone, knowing only that Jesus wills it? This man's preaching must have been tremendously effective, since everyone could remember him as the mighty terror of Gerasa. But now he was the living monument to the power and mercy of God in Jesus of Naza-

reth! No wonder he succeeded; his mission method was personal witnessing to the change wrought in his own life.

## V. THE VICTOR

**9:1 And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his city.** To entitle this section which describes Jesus' retreat from Decapolis "the Victor," would seem to some exaggerated, since Jesus obviously accepts the fear-filled request of the selfish, superstitious villagers as sufficient reason to leave. But this is to forget the total picture painted by the three Evangelists; Calmly Jesus had stepped out of the boat to face the fiercest inhabitants of the Decapolis. The mere fact that He was the Christ was itself victory, and the demons must confess their submission and condemnation. With but one final authoritative word, He drove the unclean spirits from their victims. Against His ultimate command there was no appeal. What had been proved thereby? Edersheim answers so picturesquely (*Life*, I, 613):

He that had erst been the possession of foul and evil spirits—a very legion of them—and deprived of his human individuality, is now 'sitting at the feet of Jesus,' learning of Him, clothed and in his right mind.' He has been brought to God, restored to self, to reason, and to human society—all this by Jesus, at Whose Feet he is gratefully, humbly sitting, 'a disciple.' Is He not then the Very Son of God? Viewing this miracle, as an historical fact, viewing it as a parabolic Miracle, viewing it also as symbolic of what has happened in all ages—is He not the Son of the Most High God? And is there not now, on His part, in the morning light the same calmness and majesty of conscious Almighty Power as on the evening before, when He rebuked the storm and calmed the sea?

But what is so victorious about His retreat? Here is written the meekness of the Son of God. He could have mustered all manner of invincible argument why they should permit Him to remain. He could have shown a demonstration of supernatural power that would have overpowered their reason and frightened them into abject submission. But He did not. Jesus did not stay long where He was not wanted. (cf. Lk. 9:51-55; Mt. 13:54-58; Lk. 4:16-30) He simply left without a word.

But He left behind Him a one-man advertising campaign that would more than prepare for His Decapolis ministry next year! (See

Mt. 15:29-39; Mk. 7:31—8:10) Jesus' real purpose for coming to the Decapolis area was to save it. Though He must postpone His actual ministry there till a later date, yet the activity of this freed ex-demoniac brought a deep change in the attitude of the people. Later when Jesus returned He met an open-hearted reception. Contrary to several commentators who ignore Jesus' Decapolis ministry cited above, Jesus DID come back. His mercy is long-lasting. He gave Decapolis a second chance!

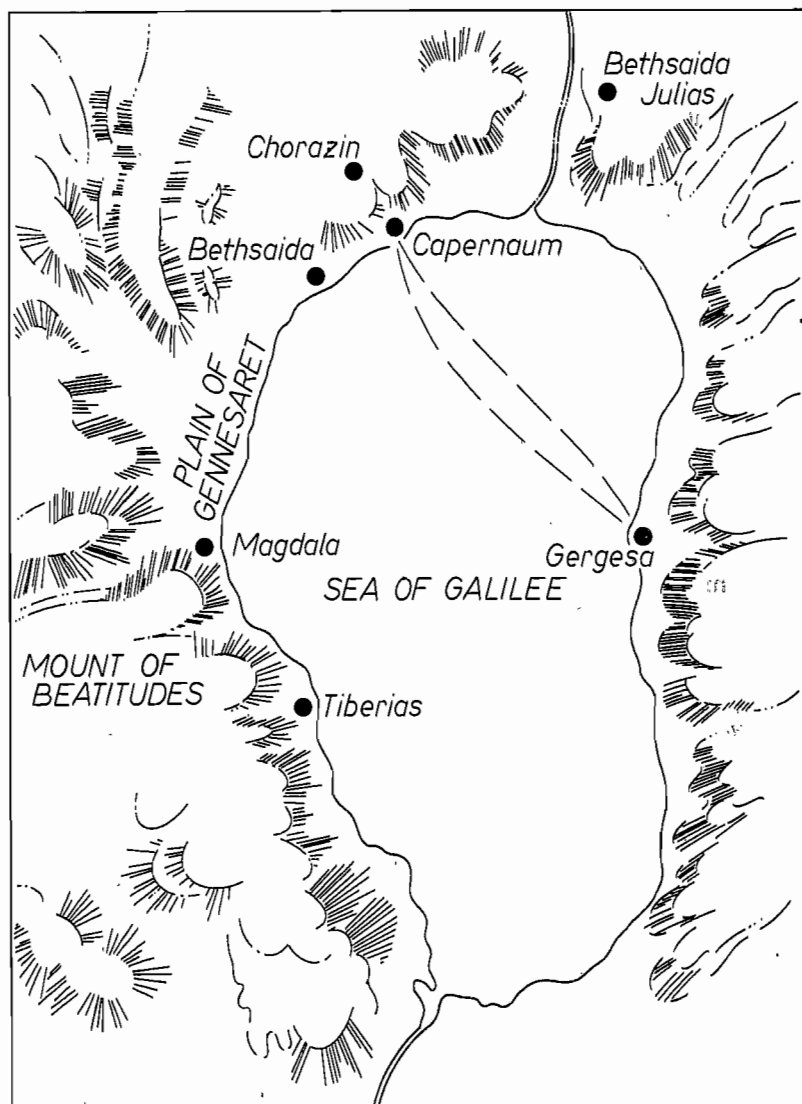
What is the proper theology regarding this section and many more like it? Jesus is NOT in league with Satan, but is successfully routing the devil's infantry at every encounter! Casting out demons, defeats also their lord, Satan. (cf. Lk. 10:17, 18; Mt. 12:29) No wonder Peter, in retrospect, described Jesus' ministry thus: "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where is the "country of the Gadarenes"? Explain about the three different wordings of this and how they harmonize.
2. How many of the Gadarenes were possessed with demons according to the Gospel accounts? Explain the apparently conflicting reports regarding the number of demoniacs by listing other occasions where Mark mentions one thing or person where Matthew mentions a multiple number.
3. What symptoms or actions indicated that they had demons?
4. How could people tell that the demons were gone from them?
5. Quote accurately what the demons said to Jesus and tell four or five things that are clearly indicated by their speeches.
6. What did the general populace ask of Jesus after the demoniacs were healed? Why?
7. What did one demoniac ask of Jesus after he was healed?
8. What did Jesus command him to do?
9. Explain the meaning of the demons' expression: "Are you come here to torment us before the time?" To what did they allude? What were they afraid of?
10. Tell what the NT teaches about "the abyss," "the bottomless pit" which was the horror of these demons. What is the difference between this and hell?
11. State the pleas made by the demons in reference to their future state, whereby they hoped to secure a compromise from Jesus. What other NT passages may explain why they made this particular plea?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

This map of the Sea of Galilee indicates in a general way the movements of Jesus when He left Capernaum by boat, calmed the storm, debarked in Gadarene territory, freed the demoniacs and sailed directly back to Capernaum.



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER EIGHT:  
"THE TOUCH THAT CLEANSSES"  
(8:2-4)

*Introduction:* When Matthew wanted to show God's power at work in Jesus of Nazareth, he picked the most loathsome disease he could conceive.

I. THE LEPER'S INSISTENT REQUEST: It was:

- A. Original: there were no previous recorded instances of such a cure amid all the Judean and Galilean cures. Perhaps he reasoned: "It is no secret what God can do; what He's done for others He can do for me too!"
- B. Courageous: "full of leprosy" "in a city" directly to Jesus he came with a courage born of desperate hope.
- C. Pitiful: "Lord, if you will . . ." Is he not sure of Jesus' willingness?
  - 1. He had a repulsive disease from which people recoiled in disgust; it was a horrible, living death.
  - 2. His was a contaminating disease; rabbis wanted nothing to do with him or his kind; they even delighted in throwing stones to keep him at a distance so as to insure their ceremonial purity.
  - 3. He had an isolating or separating disease which barred him from human society.
- D. Believing: he had a perfect confidence in Jesus' power and even in Jesus' willingness to welcome the man whom everyone else would have driven away.
- E. Humble: There is no demand here, no thoughtless claim upon His time, or energies. His unspoken plea: "I cast myself upon your heart."

II. THE LORD'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: To a Jew trained in the strict observance of the Levitical mentality of ceremonial pollution and cleanness, there could be no more amazing sentence in the New Testament than the simple declaration: "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched the leper."

- A. From a human standpoint Jesus ran the risk:
  - 1. of ghastly infection: "What if Jesus became a leper too?"
  - 2. of moral contamination: "Should anyone, including Jesus, deliberately sully His life with such outcasts as lepers? Would not God also reject Him?"



### SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

3. of social rejection: "What if the crowds rejected an unclean Christ?"

B. Jesus got involved and touched this leper. It was just like Jesus to do it! But when Jesus became man He had already gotten involved with our filthy, corrupting morals and our insoluble problems.

C. Jesus not only spoke cleansing but willed it! (Greek: *thélō*) "I will it—I want to cleanse you!" Jesus' answer was no naked word of power spoken at an uncommitted distance. Jesus loved him and desired to help him. Here we see a man who had been kept at arms' length by all men, now wrapped around with the compassionate love of God.

### III. THE FIRST COMMAND OF JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLE: "Obey God's revelation for those in your situation!"

A. To the cleansed leper it was:

1. "Go show yourself to the priests for a testimony to them!" They too must hear of my power first."
2. "Offer the sacrifices Moses commanded for your cleansing! Not even so marvellous a cleansing as that from living death can excuse you from your normal duties to God."
3. "Keep still; revolutions are afoot; the success of my ministry cannot stand such display of ignorant popularity encouraged in unthinking crowds. Besides, your pride cannot stand display either. Tell it to no man!"

B. To us and our age, Jesus charges us who claim to be His followers:

1. Faith, repentance, baptism (Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:3; Mt. 28:18-20).
2. Growth in discipleship (Mt. 11:28-30) and all that it involves.
3. Sharing His message and His life with our associates.
4. Getting involved in His work.

CONCLUSION. Jesus touched the untouchable, crossed the chasm and got involved in our suffering, our sorrows. Who can refuse such a Lover as He? No man can ever feel himself incurable in body or unforgiveable in soul while Jesus Christ lives! Do you fear the exposure of some hideous sin in your life? Are you deliberately separating yourself from human companionship because of some heartbreaking experience in your home and family? Do you wonder if anyone really loves you and cares what happens to you? Do you long above all else to turn to a useful, happy life of service, gratefully rendered to Jesus? Jesus calls you to His side. Will you come? Will you say, "Jesus, if you

want to, you can cleanse me, restore me, heal me, fill me!" He lays His reassuring hands upon you, saying, "I want to, come to me. I will give you rest and cleansing."

## "THE MASTER MARVELLED"

(8:5-13)

What can excite the wonder and admiration of Jesus of Nazareth? The times of Jesus' earthly ministry were days loaded with excitement, but they must not dim our sight of the Lord Himself. If we desire to delight this Master, let us pay attention to what brings Him highest joy. There are some genuinely impressive facts in this text: what one fact drew Jesus' attention leaving Him overjoyed and amazed? Matthew tells us of . . .

I. AN UNEXPECTED COMPASSION. Ours is a cruel, hard-nosed, "business is business" world, where men climb the heights to a success over the bent backs of their inferiors, the less fortunate.

A. An unlikely object of compassion was the centurion's slave.

1. Slaves in the Roman empire were no better than a living tool, differing from other things possessed by owner in the sense that the slave could talk. Slaves too sick, too old or too unable or unwilling to work could be disposed of in any manner the master chose.

2. But here in this household the anguished cry from a paralyzed human being, though a slave, was heard!

B. An unlikely person for expressing such compassion was the centurion.

1. His military career had not been able to extinguish his human concern for another human being.

H. P. Hughes commented: "I know nothing more noble, more indicative of the godlike man, than a proper courtesy and thoughtfulness and a disinterested and unselfish care for those who are our social inferiors."

2. The centurion was not Jewish, therefore, technically a pagan. What opportunities had he had for knowing God's revelation? What circumstances had God combined to bring him to his love for the subject people over which his own government had posted him to keep law and order?

C. No, while this compassion and unexpected generosity certainly surprises us, this is not yet what caused the Master to marvel.

## SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

II. AN UNPRECEDENTED AFFECTION. (Read Luke 7:1-10) Here Jewish elders actually intercede with Jesus on behalf of the Capernaum centurion—yes, a centurion!

- A. He was more a candidate for assassination, not assistance.
  - 1. In the Jewish struggle for independence from the Roman yoke, every Roman official, every collaborator with Rome, every supporter of Roman government would be viewed with suspicion, if not outright hatred.
  - 2. But here we find the precise opposite to be the case: responsible Jewish citizens expressing unprecedented affection for a centurion.
    - a. Why *should* they hesitate to help him? "He loves our nation. He built us our synagogue!"
    - b. Herein is a sentence sermon: Sterile orthodoxy that does not love, that does not act, is not orthodox!
    - c. The orthodox deeds of one Gentile centurion produced more concrete results, more humanity, more genuine affection and deep-felt appreciation than all the orthodox speculations of a hundred theologians.
- B. Who were these "elders"? Was Jairus among them? What about the royal official (Jn. 4:46-54) whose son Jesus had already healed?
- C. What opportunities had they had for knowing God's revelation? What witness had they given to this centurion concerning Jesus? Had they been as generous with the centurion as he had been with them? Many of these intriguing questions stimulate our imagination, as they fill in the flesh-and-blood outline of these real people.
- D. The actions of these men who normally would not be known to be so solicitous for a Roman's needs lead us to feel their unprecedented affection for him, and yet even this example rising above usual Jewish parochialism did not excite the wonder of our Lord so much as

III. AN UNEXAMPLED FAITH. That did it! Nothing turns the head of Jesus of Nazareth so quickly as the concrete expression of real belief! What was the formula of his "great confession"?

- A. "I am not worthy."
  - 1. He is a Roman who says this to an itinerate Jewish Rabbi!
  - 2. This is obviously real humility: the higher he held Jesus, the lower he esteemed his own power, position, accomplishments and person.

#### THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

3. This confession of unworthiness was his highest claim to being actually worthy of the Kingdom! (Mt. 5:3)
- B. "I understand authority and I know you possess it." When he had learned to confess Israel's God as his own and to believe Jesus to be absolutely unlimited in the exercise of God's power, this centurion permitted no frivolous objections to hinder his decisive action, such as might be raised by scribes and Pharisees of his day.
- C. "Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."
  1. What an intelligent grasp of the fundamental principle underlying God's government of the world! (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pe. 3:5-7)
  2. The centurion knew that if one simple word from Jesus could not cure his slave, hundreds of mumbled or shrieked incantations from others were so far less incapable of bringing the slave back to life and health. One powerful word from Jesus is all that is needed: "Just give the command, Sir."
- D. This kind of faith brought Jesus joy, wonder and admiration just because it was so rare, strong, pure and real. Why great?
  1. The centurion was sensitive to human need; religious people can be so unseeing, so deaf to concrete hard life problems.
  2. The centurion had overcome gigantic obstacles of prejudice to bow before this Jewish Teacher; more often "the right people" would have called this "improper" at least, or unthinkable, at most, for a man of his position. Honesty compelled him.
  3. Despite the difficulties that would have choked the momentary enthusiasm, the conflicting theories and contradictory logic and broken the reasonably resilient faith of others, the centurion arrived at a determined conclusion and with confident firmness confided his case to Jesus.
  4. The centurion was humble enough to recognize the high holiness of Jesus. Our "humility" is often so pretentious! By contrast, this centurion was willing not to be honored by the Lord's presence.
  5. The centurion, even though a Gentile and in much more need of it, did not ask Jesus for a confirmatory sign for verification of the reality of His power before working the miracle. (Contrast Gideon's fleece, Judg. 6:36-40; or the Jew's demand for signs, Mt. 16:1-4)

#### SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

6. The centurion showed careful planning by sending the elders, men whose religious views he thought would not be so likely to clash with Jesus as would perhaps the Gentile unworthiness of the centurion himself. Thus, he showed himself keenly sensitive even to Jesus' views, as a man.
7. His faith had been intelligently arrived at. Simple trust of Jesus may be acceptable, but Jesus is more stirred by a man whose faith is the result of his mental wrestling with facts, theories, alternatives, prejudices, personal ignorance and desires and who STILL decides to believe Jesus. The centurion had shown careful reasoning behind his actions.

This leads us around to

#### IV. AN UNTHOUGHT-OF-CONCLUSION. The tables are turned; the relations reversed!

##### A. The UNWELCOME are welcomed! (Mt. 8:10, 11)

1. Jesus praised the "pagan" centurion's faith: "I tell you I have not found so great faith!"
2. Jesus answered a "pagan's" prayer, wrapped the loving arms of God's compassion around both men:
  - a. around the hated man, the agent of a foreign government occupying one's homeland.
  - b. around the despised man, the slave, the living tool with no human rights and no legal existence except as property of his master.
  - c. "I will come and heal him . . . (later) Go your way; as you have believed, so be it done for you." Jesus knew neither Jew nor Roman, slave nor free, male nor female; He only recognized human need. No prejudice was strong enough to hold Jesus within its narrow, provincial bounds.
3. Jesus threw open the doors to God's Kingdom to believing Gentiles like this centurion. (Mt. 8:11)

##### B. The ELITE are excluded! Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are not the exclusive possessions of any exclusive race of men. He is the possession of every man in every nation in whose heart there is FAITH.

1. Jesus' amazement at the centurion's faith was caused directly by the contrast with the usual, dull lack of deep commitment He met in the very people who had enjoyed God's preparation for Messiah's coming.

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

2. Jesus' voice reflected the tragedy of unbelief: "I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel!*" With a reluctance that throbbed with the love of God, Jesus condemned unbelievers to hell (vs. 12)

Yes, Jesus marvelled at the faith found in this very unlikely person, He encouraged the man as far as circumstances permitted and answered the centurion's request. Any Jew standing around could probably have said, "Who would have thought that **THAT** man could be the object of God's mercy?"

All of us make a very unlikely crowd to be the special objects of God's continued mercy! But the point is: He does care. Who would have thought that **WE** could be Christians? But we began with the confession: "I am not worthy. . . . Jesus, you are our Authority: only speak the word and we will live!"

## CHAPTER NINE OUTLINES

- Section 18. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic (9:2-8)
- Section 19. Jesus Calls Matthew Levi to be Apostle (9:9-17)
- Section 20. Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter (9:18-26)  
and Heals Woman's Hemorrhage
- Section 21. Jesus Gives Sight to Two Blind Men (9:27-34)
- Section 22. Jesus Evangelizes Galilee (9:35-38)

## STUDY OUTLINE

- I. JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC (9:2-8) at a "Congressional Investigation."
  - A. Situation: house full of critics, Jesus in midst. Paralytic lowered through roof into Jesus' presence.
  - B. Crisis: Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic
    1. Pharisaic reasoning: "blasphemy!"
    2. Jesus' reasoning: "It is my right."
  - C. Conclusion: Jesus, as God, has power on earth to forgive sin.
- II. JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI TO BE APOSTLE (9:9-17)
  - A. The Call of Matthew (9:9)
  - B. The Concept of the Master: "I am Physician for the sick, at work where I belong. (9:10-13)
  - C. The Controversy: feasting versus fasting (9:14-17).
    1. Situation: Disciples of John and Pharisees fasted, while Jesus' disciples feasted.

## CHAPTER NINE

2. Jesus' Defense: Things that do not harmonize should not be united.
  - a. Illustration: a wedding is no place for mourning
  - b. Illustration: new patches do not repair old garments.
  - c. Illustration: new wine bursts old wineskins

### III. JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (9:18-26)

- A. Situation: Twelve year-old daughter of the leader of synagogue dead; father comes to Jesus requesting His help.
- B. Jesus' response: The broken heart of the father moves Jesus.
  1. Jesus' journey, interrupted by the woman He healed, was filled with agonizing delays for the father whose understanding was inadequate.
  2. Death notice delivered to father: extreme crisis of father's faith.
  3. Jesus ministered comforting words to Jairus, He was healing the father's heart also.
  4. Jesus stopped the funeral to call dramatic attention to what He is about to do.
  5. He then raises the daughter from death.

### IV. JESUS HEALS A WOMAN'S HEMORRHAGE (9:20-22)

- A. Situation: Jesus hurried to Jairus' house, pressed by crowds on every side. Woman in crowd with unhealing 12-year hemorrhage, practically excommunicated from worship, from normal marital relations, practically penniless, decidedly incurable and unbelievably desperate.
- B. Jesus' Response: healing.

### V. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO TWO BLIND MEN (9:27-31).

- A. Situation: Coming away from Jairus' house, Jesus is accosted by two blind men requesting healing, who persist in following Him indoors.
- B. Jesus tests their faith.
- C. They respond affirmatively.
- D. Jesus healed them instantly with a word and a touch.
- E. Jesus demanded secrecy.
- F. Instead they publicized the miracle.

### VI. JESUS FREES A DUMB DEMONIAK (9:32-34)

- A. Situation: A dumb demoniac is brought to Jesus;
- B. Jesus' Response: He cast out the demon, with the result that the dumb man could speak.

- C. The Crowd's Reaction: "Nothing ever seen like this in Israel!"
- D. The Pharisees' Reaction: "Jesus is in league with Satan."

## VII. JESUS EVANGELIZES GALILEE AND SHARES HIS VISION WITH THE DISCIPLES (9:35-38)

- A. Situation: Jesus goes on a preaching and healing tour of Galilee.
- B. Jesus' Motivation: His compassion and intelligent love for the leaderless multitudes.
- C. Jesus' Challenge: Pray for helpers to reap the waiting harvest.

### Section 18

## JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC

(Parallels: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

### TEXT: 9:2-8

2. And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.
3. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.
4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?
5. For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?
6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.
7. And he arose, and departed to his house.
8. But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose so many theologians began to gather around Jesus on this occasion? Were they slowly becoming His disciples too?
- b. Why did Jesus declare first the forgiveness of the man's sins? Would it not have been better first to heal the man and then declare his sins forgiven? It certainly would not have scandalized the religious



leaders so drastically. What do you think about Jesus' method? What was He trying to accomplish by this abrupt approach? Did He not know that He would shock them by this method?

- c. Why did Jesus command the man to carry off his pallet?
- d. Why could not the four men have waited until Jesus finished teaching and dismissed the crowds? What was so important about their friend's illness that demanded that they interrupt Jesus' teaching?
- e. If the four men had had the opportunity to express their desire to Jesus regarding their sick friend, would they have been more likely to ask for healing for him or forgiveness? Why do you say that? If you think they would have asked for healing, then why does Jesus give them what they would not have requested? Is not He being a bit presumptuous?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

After several days He returned to Capernaum. On one of those days the news spread that He was at home, and so many people gathered together that there was soon no longer room for them even about the doorway. He was preaching the word to them. Now as He was teaching, there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting near Him. They had come from every town in Galilee and Judea, even from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was with Him to heal people.

Meanwhile, there came some men bringing to Him a paralytic lying on his pallet which was carried by four men. They were trying to bring him in to lay him down before Jesus. However, finding no way to get near Him on account of the crowd, they went up on the roof. They removed the roof above Him, and when they had dug an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralyzed man lay, down through the tiles into the midst of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, He addressed the paralytic, "Take courage, my son, your sins have been forgiven you."

At this some of the scribes and Pharisees who were sitting there began debating in their minds, saying to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming. Who is this blasphemer? Why is he talking this way? It is blasphemy! For who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Now Jesus, knowing their thoughts, realized in His spirit that they were reasoning in this fashion within themselves, answered them, "Why do you argue this way and think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say to a paralyzed man, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to tell him. Get up, take up your stretcher and begin walking?"

But, to make you know that the Son of man has on earth the right to forgive sins" (He then said to the paralyzed man) "Stand up, I tell you; pick up your pallet and return to your home!"

And immediately he stood up in their presence, took up the pallet he had been lying on, and went out in the sight of them all. He walked home, giving praise to God.

When the crowds saw what had happened, they were afraid, for astonished amazement seized them all. They began praising God who had granted such authority to men. They were filled with awe, saying, "We have never seen anything like this! We have seen wonderful things today!"

## SUMMARY

Jesus returned to Capernaum after His first general tour evangelizing Galilee. While teaching, He was the center of immediate attention, especially of investigating committees from all Palestine. Four friends of a paralytic show real ingenuity in placing their friend before Jesus. The Lord took the opportunity to demonstrate His divine prerogative to forgive sin, by showing Himself to possess power that only God could claim. This He did by healing the paralytic.

## NOTES

**9:2 And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy.** The brevity of Matthew here emphasizes the fact that he has sharpened this story down to the barest facts in order to set in sharp contrast just the major points. Mark and Luke, however, add the following details:

1. There were four men who carried the paralytic on a portable mattress or pallet-type bed, easily rolled up and carried over the shoulder.
2. The room in which Jesus sat teaching was packed with people, primarily the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from many cities. Secondly, other people jammed into all the rest of the available space, blocking all entrance to the house. This concentration of religious leaders around Jesus is probably no accident. This is a "congressional investigation" carried out by these recognized authorities in Israel. Certainly these rabbis had gathered at this time in Capernaum from as far away as Judea and Jerusalem! Considering the distance, we may conclude that they were not merely dropping in on Jesus after a Sunday afternoon

jaunt! They had probably walked the 75-100 miles to be here in Capernaum at this moment. Why? There is a revolution afoot, not only religious but possibly political, for all they knew about it. They were here to hear Jesus and arrive at some definite conclusion about Him: what is the general trend of His doctrine? What of His authority or right to teach? Where is His movement leading? What does He say about himself? For these reasons what occurs on this occasion becomes the more significant. Jesus is literally on trial before the leaders of Israel and He well knows that their report will be circulated throughout the higher echelons of the highest governing body of Judaism. One can not be too careful how he talks before such an august assembly. But observe well how Jesus comports Himself in their presence! Luke (5:17) records that "the power of the Lord was with Him to heal." Is this a simple, general statement, prefacing what is to follow or does this imply that other miracles had been wrought that day prior to the climactic cure of the paralytic? If the former, then it is made abundantly clear by Luke that Jesus' power to work miracles was not at all hindered by the critical disbelief of the opponents present. This incident, along with other similar situations, becomes the best kind of evidence that Jesus' miracles are historic fact, since they were done in the presence of enemies who had everything to gain by successfully disproving the reality of the miracle.

3. The four men, finding they could not enter by usual means, went up on the roof of the house. They either climbed the outside stairway leading to the flat roof, or else they went from roof to roof over the neighboring, contiguous houses until they stood above where Jesus was teaching. Then, by removing the roof tiles, they made an opening just above Jesus through which they lowered their friend into Jesus' presence.

Why did they not simply wait until Jesus' message was over and the crowds dismissed, before they brought their helpless friend to Jesus? These men's hearts were probably so burdened with the real need of their friend, that they were driven by the urgency to seize this precious opportunity to help him. Nothing else is said in the text of the seriousness or urgency of the man's condition, except the hurry of these his friends to take emergency measures to get help for him fast. Was his paralysis of such nature as to lead to heart stoppage and death? If so, it was now or never. Certainly, the one element that caused these men to overcome the practical obstacles, even the objection

that they should have waited until Jesus were free to help them, is their great faith in Jesus Christ as Healer. Such a One as He, could also be merciful about interruptions.

Though Jesus was concentrating all His efforts and attention upon teaching the word to this representative cross-section of His people, He did not regard the interruption, caused by the four men's de-tiling the roof above Him, as an unwelcome intrusion. As the event which follows indicates, He saw it as but the opportunity for perfect confirmation of the authority of His teaching. Also, since the entire event takes place in a private house (for this is the distinct impression given by Mark 2:1, 2), the entire situation was less formal than would be a synagogue service. Thus, the interruption would be less offensive, however unusual the method used by four men to make their need known.

**sick of the palsy** (*paralytikos*) Luke (5:18) follows better medical terminology, apparently, since he uses the more specific phrase "a man who was paralyzed," whereas the other two call him a **paralytic**. (See Plummer, *Luke, in loc.*) **Lying on a bed**: this oriental bed consisted of perhaps no more than a low mattress upon which the man was carried by his four friends, each one holding up a corner. For lowering the pallet into the presence of Jesus, they may have tied ropes to the four corners.

**Jesus, seeing their faith.** Mark and Luke tell in detail what hindered these intrepid friends of the paralytic and to what lengths they went to overcome these obstacles. **Jesus saw their faith** and was pleased. Their vivid, detailed planning which they dared execute is more eloquent than words. No great confessions or pious words were uttered. All three Gospel writers unite here in describing their deeds as **their faith**. Jesus apparently spoke first. Either the paralytic had no strength to utter his request for healing or else Jesus gave him no opportunity, his faith being so obvious. He had permitted himself to be laid before Jesus, regardless of the unusual method or the social or physical obstacles they must overcome. **Their faith** cheered Jesus too, because of the contrast to the unbelief and critical prejudices in the scribes and Pharisees in the room with Him.

**Jesus . . . said unto the sick of the palsy,** Again, Jesus may have spoken first in order to speak, not about the obvious disease of the man, but about forgiveness of sins. Jesus seizes here the initiative, temporarily taken from Him by the interruption caused by the four men's digging through the roof. Dust and small clods of dirt had been falling down on the Pharisees' fine robes and while they were

brushing themselves off, half laughing at the interruption Jesus' followers brought Him, half complaining at the disagreeable soiling of their clothes and warm air in the crowded room, Jesus graciously takes charge of the moment. He knows what He will ultimately do about the paralytic's disease, but He must speak first, before the request for healing is made, lest this cloud the issue He has chosen to bring before the critics in the room: His identity and consequent authority.

**Son**, or as some Greek texts have it in Mk. 2:5, **My son**, as well as **Man**, (Luke 5:20) all indicate that Jesus is being especially friendly, speaking in this kind, familiar way to the man lying helpless at His feet.

In the article *anthropos*, Arndt and Gingrich, 67, say that "in address *anthrope*, *friend*, indicates a close relationship between the speaker and the one addressed, Lk. 5:20." However it can also have a reproachful connotation, as well as express some familiarity between the one who uses it and the one addressed. (See Lk. 12:14; 22:58, 60.)

Jesus did not hold Himself aloof from sinners, as might the reverend doctors from Jerusalem seated around Him. He dared show his affection for these weak, helpless sinners who came to Him!

**Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.** Jesus saw more than their faith: He saw also the despair of a guilty conscience facing judgment. He saw the discouragement of an enslaved heart that has learned, through long experience of failure, to take sin for granted. With a gesture of loving tenderness, Jesus dealt with the man's greater need for forgiveness. **Your sins are forgiven.** This was no mere wish or description of some future pardon, but a declaration of fact. Jesus speaks as a kindly Father ("Son") and an acquitting Judge ("your sins are forgiven.") For the moment Jesus turns His full attention on this man, seemingly ignoring the scribes and others around Him, disregarding their attention almost as if it mattered not what they thought, while He took time to encourage and save this lost soul hanging between the hospital and hell. The urgency with which the man was brought suggests that his paralysis was critical and could become fatal if not helped immediately. If so, this man, staring death and judgment in the face, needed pardon before God, even if he were NEVER healed! Jesus gave him both pardon and healing!

Why did Jesus address the man first in relationship to his sins, and not rather regarding the healing of his paralysis? Because a man who is right with God and KNOWS it certainly, can endure all manner

of suffering and waiting. (Consider 2 Cor. 12:5-10) He can even face death calmly, though horribly paralyzed, because he knows that death in God's grace is his final freedom and highest joy. But a man who is merely healed but not forgiven before God does not share this certainty, until he makes it right with God. But why had not Jesus forgiven other people before He healed them prior to this occasion? Why begin here? Why not forgive, then heal, in every case? There had been many other opportunities to say it before now. It is obvious that Jesus has a special purpose at this time and place:

1. Jesus deliberately brought up the question of forgiveness for clarification and teaching. He must communicate the message to men that He has authority on earth to forgive sins. This is as good a time as any to start telling them. But this fact, that He must clarify this doctrine for the scribes, must not obscure the greater truth that He was helping the sinner who had the need.
2. Jesus needed, in the nature of evidence, just such occasions to connect His claims to divine prerogatives with demonstrations that verify His claims as true. He had come to earth, not to work miracles, but to identify Himself as the Forgiver of sins.
3. The fact that Jesus mentioned forgiveness in place of a declaration of the healing of the paralytic must not be taken to mean that Jesus sees a direct and necessary causal connection between one's individual sickness, disease or death, and his personal sins. Even though Jesus declared the man's sins forgiven, he was not immediately healed. A discussion about Jesus' alleged blasphemy intervened before the man was casually released from his paralysis.

However, it is true that in SOME cases diseases are directly attributable to a course of indulgence in certain sins or vicious practices, as for example, intemperate eating and drink, fornication or any other misuse of the body. (See Ro. 1:24-27; I Co. 6:13-18) If this is the case with this paralytic, then Jesus removes whatever fears the paralytic may have had that Jesus would not help so great a sinner. The Lord speaks forgiveness to his soul, a far greater need than mere freedom from his paralysis.

One may well doubt whether the man's paralysis be caused by a consciousness of guilt, even though psychosomatic paralysis is not impossible. One may doubt the psychosomatic connection, since Jesus' argument is based on the evidence presented through a real healing uniquely produced by the instantaneous exercise of the power of God. But, even if the man's paralysis were 100% psychologically based, still the obvious instantaneity of his total

cure, without weeks of consultations and therapy, is miraculous, in the supernatural sense of the word.

And even if all the rabbis in Palestine had taught, as some of them actually did (see citations by Barclay, *Matthew*, I, 334), that there is no sickness without some transgression back of it, is it necessary for Jesus to accomodate Himself to that view, in order to deal with this paralytic whose personal views may have been influenced by that thinking? (Cf. Jn. 9:1-3) While it is true that Jesus dealt with men in their own situation and culture, yet it is not necessary to conceive of Him as leaving men in this belief, if He knew it were not true. While it is true that disease and death are in the world because of sin (Ro. 5:12), yet we err greatly in presuming to describe as sinners everyone whom we find personally afflicted, as if God had smitten them on the basis of the greatness of their sins. If this paralyzed man has been attacked by some malady that is paralyzing him, then there may be no direct connection between his present condition and specific, past sins. A person who is bitten by a poisonous spider or serpent is not morally responsible for the physical results that ensue.

Whatever Jesus' reasons may have been, the scribes' personal views certainly affected their understanding of Jesus' words. Barclay (I, 334) notes:

Rabbi Alexander said, "The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven . . . Rabbi Chija ben Abba said, 'No sick person is cured from sickness, until all his sins are forgiven him.' This unbreakable connection between suffering and sin was part of the orthodox Jewish belief of the time of Jesus. . . . Now remember that these scribes believed that no one could get up and walk unless his sins were forgiven. If Jesus was able to make this man get up and walk, then that was unanswerable proof that the man's sins were forgiven, and that Jesus' claim was true.

**9:3 And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, this man blasphemeth.** If they had been surprised at the intrusion, and disgusted by the discomfort of dust falling down into the room around them, and contemptuous at Jesus' common familiarity with the paralytic, this is all forgotten in the greater shock caused by Jesus' claim to forgive sins. Not only is this a surprise to the Jewish scholars present, since the Mosaic law of pardon was then in vigor. But this would surprise Jesus' closest disciples also, since this is apparently the first of very few times in Jesus' personal ministry when

He pronounced a person forgiven. (See Lk. 7:48; 23:43). We moderns can share this sense of shock only to the extent that we have learned to feel deeply the horror for and heinousness of blasphemy. This depends upon the depth of our jealousy for God's honor. But Jesus' purpose for risking this jolting of the conscience of all present is clear and necessary (9:6a). Jesus could have eased tensions by simply healing the man without a word about forgiveness. The oppositions and anger He aroused might have been avoided. But Jesus must reveal the astounding truth that the whole human race has Someone who understands them perfectly, whose perfect life condemns all their sins, but whose divine prerogatives qualify Him to bring forgiveness and righteousness to all who trust Him. This is truth in which not only that generation was interested, but which all honest men have longed to hear. And, best of all, Jesus announced this truth "in the presence of those most interested in exposing it, if false, and most able to explode it, had it not been true. Whether His words were truth or blasphemy, was the controversy between Christ and the rulers from that day to the end of His Ministry, Mt. 26:65." (McGarvey *Fourfold Gospel*, 186)

**The scribes said within themselves.** See on 9:4

**This man blasphemeth.** This secret declaration of their consciences signalled the beginning of the scribes' hostility and opposition to Jesus. The criticisms developed into open confrontations in five specific areas:

1. Alleged blasphemy: here
2. Having common fellowship with people with whom no self-respecting rabbi would ever be found: (Mt. 9:11; Lk. 7:36-50)
3. Neglect of traditional religion with its ascetic practices, such as the ablutions (Mt. 15:1-20); the fasts (Mt. 9:14-17)
4. Violation of the sabbath: (Jn. 5:15-18; Mt. 12:1-14)
5. Being in league with Satan: (Mt. 9:34; 12:22-45)

Although from a Jewish standpoint, all these charges were serious enough, it was this charge of blasphemy for which they crucified the Lord. (See Mt. 26:63-66)

There are two means of blasphemy: direct, by which one calls God unjust or unholy, or disparages anything that speaks of the sovereign majesty of God; or indirect, by which one holds anything or anyone as equal with God, hence, placing oneself in the place of God, or assuming any of His unique prerogatives. Thus, Jesus deserved to die, if He were not the very incarnation of God Himself! The Jews were right in their attack. Their horror in the presence of this apparently common human being, who lays claim to one of God's unique



rights, is proper. But when they refuse the evidence that He **IS** the Son of God, then **THEY** become the blasphemers. But their horror was not so innocent as it may seem at first glance. Their contempt is unwarranted, since all Jesus' other miracles should have identified Him to them as possessing this right without further proof. **This man**, on the lips of these accusers, is decidedly emphatic: "Who does this guy think He is anyway?" (Cf. Lk. 4:22; 7:39, 49; 9:9; 14:30; 15:2; Jn. 9:33 for other emphatic uses of *houtos*, "this one, this fellow, this man.")

The Pharisees arrived at this conclusion through a syllogism perhaps similar to this one:

Major Premise: "No man can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus of Nazareth is not God in any sense."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is blaspheming God in arrogating to himself authority to forgive sins, a prerogative which is God's alone."

Their major premise is a right principle. (Isa. 43:25; 44:22 etc.) The fundamental question lay in the minor premise: is Jesus God in any sense that affects the truth of His claim to forgive sins? For the correction of this false conclusion drawn by the Jews, see on 9:5, where Jesus' argument shows the fallacy of their minor premise and conclusion.

**9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said.** Several factors combine to lead us to the unshakeable conviction that Jesus supernaturally perceived the content of their mind. While the probability is great that anyone could have read the minds of these scribes, given the knowledge of their views on blasphemy and the overt expressions on their face and perhaps the tearing of their garments, yet the capacity to divulge with unerring accuracy what had not been said is an obvious miracle of omniscience. At first view Luke (5:21) gives the impression that at least some of the scribes expressed their thoughts openly in words, which are, in fact, reported by all three Evangelists. Or is Luke's expression to be interpreted in light of the supposedly fuller statements reported by the other two? This is the case here, for, as Plummer (*Luke*, 155) demonstrates, *légontes*, "saying," may be used of thoughts, even when not uttered. (See Lk. 12:17; Mt. 21:25) So, if we conclude that the scribes said nothing about what was going on in their minds, although they were deeply agitated, this event identifies Jesus as God who knows men's hearts, come in the flesh. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; I Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 6:30; Ezek. 11:5; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24; Rev. 2:23; Jn. 2:24, 25) While Jesus did not here directly claim

omniscience, yet he challenged their thoughts with such pointed reference to them, that had this not been the direction of their thoughts, the scribes could have objected to Jesus' misrepresentation of their reaction to His words. No such objection is recorded. Rather:

1. Matthew and Mark describes the objectors as "saying to themselves" or "questioning in their hearts."
2. All three Evangelists picture Jesus as "knowing their thoughts," or as perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves," or "perceiving their questionings."
3. Jesus did locate openly the place where their evil thoughts and questionings arose: "in your hearts," a fact cited by all three Gospel writers.

This power to pronounce with certainty the hidden, innermost thoughts of the human mind, qualifies Jesus as the perfect Judge, not only of the Pharisees and scribes whose hearts He has just laid bare before them all, but He, as Judge, can acquit the paralytic too!

**Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?** The scribes' conclusion was not illogical, granted the premises. But they refused to admit the evidence which would have corrected their minor premise and led them to a different conclusion. Their reasoning was *evil*, not merely faulty or incorrect, since it was produced by hearts bent upon rejecting evidence, bent upon destroying Jesus. Jesus' question, therefore, challenges the motivations and purposes behind their rejection of His deity. These hidden reasons for their objections were morally indefensible. And their objections lay in their own pre-conceived notions about what God's Messiah had to be like. The evil lay in adhering to these prejudices rather than follow the clear evidence He had so faithfully and continuously presented of His divine right.

Note that Jesus does not object to the right principle upon which the theologians state their case. He respected their zeal for God's honor, by claiming to forgive sins, not in His right but upon God's authority. He tacitly admits that they are right in affirming that anyone who would presume to forgive sins on his own authority would be guilty of blasphemy. As we follow Jesus' method of argument, we see that if He had claimed to forgive this man's sins, without God's authority to do so, He Himself would be what they had claimed, a blasphemer. The fact that He virtually accepts their way of stating the case, makes His further declarations and proof of His right so much stronger.

**9:5 For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?** The twice repeated expression

to say, is the key to Jesus' meaning. Even though Jesus asks which is **easier** to claim, His obvious intention is to place both claims on the same level, because both statements are ridiculous claims for the man who can do neither. Both claims demand the identical power and authority of God, before either can be seriously meant. Jesus is not asking which is the easier to do, but which is easier to claim. Naturally, the **easier to claim** is to forgive sins, for none can examine any external, visible evidence that proves it. But to claim to heal a paralytic is capable of visible, immediate verification. It is here that the real test of Jesus' authority will lie, if He can demonstrate through this latter claim that He is God and possesses therefore the proper and personal authority to forgive sins. This He proceeds to do, because, even though He has proven it over and over again, Jesus would not ask these present to believe without evidence. They must have a rational ground on which to rest their faith in His word. Though they have more than enough evidence to convince the honest heart, mercifully Jesus gives them more. But this is not simply more evidence, since it is inextricably linked with His majestic claim to forgive sins here on earth.

9:6 **But that you may know**, i.e. with the specific purpose of making my authority clear and obvious to you. Here Jesus draws the direct, immediate connection between His works and His claims. (See Jn. 10:38; 14:10, 11) **that the Son of man** (See Notes on 8:20) This use of this title by Jesus forms the conclusive proof that Jesus does not intend thereby to identify Himself with mankind, in the sense of making the title equivalent to "man" or "Everyman," as opposed to "Son of God." The authority to forgive sins does not belong to men. Jesus uses this title in its true Messianic sense, determined from Daniel (7:13, 14). For fuller notes on "Son of man," see also Plummer (*Luke*, 156, 157).

**But that you may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.** Jesus establishes hereby His entire claim to the possession of personal authority to forgive sins on the reality of this miracle. In effect, He was saying to His critics: "You presume that it is a safe, easy thing for me to pretend that I can forgive sins, since no one on earth can verify whether, when I address this paralytic, saying, 'Your sins are forgiven,' they are actually pardoned or not. So, let me provide you a test that you can verify. You know that only a person possessing God's full authority could say to this paralyzed man, 'Rise and walk,' with the result that he be actually healed, in exactly the same way

that it really demands God's authority to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' with the result that he has the certainty that God really has forgiven him. Now, if a physical cure of his paralysis takes place when I say to him, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home, then you can be certain that when I say to him, 'Your sins have been pardoned,' his forgiveness is a reality. In which case, of course, I am not guilty of blasphemy, as you charge. On the contrary, my high claim to God's authority shall be vindicated."

The logic of Jesus' argument may be stated like this:

Major Premise (tacitly): "No man but God can heal paralysis with a word of power."

Minor Premise (demonstration): "But I have power on earth to heal paralysis with a word of power."

Conclusion: "I possess on earth the authority of God to heal paralysis."

This conclusion becomes the minor premise of further argument:

Major Premise: "None can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But I have shown that I possess God's authority."

Conclusion: "Therefore, I have power on earth to forgive sins."

Or, the alternative, implicit reasoning arrives at the same conclusion:

Major Premise: "Only those who pretend to divine prerogative without right or authority are guilty of blasphemy."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus has demonstrated by this miracle that He does possess the proper right or authority to exercise divine prerogatives."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is not guilty of Blasphemy."

**Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.** There could be no bolder challenge than this. It is at this point that Jesus' claim to the right to exercise divine prerogatives stands or falls. If the paralytic can do what Jesus says, then his forgiveness is real. Jesus healed the man, not merely because He was anxious to vindicate Himself, but out of great tenderness and mercy He felt for the man's need. Instantly He healed him, that the people might have the required evidence upon which they could base their trust in Him.

**9:7 And he arose, and departed to his house.** That settles the question. One fact is worth more than a thousand theories. Luke (5:25) reports the man as arising immediately on the presence of the people. Then he probably rolled up his pallet and walked through the amazed crowd. The point to be noticed is that Jesus knew with

unerring certainty exactly what would happen before anything took place. In one sense He was taking no chances, for with divine foresight He could see the paralyzed man arising even before He forgave him. But from a strictly human point of view, Jesus had taken an awful chance of losing everything He had won! Who but Jesus could have had the necessary knowledge? Who but Jesus could have had the power demanded to heal the paralytic? Who else could have given the required proof of His identity?

Whereas the man's friends could not even carry him into the house due to the crowd jammed into the doorways, now the astounded people open the way for him to leave. Luke (5:25) reports that this grateful ex-paralytic walked out glorifying God. Whereas the scribes had accused Jesus of blasphemy, this man had nothing but praise for God. Had he understood the connection between Jesus and God? Whatever he may have understood, his exuberant example of rejoicing and praise was contagious.

**9:8 But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.** This mixed reaction stands in perfect harmony with human nature and is psychologically sound, since these people felt their own sinfulness in the almost touchable presence of God. They knew they were standing in that no-man's land, that twilight zone between the natural world and the supernatural. They knew that this earth had just been invaded from outer space where they supposed God dwells. And they recognized the Invader as God, and they feared. Yet the joyful surprise and marvel of the seemingly impossible healing drew out of them this glorifying praise for the God they feared so near. They had heard Jesus pronounce that word which the honest heart of sinful mankind longs to hear more than any other. They had not believed Him. Rather they had concluded that He had blasphemed, saying something incapable of proving. They had questioned His right to say something they could not accept as truth. Now they had to reckon with the shock of truth breaking into their personality: they could not deny its reality without denying the dependability of their own senses with which they observed it. In response to this manifestation of God's presence seen among them, **they glorified God.** (Compare similar experiences of the Jews on mount Carmel as the fire fell from heaven after Elijah's prayer, 1 Kgs. 18:36-39, and Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch of fish with his own nets and boat, Lk. 5:8.)

**They glorified God,** saying in their amazement and awe, "We never saw anything like this—we have seen strange things today!" (Mk.

2:12; Lk. 5:26) They had seen things transcending ordinary human experience and reason: sins forgiven, omniscience and healing of paralysis. But they had also seen the greatest difference between Christ's religion and the message of all other isms: while all other philosophies glorify and save the fittest through survival of all natural forces or through perseverance in progression through an infinite number of stages or steps or through the endless accumulation of an undefined number of merits or, to sum them all up, while all other systems "save" the powerful, the good and the worthy, the greater glory of Jesus' mission lay in His stooping to concentrate divine attention upon the lowly, the sinful, the poor, the weak, the damned. He brought forgiveness within reach of all. And this miracle proved it! The crowd is convinced that the charge has been disproved and that Jesus is acting with the full authority of God. What effect this miracle produced in the theologians present is not mentioned in the text, but it may be suggested from their growing opposition on later occasions that they remained unconvinced.

**God who had given such authority unto men.** Though Matthew does not cite the words of the crowd directly, it is probable that he is quoting the content of their praise, even as Mark and Luke cite directly their words: McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 82) well says: "It was to the **man**, Jesus, that the power was given, and to **men** only as He was contemplated as one of the race." These people were honest enough to admit that God had actually granted such authority to Jesus. His claim was vindicated in their eyes.

What does this miracle prove about Jesus? It proves that Jesus has the right to speak with all the authority of God. It means that He can be relied upon to speak authoritatively the message of God. It means that we must accept Jesus' word provided by this miracle and we do not need to ask for more miracles to back up everything else He may affirm. It means that we may be 100% certain that what we had asked of God, i.e. forgiveness, we may now ask of Jesus of Nazareth, for He is God come in person to tell us that He is the real Ruler who is able to present us without spot or blemish before God, forgiven, pardoned, cleansed, fit for fellowship with God.

### COMPARE

For a similar case which touches this narrative at several points, see the healing of the paralytic in Jerusalem. (Jn. 5:1ff.) Edersheim (*Life*, I, 500) suggests the following interesting points of similarity:

1. "The unspoken charge of the Scribes, that in forgiving sins

Jesus blasphemed by making Himself equal with God, has its exact counterpart in the similar charge against Him in St. John 5:18, which kindled in them the wish to kill Jesus;

2. "as in that case the final reply of Jesus pointed to 'the authority' (*exousia*) which the Father had given Him for Divine administration on earth, (Jn. 5:27), so the healing of the paralytic was to show the Scribes that He had 'authority' (*exousia*) for the dispensation upon earth of the forgiveness of sins, which the Jews rightly regarded as a Divine prerogative.
3. "the words which Jesus spake to the paralytic . . . are to the very letter the same . . ."
4. "alike in the words which Jesus addressed to the Scribes at the healing of the paralytic, and in those at the Unknown Feast, He made final appeal to His works as evidential of His being sent by, and having received of, the Father 'the authority' to which He laid claim." (Jn. 5:36; cf. Mk. 2:10)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Locate this incident in the chronological history given by Mark and Luke. When did this miracle occur during Jesus ministry?
2. Identify the city meant by Matthew when he used the cryptic expression "His own city." Prove your answer.
3. Describe the situation on this occasion, borrowing materials from Mark and Luke, which give clarity to the situation here narrated by Matthew. In other words, explain why it was necessary for the four men to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus in the exact manner they used.
4. What more important need did this man have than the cure of his paralysis?
5. State the evidences of Jesus' deity expressed in this passage.
6. What kind of bed did the four men hoist up on the roof? How did they manage to get the friend into the presence of Jesus? What was hindering them?
7. Is there any evidence in the narratives of this miracle that the paralytic himself expressed any faith in Jesus? If so, what is the evidence?
8. What did Jesus see, when, as the Gospel writers put it, "He saw their faith"? What was visible about so invisible a quality as faith?
9. What was the effect of the miracle on the crowds present?
10. State the response of Jesus to the expression of faith on the part

of the four men who had brought their friend. What did Jesus actually say?

11. What was the response made by the Pharisees and theologians to Jesus' declaration? Express the principles behind their assertions about Jesus' declaration. Though you may disallow their application to Jesus, justify their conclusion when applied to anyone else who said what Jesus said. Quote Jesus' answer to their complaint.
12. Show the conclusiveness of Jesus' rebuttal of the theologians' conclusion. Explain the relationship between what Jesus said and the miracle He performed in the presence of these people.
13. What did Jesus mean by the expression: "authority on earth to forgive sins"?
14. Explain why these "reverend doctors from Jerusalem" were even present on this occasion. What was their special interest in Jesus' message and ministry?
15. What kind of roof do Mark and Luke describe the house as having, wherein Jesus sat with the crowd of people? What does this fact have to do with the event itself?

## Section 19

### JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI

(Parallels: Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:27-39)

#### TEXT: 9:9-17

9. And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.
10. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?
12. But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.
13. But go ye and learn what *this* meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.
14. Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?
15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber



mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.

16. And no man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.
17. Neither do *men* put new wine into old wine-skins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. We all know how important it is to choose our friends with care. The more important the person, the more care he must exercise in the selection of his friends. On what possible basis, then, how can Jesus be justified for being intimate with the riff-raff of Jewish society? A man is known by the company he keeps. Yet, ironically, how does this very fact identify Jesus as the finest of men ever known?
- b. Why do you think Jesus chose to call such a man as Matthew to be an Apostle? Would not He have run too great a risk to call a publican?
- c. How is it possible for Hosea to declare that God did not really care for sacrifices, since it was mercy He wanted? After all, had not God originally ordered that the sacrifices be given? What could Hosea mean that reflects not only God's original command but also the true purpose behind the law of sacrifice?
- d. Do you feel that Jesus' hobnobbing with sinners justifies a man in seeking bad company? In what way would he be right in so doing?
- e. Can you give a possible reason why the Pharisees and legal experts were on the scene when Jesus went to the dinner party with Matthew? Had they been invited too?
- f. Paul says (Romans 3:10-18, 23) that there are none who are righteous and that all are sinners. Who, then, are those whom Jesus describes as "righteous"? Are there some "righteous" persons on earth whom Jesus did not need to call to repentance?
- g. Do you think the disciples of John the Baptist were criticizing Jesus? On what basis?
- h. What effect would Jesus' cryptic declaration have on the Apostles when He said, "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast"?

- i. Do you think that we too should fast? Why? Under what circumstances.
- j. Does it not seem to you that the call of Matthew to follow Jesus was a little abrupt? On what basis is it possible to comprehend Matthew's instant, deliberate response?
- k. Why would Matthew invite Jesus to the dinner party in his own house?
- l. Why would Matthew have invited also all his old cronies, when he knew that the pure Jesus of Nazareth would be there? What possible purpose could he have for making this social blunder? Or was it a blunder?
- m. If you decide that fasting is something a follower of Jesus can do today, do you feel that fasting is a ceremony to be observed regularly, or should the circumstances in which you find yourself determine your choice?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus was passing on away from the seashore where He had taught the gathered crowd, He saw a man, a tax collector, named Matthew Levi, son of Alphaeus. Matthew was busy at the tax office, but Jesus invited him, "Come, be my disciple."

Matthew left the whole business, stood up and went along with Jesus.

Later, Matthew made Him a large banquet in his home. While the Lord was at his house as dinner guest, there was a large number of Matthew's old cronies, sinners and other people who came as guests. They all sat down with Jesus and His followers, for there was also a large group who came with Him.

Now when the Pharisees and their legal experts saw that Jesus sat there enjoying dinner with such notorious sinners, they murmured against Jesus' disciples, "How can you and your rabbi enjoy the fellowship of such scum?"

When Jesus heard what they were saying, He argued: "People who are well do not need a doctor, just sick folk do. You go study what this Bible text means (Hosea 6:6): 'It is not just your sacrifices that I want—I want you to learn to be merciful! And besides, why should I spend my time trying to get the 'righteous' to turn from their sins? It is the SINNERS who need my help!'"

Now the disciples of John the Baptist as well as the Pharisees fasted regularly each week. So the disciples of John approached Jesus with the query: "Why do we regularly go without food to spend time in

prayer? The Pharisees and their disciples do it too. But your followers, what do they do? They wine and dine!"

Then Jesus responded like this, "You cannot make the wedding guests go without food or be sad during the wedding festivities, can you? No, with the bridegroom present, it would be out of place for that. The time will arrive when the groom will be taken away from them. Then it would be appropriate for them to refuse to eat."

He illustrated His point with this parable: "Who would tear a piece from a new suit of clothes and sew it on a worn-out garment? If he does, he will tear the new material, and the new piece would not match the old anyway. In a similar way, no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, because if he does, the new patch rips away from the old cloth and you have a bigger hole than before.

"Neither should you store freshly pressed grape juice in old goat-skin bottles. If you do, the pressure of the expanding new wine will burst the skins. The wine gets spilled and so is lost and you have destroyed the skin bottles too. No, new wine must be stored in new, flexible wineskins. That way, both are preserved.

"No one who is accustomed to drinking vintage wines calls for this year's wine. 'The old,' he claims, 'is pleasant; it suits me.'"

## SUMMARY

Leaving the seashore where He had been teaching the multitudes, Jesus passed by Matthew-Levi's tax office and called him to intimate discipleship. Matthew, in turn, responded joyfully by giving a huge farewell dinner party for his former associates. Jesus' friendly fellowship with this level of society aroused the criticism of the Jewish Puritans, the Pharisees, but Jesus defended His ministry among such sinners as absolutely essential.

The disciples of John the Baptist too were scandalized that Jesus and His followers paid little of any attention to the traditional fasting practices. Again Jesus defended His practice and views as being so new and different in nature from the old system that John's disciples hoped to purify, that one would do violence to both systems to try to mix them. Jesus concluded by warning them about being prejudiced against the new ideas by thinking the old ways to be better.

## NOTES

### A. THE CALL OF MATTHEW

This account of the call of Matthew to close companionship with Jesus, following as it does upon the foregoing account of Jesus' divine

right on earth to forgive sins, is in its proper logical place. Jesus' call of him who, in the minds of popular Judaism, was a most flagrant sinner, is a thrilling exercise of Jesus' power to forgive sins and transform a man.

**9:9 And as Jesus passed by from thence . . .** Between the astounding narration of Jesus' proven ability to forgive sins on earth, demonstrated by His instantaneous cure of the paralytic lowered through the roof, and this record of Matthew's call, Mark (2:13) and Luke (5:27a) both report that Jesus left the crowded house in which that cure occurred. Perhaps it was precisely because of the pressing crowds that He went outdoors, in order to have more space. As He had done on other occasions, He led the people to the Capernaum wharf, where He could speak to them all with greater facility. Apparently, when Jesus had finished His discourse before these people, He dismissed them and walked directly toward the toll office of Matthew.

**He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll.** This could be the most beautiful sentence in the New Testament and the most incredible declaration in all of Jewish literature! Jesus, the mover of multitudes, could see the individual, Matthew. Levi was no mere number to the Lord, no "warm body" whose living personality could be ignored. How many times had thousands of other Jews passed by that same toll office without ever seeing this human being called Matthew sitting there? How often had their own awareness of his hated occupation caused them to shun him deliberately, turning their head the other way, pretending not to have seen him? But Jesus saw Matthew as he was and loved him. We too must learn to see people, not for the clothes they wear, the position they occupy, the relationships they represent to us. This latter only hides the individuality of that person. We must see the man or woman as human beings in need of God. We must see, as Jesus saw Matthew, the individual possibilities they have to grow into the image of God. Jesus was not afraid that the moral filth and contamination, of which the Pharisees were so afraid, would cause Him to lose His own purity. Nor should we withhold help for fear of contamination from those to whom Jesus felt irresistibly drawn. Jesus was not deceived by a contact with Matthew elsewhere, for He saw Matthew precisely as he was, engaged in his universally despised occupation.

**Sitting at the place of toll.** For detailed bibliographies on *publicans place of toll, etc.*, see encyclopedic articles and special studies, especially Edersheim, *Sketches*, 51ff.; *Life*, I, 515-517; *ISBE*, 2920a, b, 2921a,

Arndt-Gingrich, 820 on *telōnēs*. The official position of the tax official in Jewish social life, regardless of the education, wealth or power of the individual who exercised that office, was despicable beyond belief for those unaware of the peculiar religio-political situation that existed in Palestine during this period. Religiously, the Jews owned no king but God and to Him alone should they bring proper tribute. (Though for convenience' sake, they acted otherwise more often than not, as for example, Jn. 19:15; yet their religious ideal was this.) Politically, they were a small political unit of the Roman empire to which they owed tribute, custom, and duty. Although in a period previous to the Roman imperial era, the taxes were collected by wealthy men who purchased from the Greek kings the right to collect them (see, for example Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII, 4, 1-4), under the empire "the direct taxes were not farmed out, but collected by regular imperial officers in the regular routine of official duty. The customs or tolls levied upon exports and imports, and upon goods passing through the country, were sold to the highest bidders, who were called 'publicans'" (*ISBE*, 2920b). Even though the publicans themselves were apparently not Roman officials, they possessed all the authority of Rome behind their exactions. As a Jew, the publican was viewed as a traitor to his nation and to God, because of his willingness to collaborate in this way with a pagan, foreign conqueror. Worse still, the Roman system encouraged greed and graft by selling the right to collect taxes at auction, from which the publican repaid himself for his work and risk involved by collecting all he could. The tax collectors naturally enriched themselves at the expense of their own nation. The indefinite rate of taxation plus the exaggerated and arbitrary value placed upon goods by the publicans rendered their position indescribably odious to all other Jews.

Scripture notices of the publicans reveal in passing in what light they were considered in Jesus' time: they were typically selfish (Mt. 5:46, 47). They were classed on a par with heathens (Mt. 18:17), prostitutes (Mt. 21:31) and other notorious outcasts (Mt. 9:10, 11:19; Lk. 18:11). Even though Jesus Himself viewed them as people to be loved and saved, yet His use of popular language in regard to the publicans reveals profoundly in what light they were viewed by the majority of the people before whom Jesus used this language.

**And He saith unto him, Follow me.** Matthew knew that Jesus could have found plenty of other, respectable men who had no

embarrassing past to live down. Jesus could have eased tensions between Himself and the "orthodox" by selecting His disciples more discreetly. By Pharisaic principles, Jesus should have prudently passed right on past Matthew, but He chose not to. These two words of invitation are Jesus' deliberate demonstration of His determination to show what He could do with a man completely surrendered to Him, regardless of background or lack of previous religious virtue. Jesus intended to take this dull, rough, crude, sinful man and help him to be transformed into His own image. Jesus could see Matthew as he could become, so invited him to follow. Jesus could see in Matthew more than Matthew himself dared dream; because He was seeing "the possibilities in personality." Jesus knew the man that Levi might become, quite as well as the man Levi already was. It was Jesus' unshakeable faith in the better Matthew that became the power to make Matthew die to be that better man! He was literally calling this man to greatness. The tragic question that renders them the more guilty is how many times had Jesus offered the same invitation to the Pharisees?

**And he arose and followed Him.** This was the vital difference between Matthew and the Pharisees: he could properly evaluate this invitation. He responded differently from the Pharisees precisely because he was a different man. He had endured hate from his fellow Jews for years. He knew that he had sold out to the Romans for this well-paying job, but all he had earned in human relations, of which are made the real treasure of life, was the contempt and snubbing of his own people. He had felt the power of greed, cruelty, gouging and cheating in his own heart. Sick of soul, Matthew does not surprise us by responding this way. And yet, Matthew's own will could have hindered all that followed this moment, for, as Morgan (*Matthew*, 92) points out, Jesus could offer the highest invitation of heaven, but He stood limited before the surprising reality that a man can say, No.

Matthew could gratefully appreciate how much it cost Jesus to involve Himself with such as Matthew. But this publican had never witnessed a man sacrifice his reputation like this before. This customs agent could never have dared hope for such personal recognition, much less could he hope to be called to personal companionship with Jesus and Apostleship! How long had he been a secret admirer of the Prophet from Nazareth?

One interesting problem is noted and adequately handled by Bruce (*Training*, 22), i.e. why and how Matthew should respond to Jesus' invitation so promptly without any apparent or at least recorded psychological preparation. The Gospels

give the impression of abruptness surrounding Matthew's call, as if Matthew had not known Jesus quite well previously. Two factors combine to suggest very strongly that this acquaintance actually existed:

1. The call of other Apostles is surrounded by the same sort of abruptness, whereas we know that several of them had been previously acquainted with Jesus. (See on 4:18-22) As Bruce (*op cit.*) notes, "The truth is that, in regard to both calls, the evangelists concerned themselves only about the *crisis*, passing over in silence all preparatory stages, and not deeming it necessary to inform intelligent readers that, of course, neither the publican nor any other disciple blindly followed one of whom he knew nothing, merely because asked or commanded to follow."

2. Considering Jesus' close connection with the city of Capernaum, His mighty works done and repeated before a grateful and at first, responsive populace, and remembering that Matthew probably lived and worked in Capernaum, we conclude that Jesus and Matthew had been fellow-citizens of Capernaum and could well have known each other. It would have been more psychologically improbable to believe that Matthew had never heard of Him. (See on Mt. 11:23).

Had he had business relationships with the fishermen and shipowners among the Apostles? Had he been watching the growing opposition to Jesus' ministry? Or had he failed to notice the fact that Jesus seemed always to be surrounded by common sinners like himself? Could not this fact have encouraged Levi to leave his table on various occasions to slip in at the back of the crowds to hear Jesus personally? But when Jesus came right up to his table, placed before him this invitation to destiny, it took not even a moment's deliberation to make that decision that forever sealed his future and gave to the world Jesus' first publican-Apostle. As Edersheim paints him, "His soul was in the speechless surprise of unexpected love and grace; but he rose up, left the custom-house and followed Him"!

**And he arose and followed,** The significant omission of the word "immediately" allows us to surmise that Matthew first settled his accounts, closed out his books and turned over his responsibilities to others. His good rapport with publicans later indicates that he did not leave them embarrassed by his absence. While he may well

have concluded his work to leave all to follow Jesus, why did he rise up to readily?

1. Was it because he still retained influences of a godly upbringing? Is his deep knowledge and use of the Old Testament shown later in his Gospel, only the result of supernatural inspiration, or was it the result of a proper godly training, from which he in mid-life badly strayed in search of wealth?
2. Or was he reflecting a deep, personal dissatisfaction with a life, which from its beginning had been empty, shallow, hopeless? Had he realized the depth of his desperate condition as a sinner, depicted so well by Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, 41)? "The broken intentions, the wasted dreams, the splintered personality, the poisoned mind, and the calloused heart—it added up to a loathesome, hopeless case."
3. Or was Matthew simply a better man than the average publican?

Whatever his preparation to be called by Jesus, Matthew responded, leaving a comfortable job and the security of a good income for a life of destiny, adventure, peace and joy. His talent was turned to serve in composing one of the most extensive records of Jesus' teaching ministry that has ever come down to us.

## B. THE CONCERN OF MATTHEW

9:10 **And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house . . .** Modestly, Matthew omits details that would glorify himself, reserving himself only to the barest facts. However, Mark and Luke describe the arrangements Matthew prepared in his own house:

1. Levi made "a great feast" (Lk. 5:29), such as one would expect a former publican, probably wealthy, to be able to give. Nothing is spared to make this moment a memorable occasion for all who hear of it.
2. Levi made "Him" a great feast: Luke is affirming (5:29) that Matthew arranged this banquet for Jesus Himself, in His honor.
3. All Synoptic writers agree in the large number of guests, not only Jesus and many disciples that followed Him (Mk. 2:15), but also "a large company of tax collectors and others" (Lk. 5:29).

Notice the elaborate plans carried out by this one repentant publican. His conversion must have caused quite a sensation in Capernaum! After all, here is a wealthy but notorious publican suddenly called



away from his occupation to leave everything to enter the companionship of the most truly holy Rabbi people in Capernaum had ever known. All who heard about it would wonder not only at the readiness of Levi's response and the completeness of his change, but also the purpose behind Jesus' unusual choice.

Apparently Matthew planned this feast with the specific purpose of introducing Jesus to all his former associates. He cared enough to invite all his old cronies to a feast where the issue of his own former life and present association could be faced head-on. Certainly Matthew invited his friends to the feast: who else COULD he invite? This is the reason the guest-list contained so many publicans' names. But why, in re-telling his story, does Matthew use this particular expression: **many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus?** Is this a fixed phrase in popular Jewish speech, or is he writing with tongue in cheek, preparing the mind of the reader for the hypocritical question of the Pharisees which follows? Or, by saying, **publicans and sinners**, is he revealing the purpose of his own heart? The men he invited are sinners like himself. This former lover of gain has begun to act like his Lord; he has become a lover of souls, immediately doing all he can to bring his fellow sinners under the influence of Jesus' voice.

It took great insight on Matthew's part to have been able to plan in precisely this way, knowing surely that he could bring his friends to Jesus in this way that would be perfectly in harmony with Jesus' character. C. E. B. Reed comments: (*Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, XXII, 224)

One can see that Matthew had already studied to good purpose his Lord's character.

- I. First of all he perceived that he could best serve Him, not by eating and drinking alone in His presence, but by inviting the outcasts of society and befriending them for the sake of Him who made their cause His own.
- II. He invited to the feast his own associates. Many men would have forsworn the class from which they had been called and sought some new field of benevolence; whereas he does not disown his publican comrades, but selects them as earliest recipients of his bounty.
- III. He recognized that the best thing he could do for them was to bring them into contact with Jesus. Instead of going among them and talking about his new Master, he

wisely brought them face to face with Him whose teaching he could not match for breadth or power.

- IV. This intercourse between Christ and the publicans Matthew contrived to bring about by means of an entertainment. He knew well that most of them would never come to hear a formal discourse from the Lord, but that meat and drink would open their hearts to receive the scattered seeds of His teaching . . .

Note that Matthew's call to become Jesus' personal disciple had not turned his head. He could still see his old friends. He was still interested in them, still loved them, though he had made a definite break with his old life among them. See how he reflects that new love from Him who loved Matthew as no other! Is not this repentance at its best?

### C. THE CRITICISM OF MATTHEW'S MASTER

9:11 **And when the Pharisees saw it.** What were THEY doing there? It is not too likely that they had come to the feast of publicans in order to take part! Storm clouds of opposition to Jesus' ministry had already begun to form, because Jesus had already begun to succeed at the very business He had come to earth to do. These critics would never have bothered criticizing Him, were He not making real headway. His was a movement that was going somewhere—it was alive. Nobody bothers to criticize something that is all but dead. Nor were they particularly interested in Matthew, one of the "sinners" with whom Jesus ate. What these eagle-eyed censors were after was Jesus. Matthew could have eaten with all the sinners in town and no one would have noticed. But when Jesus of Nazareth is willing to risk His reputation for Matthew by eating with him, these Pharisees attack.

It is not necessary to suppose that these Pharisees who see this spectacle of a Rabbi among publicans are theologians only, although Mark and Luke both affirm that there were theologians present. The "fraternity of the Pharisees" included people from all walks of life, (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, 226ff.) some of whom may have seen Jesus and His followers enter the publican's house. They may have then reported the incident to "their scribes" (Mk. 2:16; Lk. 5:30) who, reinforcing those first on the scene, now begin to complain.

**They said unto His disciples.** Notice the sheer cunning in this approach made to Jesus' disciples, although the cunning might be motivated by moral cowardice, or that fear to face Jesus directly.

These theological lawyers, instead of introducing some deep, debatable theological objection to Jesus, try to shake the disciples' confidence in Him by showing how their Master violates acknowledged Jewish propriety. If they succeed in undermining Jesus' influence by demonstrating that, while in theory He may mean well, yet in practice He fails at a critical point, then is His ministry ruined.

**Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?** This question has perhaps less point for us westerners than it would for an oriental to whom a meal was a sacred matter. (Remember how Peter too violated this Jewish taboo by eating with Gentiles, Acts 11:2, 3) To break bread together pledged each to solemn friendship and mutual help. Consequently, self-respecting people eat only with other respectable people with whom they wish to associate. Thus would these accusers inculcate Jesus through guilt by association, making the false assumption: "You are known by the company you keep!" Thus they would insinuate that Jesus was of like character. It was as if they were asking, "What kind of God does He think He represents, keeping company with scum like that? He is unable to discern their character perhaps, in which case He disqualifies Himself to be a proper rabbi!" Any way the statement is phrased, their complaint shows no obvious love for these lost ones. Their merciless self-righteousness had shut their heart and frozen their concern for those who need God so desperately.

As Edersheim teaches, (*Life*, I, 507), this text highlights the fundamental distinction between Christianity and all other religions, especially Rabbinism, since all other religions must stand confessedly helpless regarding the positive forgiveness of sins and welcome for the sinner. They have nothing to say in contrast to the personal, merciful approach of God in Jesus Christ to the sinner, welcoming him back to repentance. This welcome produces repentance like no other stimulus in other religions could ever do. The burdened soul struggling toward God finds the answer of Jesus convincing and helpful like no other. Worse yet, the very title "Pharisee," or "separated one," underlined the very character of Rabbinism, even of Sadducees too in this respect, since the goal of the system was the exclusion of the unlearned, the unworthy, the sinners. So it was that this very feast of Matthew could only be looked upon by these Rabbis as a kind of reproach to the most fundamental principles they espoused. They were pledged to the maintenance of the separation of the wicked from the righteous, the Israelites from the Gentiles, the people of God from publicans and sinners. Here Jesus refused to maintain the

arbitrary lines they had drawn. This was not mere supercilious pride they felt; it was deep-running religious indignation. Jesus' goal, by striking contrast, was the INCLUSION of sinners, welcoming them to repent, assuring them of mercy and power to change their lives. The ideal of the rabbis was the welcoming of sinners *after* they had repented, with only the sterile stimulus to do so that is inherent in the repeated exhortations to repent and in the praise of repentance itself, with no definitive proof that the sins have actually been forgiven. This fact leaves the heart of the person trying to come back to God desperate and pessimistic. Instead of reinforcing the Pharisees' separatism, Jesus is seeming to sanction confusion of the traditional lines along which righteousness and holiness had been defined. It is no wonder that the Pharisees should be excited!

But Christ could not help arousing opposition. He was teaching the truth of God about sinners and about God, that would lead men to know genuine reality, as opposed to the sham or partial realities of their limited knowledge and experience. However, for doing this and for claiming to be the Son of God, He was opposed. For receiving sinners and eating with them, He was blamed. (Lk. 15:1, 2) Matthew himself was one of the chief reasons why the opposition so resented Jesus. It was but the age-old problem of the new idea presented in a context where people do not judge it on its own merits. They evaluate and its propounder only in terms of the way they are accustomed to interpreting it.

Ironically, for the very reason that they supposed themselves to be of superior righteousness and despised all others, these Pharisees thereby ceased to be righteous and manifested their own real sinfulness and need of mercy from God. The Pharisees were masters of refined sin too, and Jesus made strenuous efforts to win them to discipleship through repentance. Jesus' gentle speech here is an illustration. Usually, however, rather than repent, they got mad and tried to kill Him.

#### D. THE CONCEPT OF THE MASTER

**9:12 But when He heard it, He said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.** This vital question, so important because it involved the fundamental direction and purpose of Jesus' mission to earth, was asked of the disciples, but answered by Jesus. From Jesus' answer we get His own view of the work He came to accomplish. Had the disciples tried to deal with the critics, perhaps we would have something of less weight, depending upon their apprehension of His goals. Perhaps they even

tried, but the Evangelists are satisfied only to report Jesus' definitive answer, which forever settles the issue.

But observe how Jesus answered the captious question leveled at Him. As Bales (*Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 92, 93) puts it: "Jesus appealed to a principle which they endorsed, and showed by an apt illustration which they could not dispute successfully that His conduct was endorsed by that principle . . . Jesus made another point wherein He indicated that they need to learn the meaning of certain teaching in the very scriptures which they accepted." The principle accepted by practically every Jew was that a teacher of the Law was, symbolically, a physician to the sick. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 520). It would seem that Paul in Ro. 2:17-20 is listing appellatives by which the Pharisees, among whose number Paul used to count himself, loved to identify themselves!

Thus Jesus is using here no innocuous or merely interesting figure of speech: He is refuting His opponents with a reply that cuts them two ways:

1. According to the Pharisees' own view of themselves and of the publicans, Jesus, even had He been a member of the Pharisees' own party, was precisely where He should be, thus His course was justified. Jesus is saying, "I am a Physician to those whom we all describe as sick, the ignorant and sinful people of the land. As Physician, I must make contact with those whom I would help. Were I to ignore them or despise them, I would not be true to my mission as a doctor. The doctor that spends his time only with other doctors or with the well is not worth his salt as a healer of the sick. Instead of being contaminated by the disease or carrying their contagion to others, I am bringing salvation and healing. These publicans with whom I am now feasting are the very people to whom we should minister, hence I am right where I should be, making my rounds." . . .
2. By the same principle, the Pharisees themselves and all who shared their views were unfaithful to the ideals they espoused! "If you admit that you too are teachers of the soul and physicians to the unrighteous, why are you not mercifully ministering among these publicans too? But you shun and excommunicate these people as outcasts, never offering them the mercy of a forgiving God. Thus, by your obvious failure to live by your own ideals and principles, you confess that you are unqualified for the high honors you receive or the

high pretenses you make at being righteous! You doctors, ironically, are letting the sick die!"

3. Jesus' rebuttal has a third undertone that, by the way His argument is stated, shatters the force of the Pharisees' most fundamental presupposition. When He says: **They that are whole**, He has no intention whatever of subscribing to the Pharisees' self-estimate of themselves as righteous, fit to stand proudly before God's judgment. This expression, as well as **the righteous** in the following verse, are to be taken as ironic. As Lenski (*Matthew*, 366) asks:

Could they really be righteous when they knew no mercy for the sinners, were blind to the prophet's word demanding that they have mercy, and railed at the merciful Physician who labored among those who, according to the Pharisees themselves, so sorely needed His help? . . . Thus, even their claim to be righteous, by which they attempted to justify their contempt for sinners (cf. Lk. 18:9, 10), exposed not only the hollow falseness of their religion and the emptiness of their hearts, but also disqualified them from being the great teachers of the Law they pretended to be.

The Pharisees, in short, are here exposed as common sinners, whose best attempts at separation from sin had only left them miserable and in need of repentance. There are none in so dangerous a position as those who think they are not sick and thus refuse the healing mercies of the Physician! But lest we become too smug and pray, "Thank God I am not a Pharisee, snubbing the weak and despising the sinful!", let us remember that Jesus ministered with patient mercy even to these sinners too.

9:13 **But go ye and learn what this meaneth . . .** Edersheim (*Life*, I, 520) affirms that this command is a rabbinic formula "so often used when superficial speciousness of knowledge is directed to further thought and information." If so, the Lord assumes His proper place as the Teacher of these rabbis, using a language they can understand. But this command is much more: Jesus, being the real Physician that He is, cannot send even these Pharisees away without providing them too a cure for their own soul sickness. But was the Lord requiring that these theologians spend further time in book study and not, rather, in learning the true meaning of sacrifice by actually showing mercy? Much of God's will is not to be learned by pondering and intellectual perception, but rather by obedience.

**I desire mercy and not sacrifice.** The parallel phrase in this citation of Hosea 6:6 completes the couplet: "And the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." This is a highly compressed saying, stating in Hebraistic style of absolute negation what we would express in relative terms. Paraphrasing this verse in a manner that would interpret the verse in its proper relative sense, we might hear God saying to Israël something like this: "When I commanded you to make sacrifices, it was not burnt offerings that I wanted; I wanted you thereby to learn mercy and the knowledge of God!" (See Notes on 5:23, volume I) The mercy of God and the mercy demanded by God of His people mean more to Him than all the perfect fulfilment of any empty ritual. Hosea does not represent God as refusing the sacrifices in themselves, but simply those sacrifices which did not represent the heart of those wicked people who supposed that thereby they could cover their sins. The mercy that God requires is that intelligent love of one's neighbor which is based upon the knowledge of God and moves one to share God's mercy with one's fellow sinners. (Cf. Mt. 18:1-35 for an even stronger polemic against that selfish mercilessness which compounds the guilt of those who sin thereby.) For similar declarations, study I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 40:6-8; 50:8-23; Prov. 21:3; Mk. 12:28-34; Heb. 10:5-8; 13:16.

Jesus' use of this highly revealing text, that indicated God's real purpose behind all the positive commandments of the Mosaic system, is to show that God is far more concerned to show mercy to sinners, far more anxious that sinners show mercy than He is to have heartless, punctilious performance of meaningless forms. The superior claims of mercy rise higher than strict justice, or that righteousness based upon the letter of the law. (Cf. Jas. 2:13 and notes on 5:7 and 6:12) Instead of freezing out the publicans and sinners, the truly righteous would have made every effort to show God's mercy by endeavoring, as patiently and loving as Jesus, to help them to understand the mind of God, repent of their sins and become the greatest of saints. Thus, for Jesus, merely to live a moral life that is devoid of practical expressions of merciful helpfulness to fellow sinners is not enough. Worse yet, it is plain deceiving, since it gives a false sense of accomplishment to the man who would shut his personal goodness off to himself. For Jesus, merely to live a religious life, made up of the outward functions and rites of religion without the spirit and content which the forms were intended to hold, is worse than useless. It blinds the man to that whole way of life which is God's service, permitting him to see only a few convenient commandments while ignoring "justice,

mercy and faith." (Cf. Mt. 23:23) These Pharisees, though extremely religious, had followed their limited views to the logical extremes and had become harsh critics, proud, completely inhuman to the point of hating "all lesser breeds." Thus Jesus exposes their character as, in God's sight, being far more condemnable than those they condemned.

**For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.** Jesus is not disclaiming concern for the truly righteous or even admitting that there really are people so righteous that they do not need what He has to offer. Note that neither Mark nor Matthew specify to what Jesus had come to call sinners, even though Luke adds the words "to repentance." Jesus called men not only to repentance, but to Himself. It must be said, however, that a proper understanding of all that is involved in repentance is the secret of joy in the Kingdom of God. (See Notes on 3:15).

**I came not to call the righteous.** There are none who qualify for this title: we are all sinners! (Ro. 3:10-18, 23) Hence, we are to take Jesus' words in an ironical sense: "I came not to spend time with the self-righteous, whose self-satisfaction would keep them from appreciating the righteousness I offer. Only those who know how much they need me will accept my invitation." If Jesus' purpose is only with sinners, with the unrighteous, to give them the true righteousness, then for all the world, I would not be "righteous" (in my own sight)! For, in that case, Jesus could not help me! The duty of the truly righteous man, according to the Lord, is to admit his own sinfulness, believe Jesus and share the good news of God's mercy with his fellow sinners, regardless of the relative righteousness (or sinfulness) they may possess. Unfortunately, it never enters the head of most self-righteous individuals that UNBELIEF, a failure to accept Christ, is sin. (Jn. 3:36) The gospel of culture, civilization, morality and humanitarianism has not enough power in it to save one sinner. Only Jesus can save,—the cultured, the civilized, the moral humanitarians as well as the other common sinners!

**I came to call to repentance.** (Cf. Lk. 5:32) This should be the true mission of any man of God, who serves a holy God and dwells among a rebellious people. It is also, at the same time, Jesus' significant hint that His program would not stop short of anything but total religious revolution, bringing salvation, not to the privileged few, the righteous, the "whole", the elite, but to the despised outcasts, to the socially disgraced, to sinners, in short, to the world. As Bruce explains, with deep insight, (*Training*, 28): "It was one of the pregnant sayings by which Jesus made known to those who could



understand, that His religion was an universal one, a religion for humanity, a gospel for mankind, because a gospel for sinners."

**I came to call sinners.** How far do WE share the vision and purpose of Jesus? Are there people whom we ignore or for whom we do not pray? Are there certain individuals or classes for whom we dare not soil our "righteousness," because of the apparent gravity of their sin (in our sight)? Do we refuse to pray for or withhold every evangelistic effort to help the poor, the rich, the Indians, the Negroes, the whites, the city dwellers, the country folk or any other such group? To the extent that we are able to say, "Yes, Lord, but they are too wicked and unworthy", to that extent we do not share His vision. To that extent we do not have a universal gospel that is capable of saving ALL sinners, and it may well be doubted that a gospel that is incapable of saving EVERY sinner, is also incapable of saving the sinners that preach it. The seriousness of people's sin is never to be considered a barrier which we may use as a reason for not loving or helping anyone. Jesus came to overcome these barriers and save the sinner. To Him, the biggest sin in the world is that closed-hearted attitude of the self-righteous that never thinks of the desperate need of those whom we condemn, hence ignore. One might almost say, that, to Jesus, the greatest display of mercy is that shown to the person who needs mercy the most, the greatest sinner, the most despised.

**I came to call, not the righteous, but sinners.** The so-called "righteous" have separated themselves along lines of national pride, privileged monopolies on God's grace and sectarian exclusivism. But the sinners Jesus calls learn the truly desirable, proper separation. In contrast to the separation that the Pharisees demanded of others, Matthew's holiness, learned from fellowship with Jesus, was separation unto Christ, not merely separation from his fellows. His desires and acts became really holy, or separate, unto God, because he had learned the mind of God revealed by Jesus, something not true of those self-righteous, and, ultimately, unholy Pharisees who had despised him and criticized Jesus because of His association with Matthew and Matthew's kind. But it was this very discipleship, that made publicans and sinners truly righteous, actually holy, and not merely outwardly so. Jesus showed no mercy to the sinners' sin—to Jesus, Matthew's sins were still sins. To call those whom He had come to save "sinners", is a declaration of unvarying divine judgment. But to "come to call" just such people out of those sins, offering them the opportunity to become the greatest of saints, is a declaration of divine mercy. **This**

demonstrates the exceedingly practical nature of Jesus' ministry as well as its divine origin, because He proves by the purpose and direction of His own ministry that God is more interested in showing mercy than in holding people to the letter of the law.

### E. THE CONSCIENTIOUS

One might almost entitle this next section "the Controversy" were it not for the very spirit with which the question contained therein was brought to Jesus. It is precisely this notable difference in attitude seen in the disciples of John, in contrast to the Pharisees, that makes the difference in the way the section is considered. Admittedly, John's disciples bring up a criticism of Jesus' program, but more in the spirit of inquiry for information, than to discredit Jesus before His followers.

As Bruce (*Training*, 67ff.) rightly judges in a masterful discussion on this section, this very portion of the Gospel is fundamentally a lesson on Christian liberty, the first of three that reveal the genius of Jesus' program in sharp contrast to every other religious system, Judaism in particular. These lessons arise out of His approved non-conformity to Judaism which He expressed by disregarding minute mechanical rules and by repeatedly placing much more emphasis upon the great principles of righteousness and morality. These three lessons, pointed out by Bruce, will be studied in their separate texts:

1. Fasting (here)
2. Ceremonial purifications prescribed by tradition (chap. 15:1-20)
3. Proper observance of the Sabbath (12:1-15)

The significance of these seemingly dusty texts for the modern Christian is, the fact that out of just these situations grew the religious revolution and spiritual freedom that characterize Christianity. That is, Jesus' revelation was originally made in these historic situations, in contrast to the views held by the people of that period. Hence, an appreciation of these situations is absolutely necessary in order to grasp the fundamental difference between Jesus' revelation and all legal religion (i.e. religion based upon perfect fulfilment of an infinite number of regulations, but having no assured guarantee of personal mercy for all failure). Otherwise, we moderns will rewrite the once-abolished traditions, ignore the totally new spirit Jesus intends to put into us and conclude by repeating all the same mistakes made by these ancient rabbis in relation to God's Word given at that time, losing ourselves in minutiae and missing the grand moral principles of real righteousness.

From the point of view of Jesus' disciples themselves, as they developed into Apostles under Jesus' leadership, this non-conformity towards the established usages and customs of "proper Jews", is, as Bruce notes further,

a solemn crisis in any man's life when he first departs in the most minute particulars from the religious opinions and practices of his age. The first steps in the process are generally the most difficult, the most perilous, and the most decisive. . . . It is well . . . for apprentices in religious freedom when they make their first essays in the company of an experienced friend, who can rescue them should they be in danger . . . Non-conformity invariably gives offence to many, and exposes the offending party to interrogation at least, and often to something more serious. Custom is a god to the multitude, and no one can withhold homage from the ideal with impunity.

This is a particularly valid reason for letting these texts guide our reflections as we meditate upon our own discipleship as Jesus perfects us in His image. Often this loyalty to Him will bring us into conflict with the established views, customs and usages of our age, even into conflict with the Established Church. Only as we have comprehended Jesus' message well will we be able to respond to each situation in a manner that will please Him.

### 1. THE SITUATION

**9:14 Then come to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?** This critical question comes from an entirely different source than the usual carping complaints of the Pharisees, a source that, at first, surprises us: **the disciples of John**. This phrase suggests that those followers of John who had not left him to follow Jesus, as had many others, were maintaining their commitment to John, even though his ministry is entirely eclipsed by that of Jesus (see Jn. 3:26) and practically terminated by his imprisonment (Lk. 3:19, 20). But why did they come? Several factors may help answer:

1. All three Evangelists unite in including this section immediately after their reporting the feast of publicans, almost as if to display the two sections by contrast: "feasting versus fasting."
2. Mark's observation (2:18): "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting" (*ēsan nēstēiontes*), suggests that Mat-

thew's feast took place on one of the traditional fast days. (Cf. Lk. 18:12) This is the more noticeable since, though this periphrastic imperfect may stand for a simple imperfect, one may well ask whether Mark intended merely to record, "as a matter of habit these fasted," and not rather to remember, "at this particular time they were even then fasting." Either way, the fact is that, though there was little or nothing in common between the religion of John the Baptist and that of the Pharisees (see, for example, Mt. 3:7ff.; 21:28-32), yet, in contrast to the acknowledged practice of Jesus, both groups fasted. So whether it was the self-imposed empty stomach that gnawed at John's disciples as they hungrily looked in on Jesus' feasting disciples, or whether they merely heard of Jesus' general reputation (cf. Mt. 11:19), their question still finds its cutting edge in their customary practice.

3. But why did John's disciples, who framed the question, put it just that way? Why mention the Pharisees at all? Why should Mark also mention the practice of these latter, whereas they do not step into the foreground? Could it be that John's followers were instigated by the Pharisees, since their last encounters with Jesus had left them silenced (Mt. 9:2-8) and rebuked (Mt. 9:9-12)? If so, they could gain much by enlisting the aid of these zealous disciples of the Baptist, since these represented a strong religious force in Judaism. In this case, this objection, lodged by John's disciples would be all the more damaging, since a contradictory diversity in practice would be exposed, placing John and Jesus in clashing opposition. The result would be disastrous for both Jesus' and John's groups, but definitely advantageous to the cause of Established Religion which had continually withstood both. Had the Pharisees not been behind the disciples of John, would it not have been more consonant with their discipleship to John to have asked, "Our master, John, has taught us to fast, but your disciples feast!"? In the absence of the guiding force of their master, were these John's disciples developing a sectarian mentality of rivalry and jealousy? Were they desiring, by their inclusion of the reference to the Pharisees, to set Jesus' disciples in the minority on a question that surely was already decided by the opposing schools of John and of the Pharisees?

Bruce suggests another motive as possibly motivating this criticism:

surprise. The disciples of John were astounded "that in respect of fasting they should approach nearer to a sect whose adherents were stigmatized by their own master as a 'generation of vipers,' than to the followers of One for whom that master cherished and expressed the deepest veneration."

Why had they come? Perhaps they had been tormented by uncertainty caused by John's imprisonment, not knowing whether to leave, to rot alone in Herod's dungeon, him who had given them the first real glimmer of messianic hope and the first real taste of genuine righteousness, in order to follow Him to whom John pointed. Any hope that they may have nurtured of John's deliverance from prison and vindication before Israel lay in Jesus' hands and He was to be found down at Matthew's house enjoying a feast with the despised scum of Jewish society! It was not the fact that Jesus received publicans and sinners that piqued them, since John himself had not rejected them. (See Lk. 3:10-14) What shattered their confidence in Him was His feasting at a time when, in their opinion, fasting and prayer would have seemed so much more appropriate. Could Jesus be the Christ if He sits down to eat and drink at a feast of publicans, while John is lying in the dungeon of Herod?

However strident the contrast might seem between Jesus' practice and their views, yet Jesus was training His disciples to act on a principle of which John's disciples neither understood the truth and validity nor the meaning. Further, until these latter asked Him, they would never grasp it. But they did come and they did ask.

## 2. JESUS' REPLY

Note the difference in approach used by the Lord in dealing with John's disciples and His method in dealing with the Pharisees (Mt. 15, 23, etc.) Toward these He is respectfully defensive, giving reasons for His position, whereas with the Pharisees, He denounces their marked preference for their own rules while despising God's commandments. Here, however, He is definitely on the defensive, not wounding their conscience nor attacking their practice until He could teach them. They were probably more open to learn than were the Pharisees. If it could be proved that John's disciples had not at all been motivated by the Pharisees, then their coming to Jesus reflects that attitude of anguished confidence shown later by their leader, John himself, in the hour of his great perplexity and soul anguish, when he too asked Jesus the torturing question of his heart. (Mt. 11:3)

Jesus' gentleness with John's disciples is further significant because

in no way did the Lord put in doubt the validity of John's message or practice. It is not necessary to decide whether this fasting practiced by John's disciples were actually part of his program of repentance required of Israel. Tolerant of the present state of things, which, in Jesus' view, would soon pass away, the Lord contents Himself with an appeal to His critics' sense of propriety, in order to help them see that His program and that of John were not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but represented different, progressive phases, the old and the new, of God's continuing message to Israel. In fact, Jesus' response is so very gentle that He does not actually state His conclusion directly, as though He would force them to see the truth. Rather, by means of three brilliant illustrations, He leads their minds to make His unstated conclusion.

Were we to formulate the actual conclusion to which Jesus was leading, we might state it something like this: "Real religion is that harmonious outward expression that corresponds with what the heart really feels and is. False religion involves the attempt to act without reference to that correspondence, or else to cause others to do certain acts or acquire habits without any connection to the inward condition of their heart. Fasting does not reflect the present spiritual condition of my disciples, hence should not be forced upon them artificially by some mechanical rule. While the old Judaism out of which John would preserve the finest elements and the new Christianity I represent have their respective place, it would be a catastrophe to endeavor to mix the quite different dynamics of the two."

a. FIRST ILLUSTRATION: A WEDDING IS NO PLACE TO FAST

9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? The sons of the bridechamber is a common Hebraism referring to those closely connected with the groom, i.e. the wedding guests. (cf. the use of the Hebraism elsewhere: Lk. 10:6; 16:8; 20:36; Ac. 4:36; Mt. 23:15; Jn. 12:36 and Edersheim's observation, *Sketches*, 152, 153) As used by Jesus here, the wedding guests are Jesus' disciples. Jesus thus calls attention to a very definite and accepted exception to the rule of fasting: must wedding guests fast? (See Edersheim, *Life, in loc.*, *Sketches*, 151-156; cf. Mt. 22:2; Jn. 2:1-10; 3:29; Rev. 19:7-9) This question in Greek, beginning as it does with the negative *mē*, shows that Jesus expected His hearers to answer, "No, of course not." By universal custom the marriage week was to be marked by unmingled festivity, a period when fasting or mourning would be especially inappropriate.

This illustration would perhaps appeal to the disciples of John with particular force, since John himself had called Jesus "the bridegroom," while referring to himself as "the friend of the Bridegroom." (Jn. 3:29) John's use of this figure actually proved the contrary of his disciples' present position, since rather than fast and mourn over Jesus' ministry, John "rejoiced greatly," his joy was now full. However, whether these disciples now questioning Jesus ever heard that comment from John does not matter, since Jesus' illustration stands independently as an approved exception to the fasting rules probably practiced.

But note that in making His answer Jesus changes from the word "fasting," as asking by John's disciples, to "mourning." By this change Jesus shows that fasting must be the expression of an afflicted heart. Hence, the question of fasting cannot be solved by a mechanical rule. It must be governed by the state of mind. Fasting is perfectly in order when called for by some preoccupation or great, absorbing life crisis. When the heart is deeply troubled, who cares about food then? Even though the Law had been painfully specific in regard to sabbaths and the great feasts, which the Jews were not at liberty to reject or ignore, yet the Mosaic legislation has little, if anything, to say about fasting, and then only in connection with an afflicted soul (See on 6:16, volume I.) Thus, each person was left at liberty to decide for himself when he should fast. Fasting at a wedding would be especially forced, unnatural and real. Therefore, unless there is some significant reason to fast, to do so would be unreasonable, hypocritical.

It is interesting to note that this principle Jesus states justifies both His own disciples as well as John's. The loss of their master's leadership through an imprisonment which would eventually end in his untimely death, was a momentous crisis for them, arising as it did out of the wickedness of the age against which John had preached. So for John's disciples there was a heart-felt need to fast.

But Bruce (*Training*, 73) points out the real danger to these men: after crystallizing a movement around John's revolutionary message of repentance and preparation for the Messiah, these his disciples had not totally committed themselves to the Bridegroom whom John had already announced. Thus, "their grief was willful, idle, causeless, when He had appeared who was to take away the sin of the world!"

Further, some of Jesus' closest disciples had originally been also disciples of John and had followed John's message more closely by leaving him

to follow Jesus. But then, finding themselves in Jesus' company, they found themselves required also to change their manner of life in harmony with their new, altered circumstances. How could they fast and mourn, when in His presence was to be found peace and joy?

**But the days will come.** Plummer (*Luke*, 162) regards this as a complete phrase, followed by a mournfully significant silence in which Jesus seemed almost unwilling to speak His mind because of the impact His words must necessarily have on His disciples. There is evidently power in these few words: they are the voice of the prophet. This early knowledge of Jesus' violently being snatched away from His people and their consequent grief, demonstrated that His grasp of His own divine mission was not forced upon Him from without by chain of circumstances that brought about His death. It proves, on the contrary, that, even from the beginning of His ministry, He not only knew toward what goals He moved, but He set about to reach them with unwavering purpose. (Cf. Mt. 26:11; Lk. 17:22; Jn. 2:19; etc.) Jesus knew what fidelity to God would cost Him, yet He did not swerve from this knowledge. But His omniscience, as God, assures us that He holds the future secure in His hands.

**When the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast.** The implication is clear that Jesus' disciples personally are meant. How then did they receive these ominous words? Their own ideas of the Messianic Kingdom did not differ greatly from those of the disciples of John, even of all Israel. If they viewed God's Kingdom as one continuous, external victory by which the Messiah asserted invincible Jewish power over the world, they were completely mistaken. If they assumed that Jesus' presence among them were permanent, they needed correction. (Cf. Jn. 12:32-34; 7:33; 13:36; 16:16-22) Here is one of the first intimations of approaching tragedy. In the nature of the case, this becomes a warning to the Apostles to count the cost. At the same time this reality, that there would be gloom in Jesus' absence, becomes a challenge to the Apostles: can you unite in your personal experience both the Christian joy and the Christian cross?

**Then they will fast,** of their own accord. No one will have to tell them to mourn or fast. Jesus does not say, "Then you can make them fast," which would be the exact opposite of Jesus' teaching earlier. Compelling Jesus' disciples to fast when Jesus would have been taken away from them would be as totally unnecessary as it would be totally incongruous now in His presence. Upon revealing the approaching death and departure, Jesus concedes that fasting would



under those circumstances be quite appropriate and voluntarily chosen. But in that case the value of fasting would consist not in its being forcibly imposed by others, but in its being spontaneously adopted because of the real sentiments of His disciples at that time under those altered circumstances.

b. SECOND ILLUSTRATION: NEW PATCHES DO NOT  
REPAIR OLD GARMENTS

9:16 **And no man putteth a piece of undress cloth upon an old garment; for that which would fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.** It is worthy of note that Luke (5:36) calls this illustration a "parable," a fact that may not be pushed too far, since no parable can be extended to mean more than the point the author himself intended to illustrate. Nevertheless, the two following illustrations have much in common, not to mention the two additional illustrations that Luke (5:36, 39) includes. In all the illustrations, there is a particular emphasis laid upon the incongruity and impossibility of mixing something *old* with the *new* and vice versa. In all but the last there is definite loss or ruin involved in this confusion of old with new or the new with the old. The context of these parables helps to clarify their point since they were told to answer John's disciples' question that touched the radical difference between Jesus' program and that of John. (Cf. the use of *old* versus the *new*, developed by the Apostles in describing the weakness and failure of the Law versus the transforming vigor of the Gospel of Christ: (Ro. 7:6; 2 Co. 3:6; 1 Co. 11:25; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-10; 9:15-20; 12:24 in which *kainós* and *néos* are both used to describe Jesus' new program.)

Contrary to McGarvey's contention (*Matthew-Mark*, 84) that these parables "have nothing to do with the proper relation of the gospel dispensation to the Jewish law, but rather deal only with propriety of fasting on a certain occasion," an argument erroneously based upon Luke's concluding illustration (5:39), let it be urged that the whole point of Jesus' argument is to show John's disciples that His program and message, whereby His disciples are being trained, cannot be mixed with the old system with its forms and expressions of piety out of which fasting had come as a specific, representative practice.

The literal expression of Jesus' illustration is based upon the absurdity of using a patch of new cloth that is not pre-shrunk to repair an old robe. At first washing, the new patch would only rip the tear still wider, as the shrinking patch pulls against the threads

of the repaired robe. At this point Luke (5:36) sets forth the antithesis of this illustration by bringing in another illustration using exactly the same figure with another emphasis. This should be called the third illustration:

No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old.

Taken together, these two similar but antithetic parables teach that the religion of Jesus is in no sense just Judaism patched up, modified or revised for a later age. It is something entirely new, separate and distinct. Nor can Jesus' program be adjusted to fit the mentality of the old system without irreparable damage to what He is bringing into being. Old Judaism cannot bear mending by the superimposition of a totally new concept of man's relationship with God upon Judaism's forms. This would only destroy Judaism. But fasting came out of the old system under which John's disciples had been trained, precisely as feasting came out of the natural environment in which Jesus' disciples were being trained. And to deprive Jesus' followers of this freedom from fasting while He was with them would confound the message they had been taught to believe. To force the Pharisees and others to stop fasting before they had grasped the spirit of what Jesus was bringing to men, would destroy the fabric of religious consciousness they had developed under Judaism.

#### C. THIRD ILLUSTRATION: NEW WINE BURSTS OLD WINESKINS

**9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and skins perish; but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved. Wine-skins** are skin jugs made from a single goat-skin from which the flesh and bones are removed without cutting the body; only the head is removed leaving the neck of the animal to become the neck of the bottle. (For their use, see Gen. 21:14, 15, 19; Job 38:37; Psa. 119:83) When new, the flexibility of the skin permits considerable expansion due to the pressure of the carbon-dioxide present in the wine during fermentation. However, when the skins have become inflexible with age, they are not able to expand, not absorbing thus the internal pressure of the liquid that can burst a common glass bottle. This is why they explode, causing the loss of their contents. (Hear Elihu's complaint, Job 32:19)

The main point of Jesus' illustration is that the physical results produced by expanding new wine do not mix with the inelasticity of

old wine-skins. Here again, as in the former illustration, there is contrast between the old and the new. Lenski notes (*Matthew*, 370):

This illustration advances the thought. The old cannot be kept by adding a *little* of the new, nor by combining all of the new with it. In this respect there is a parallelism of thought. But again both illustrations speak of conserving; the first, the old robe; the second, the new wine . . . In this respect the illustrations are antithetic.

But there is also another current of thought in Jesus' illustration, not specifically stated but immediately below the surface: conservation, not only of the new robe from which no patches are taken and the new wine in the new wineskins, but also of the old robe with old patches and old wine in old wineskins. Jesus is not arguing that the old system was not good or that the forms which expressed it were bad, like, for example, fasting. In fact, He actually admits that honest admirers of the ancient system of Judaism would have difficulty quickly changing over to the new system of Christ. (Lk. 5:39) He does not propose the burning of the old robe or the destruction of the old wineskins, since each served its purpose in its time. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets but to fulfill them. (See Notes on 5:17, 18, Volume I) But once the old robe or the old wineskins had served their purpose and could no longer be repaired or filled with the power and vigor of the new, they must be replaced.

Both are preserved. Jesus is interested primarily in preserving the vital spiritual force of the Gospel as well as the forms in which it would be expressed. He knows that it would be fatal to limit Christianity by trying to express it in the thought-forms and rituals of a legal system. Christianity must have modes of expression that are consonant with its nature. In the establishment of Christianity among men, the Apostles declared authoritatively what fundamental forms express Jesus' new religion. To the extent that the Lord or His Apostles have described these new forms, or their content, it is heresy to seek other forms and accept other content.

But this raises the burning question about what we should do when the new robe, the new wine of Christianity, because of the sterilizing power of tradition, becomes in our day "old wine, old cloth, old wineskins." We can but pray, "Lord, make us into new wine again; transform our tired, worn-out robe into new cloth." Then, in agreement with our prayer, we will seek in the original message of Jesus and the Apostles that transforming power which will bring us back to what the Lord wanted originally. We should remember with

Lenski (*Matthew*, 371) that the modern philosophies that reject the supernatural and the religious views that revere the traditions of the fathers, both of which reject Jesus today, are nothing but the ancient Pharisees and Sadducees with updated names. To follow them would be but to fall into the ancient but rejected errors of those who crucified the Lord. The so-called "new categories of thought, new concepts of sin and righteousness, new visions of God, new morality" are nothing but old errors, heresies and ignorance rewritten, revised and reissued. Our only hope for remaining new wine is by ever coming back to Jesus; only His message is ever new, however long ago, historically, He gave it.

Jesus says, "The content of the new relationship with God that I propose cannot be confined within the mode of expression of Judaism. There is such power and vigor in the Gospel, that, by its very nature, it bursts the constrictions of Judaism, or of any other legal system with which it is put." This is why Christianity with its modes of expression is a completely different kind of thing than Judaism, even though it is founded upon the preparations made for it in the Law and Prophets.

There is a succinct warning, however, in Jesus' admission that there would be plenty of admirers of the old wine, (Lk. 5:39) "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says 'The old is good.'" He points out how natural it is for those, who have been accustomed to the old worn-out forms of Judaism, to be unwilling to abandon them for what they would consider to be "untried and novel." Jesus faces the reality of the old conservatives, the reactionaries in Judaism whose lives were bound up in the formalism and thought patterns of the past. Barclay (*Matthew, in loc.*) sees the problem of the new idea here:

Jesus was perfectly conscious that He came to men with new ideas and a new conception of the truth, and He was well aware how difficult it is to get a new idea into men's minds at all . . . Our minds must be elastic enough to receive and contain new ideas, since the history of progress is the history of the overcoming of the prejudices of the shut mind.

Some might take exception to Jesus' argument, saying, "But it is universally conceded among those who know good wines, that the old wine is in fact the best, the most fully matured, the richest flavored." But Plummer (*Luke*, 164) answers:

The comparative *merits* of the old and the new wine are not touched by the parable, but the *taste* for them. . . One who is

accustomed to old will not wish for new; it does not attract him by look or fragrance . . . The prejudiced person will not even try the new, or admit that it has *any* merits. He knows that the old is pleasant, and suits him; and that is enough; he is not going to change . . .

Compare the relative conversion of an outcast tax-collector, who had less prejudice for the old system, with the conversion of a Pharisee who had advanced in Judaism beyond many fellow countrymen and extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. (Gal. 1:13-17; Phil. 3:5, 6; I Tim. 1:13; Ac. 26:14).

One more note is in order regarding how Jesus dealt with His objectors. He practiced what He preached: mercy and not sacrifice. According to the letter of divine truth and justice, he could have cut down John's disciples with a withering fire of irrefutable argument. By the sheer power of His voice He could have given them no ground. But in mercy the Lord here gives us a beautiful example by which we may grasp the truth that "the Lord's servant must not strive, but be kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth"! (2 Tim. 2:24, 25) Our Master was that way. He knew how to concede a point, admitting the natural preference of some Jews for ancient Judaism. As Bruce writes (*Training*, 75)

This striking sentiment exhibits rare candour in stating the case of opponents, and not less rare modesty and tact in stating the case of friends . . . Too seldom for the church's good have lovers of the old ways understood Christ's wisdom, and lovers of new ways sympathized with His charity.

What Jesus required of the Pharisees (9:13), He Himself practiced in this critical encounter with John's disciples. He is not willing that any of these men should perish, but that they should all come to repentance by leaving the old forms of Judaism, stop trying to correct the faults of the old and just become new men in a new, totally different relation with God. This they could do in His discipleship to which, by His very gentleness in dealing with their problem, He leaves the door open. He proves in everyday practice what He will later affirm of Himself, His meekness (Mat. 11:29). This sheer gentleness with opponents, when such invincible power lay within His grasp, sets Jesus apart as the real Savior of men. (Cf. 2 Co. 13:10) This attractive gentleness of Jesus, whereby He deals effectively with

human problems, without destroying the confidence or glimmer of hope that Jesus could help, probably caused John's disciples later to return to the Master, when their great light in Israel had been extinguished. (Jn. 5:35; Mt. 14:12). Here then is the might and wisdom of meekness.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is a "place of toll"?
2. Who were the publicans? Describe their occupation, public notariety, religious and political character as viewed by their contemporaries.
3. Describe Matthew's response to Jesus' invitation to be His disciple.
4. Give evidence that renders psychologically sound the impression given in the text that Matthew responded immediately and decisively to Jesus' unusual invitation.
5. Tell all you know about Matthew Levi.
6. What passage of Scripture did Jesus cite (book, chapter and verse) in defense of His intimacy with such scum as the publicans, and sinners.
7. What was the probable reason for Matthew's giving this feast for Jesus as well as for his acquaintances?
8. What were the complaints offered regarding Jesus' feasting and what two separate groups made them? How did these complaints as well as the complainers differ from each other?
9. Explain the three parabolic figures used by Jesus to answer the questions raised by those who objected to His feasting instead of fasting.
10. What particular twist does Luke give to the last illustration, thus making it a fourth illustration? What does Jesus mean by this latter picture?
11. What particular facts out of oriental life and culture does one need to know in order to grasp the meaning of Jesus' last three illustrations about the present bridegroom, the torn cloth needing repair and the bursting wineskins?
12. Explain the point of view behind the question posed by the disciples of John.
13. Explain why it was so natural and right for Jesus to be found generally surrounded by sinners. Show how this fact just as deeply demonstrates His identity and true mission to earth as His stupendous miracles.

## Section 20

## JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

(Parallels: Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:49-56)

## TEXT: 9:18-26

18. While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.
19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.
20. And behold, a woman, who had an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment:
21. for she said within herself, If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.
22. But Jesus turning and seeing her said, Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.
23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult,
24. he said, Give place: for the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.
25. But when the crowd was put forth, he entered in, and took her by the hand; and the damsel arose.
26. And the fame hereof went forth into all that land.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What kind of faith in Jesus did Jairus and this sick woman have that drove them to Jesus? What factors probably brought them to this kind of belief?
- b. What is your opinion? Was the miracle of healing performed on the woman without the knowledge and will of Jesus?
- c. Why do you think the woman would wish to resort to the method she chose, rather than simply ask Jesus directly for help?
- d. Why did Jesus stop to embarrass this poor woman? She was embarrassed, was she not? What possible motive could Jesus have had for doing it?
- e. Why was the woman so afraid after she had been healed? Would we not rather expect confidence and joy of her than fear?
- f. Why do you think Jesus said "only believe," to the desperate Jairus when the news came of the death of his daughter? How could that help?

- g. Why would Jesus permit no more to enter the room where the maiden lay dead than just a few? Why should He drive everyone else out? Would it not seem better to have as many witnesses to this miraculous event as possible?
- h. Why did Jesus order Jairus and his wife to provide some nourishment for their daughter after He raised her from the dead? Could not He have provided miraculous bread for the little girl?
- i. What possible reason could Jesus have for not wanting this miracle reported? Was He ashamed of what He had done, or, perhaps, did He fear critical examination of the evidence for the fact and knew that He had foisted a common deception upon the parents? What was to gain by demanding silence over this miracle?
- j. Do you think that Jesus really expected the people to keep quiet about this wonderful miracle performed upon the only daughter of a prominent official? Could He not have foreseen that at least the neighbors would have known the facts and so divulged the information? If He did not expect them to be silent about the miracle, why then did He sternly instruct them to be silent? If He did expect them to remain silent, how did He expect His instructions to be carried out against human nature?
- k. Why did Jesus have the Gadarene demoniac spread the news of his great deliverance, but requires the opposite of Jairus and countless others?
- l. Why do you suppose Mark quotes Jesus' words to the dead maiden in Aramaic? Does this give any indication whether Jesus usually spoke Aramaic or Greek? How would you go about deciding? Is there any value in knowing the answer?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus had returned across the Sea of Galilee in a boat and arrived on the other side, He disembarked at His home, Capernaum. Instantly a large crowd of people began to gather about Him and welcome Him back, because they had all been waiting for His return.

While He was standing there on the beach talking to them, a man named Jairus, one of the synagogue officials, came up through the crowd. When he spotted Jesus, he fell to his knees before Him, worshipped Him, begging Him desperately to come to his home, since his only twelve year-old daughter was dying. He pleaded, "My little girl is about to die! She is dead (if you do not come!) Just come lay your hands on her to heal her and she will live!"

So Jesus started out to follow him with His disciples. But as



they went, a large crowd of people followed too, the people all crowding through the narrow streets. They were all around Him. Now, notice, there was a woman in that crowd who had suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years. This lady had gone through a great deal under the treatment of many doctors. She had spent all her money and still could not be healed by any of them. She was no better off; rather, she had gotten worse. She too had heard what people were saying about Jesus. So she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched the fringe on His robe. She did this because she had said to herself, "If I could just touch His cloak, I would be healed." Right then and there her hemorrhage stopped, and she knew in her body that she was cured of her disease.

Jesus, aware that healing power had left Him, immediately stopped, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes? Who was it that touched me?"

When all denied it, Peter and those disciples who were with Him, objected, "Master, you see so many people all around you, pressing against you, and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

Meanwhile Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then He reaffirmed, "Someone touched me. I know because I felt healing power leave me."

But when the woman, realizing that she had been healed, saw that she had not really escaped notice, came forward trembling fearfully. Falling down at Jesus' feet, she laid before Him the whole story. She admitted before everyone why she had touched Him and affirmed that she had been instantaneously cured.

Looking right at her, Jesus encouraged her, "Cheer up, Daughter, it is your faith in me that has healed you. Go in peace, healed of your disease."

Immediately the woman was cured!

While He was still talking to her, a messenger came from Jairus' home with the news, "Your daughter is gone. Why bother the Rabbi further?"

But Jesus, overhearing and ignoring what was said, comforted the synagogue official, "Now do not be afraid, just trust me and she shall be well."

Then Jesus cut the size of the group down to Peter, James and John and hurried along to Jairus' house. When they arrived at the house, He permitted only these three and the child's father and mother to go in. He heard the funeral music and saw the crowd in general commotion. The people inside the house were weeping and wailing

loudly, mourning her death. But when Jesus went in, He asked them, "Why all this commotion and weeping? Stop crying and leave, because the little girl is not dead, just sleeping."

This drew a scornful laugh, since they all knew that she was really dead.

But Jesus ordered them all outside the house and led the little girl's father and mother and His companions into the room where the child was. Then, taking the little girl by the hand, He said to her in Aramaic, "Talitha cumi," which means, "My child, get up."

Instantly her life returned. The girl stood up immediately and walked around. She was twelve. Her parents just could not get over it, they were so overcome with happiness.

But Jesus very earnestly instructed them not to tell anyone about what had happened. Then He directed them to give her something to eat. The story of this became the talk all around that country.

## SUMMARY

No sooner had Jesus returned from the Decapolis where He had freed the two Gadarene demoniacs, when He was met at the boat by well-wishing crowds who had been waiting for Him. No sooner had He begun talking with them than Jairus, an important synagogue official, requested Jesus to come immediately to heal his dying daughter. On the way, Jesus' progress is not only impeded by surging throngs blocking the streets, but also by a woman whom He stopped to heal of a long-standing disease, a hemorrhage. Messengers informed Jairus that in the meantime his little girl had died. Whereupon Jesus encouraged him not to lose heart but trust Him. To hurry, Jesus reduced His entourage to three men and reached the ruler's house only to find the funeral already in progress. Jesus, Jairus and the three Apostles rush into the house. Jesus said, "Stop the music: funeral's over! The little lamb is asleep, not dead." Everyone thought His words in bad taste and utterly ridiculous since they knew the child to be dead. But after ordering the crowd to leave the house, Jesus raised the damsel to life. The overjoyed parents' part was to provide the little girl some food. Jesus tried to keep the matter private, but the story spread anyway.

## NOTES

### I. THE REQUEST OF JAIRUS DELIVERED (9:18, 19)

9:18 While He spake these things unto them, as a phrase, immediately raises the obvious questions: to whom? about what things?

Some harmonists use this phrase as if it were the clearest clue regarding the connection of contexts given by the three Evangelists, since Mark and Luke only begin this section of their respective narratives with the word "and" (*kai*) which loosely connects this section with what they record as preceding. Matthew, on the other hand, begins his narration of Jairus' request with a genitive absolute that contains the apparently strict connection of time subsequent to what had immediately before been narrated, i.e. Matthew's feast and the ensuing discussion with John's disciples. In which case, we would know both the people with whom Jesus spoke as well as the subject matter.

But it is strange that Mark and Luke, who so often generally follow a more chronological arrangement, should now find themselves agreeing together on this point over against Matthew, who more often follows a logical system! Mark and Luke connect this request made by Jairus with Jesus' return from Decapolis by boat after the freeing of the Gadarene demoniacs. (See Mk. 5:18-22; Lk. 8:38-41) And in fairness, it must be admitted that Matthew too, however much more generally, puts Jairus' request after Jesus' return from Decapolis (Mt. 8:34; 9:1, 18), with the exception that he inserts the accounts of the forgiven paralytic (9:2-8) and the call of Matthew, the feast of the publicans and the question from John's disciples (9:9-17), events which Mark and Luke locate elsewhere. As noticed before, this does not surprise us, since Matthew has made no pretences of following a strictly chronological sequence. But what is surprising is Matthew's rather precise time connection with which he introduces this narrative. Even though this second view of the question is taken in the PARAPHRASE-HARMONY, it remains an admitted difficulty how Matthew's introductory phrase is to be understood by the original readers of his Gospel who had no opportunity to compare Mark and Luke. Certainly they would have connected the phrase with the immediate context, as indicated above. But as noted by some commentators, this phrase by Matthew is introduced apparently without reason, until the other Evangelists are consulted. They, in turn inform us that Jesus was indeed met at the seashore by a great crowd of people who had been waiting to welcome Him back. It would then be this group He was addressing when Jairus arrived. This puts the emphasis upon the independent witness of the separate Gospel writers who give varying features of the same event while unwittingly complementing each other's testimony.

But the greater problem raised by Jairus' arrival is that, since Jesus was just in Capernaum the day before, before He sailed for the

eastern shore, why had not the ruler brought the case of his daughter before Jesus then, before she got into this desperately sick condition?

1. This condition could have been caused by the sudden attack of some lethal illness or of a poison, a situation which would have left Jairus quite unprepared to intercept Jesus in time before He sailed.
2. Or perhaps the ruler's own faith had not developed into that concrete confidence in Jesus that would have caused him to take that decisive step the day before. Could it be that the growth of his faith in Jesus had to overcome his own personal pride?

**While He spake these things unto them,** certainly indicates the emergency nature of Jairus' request, as if, having once made the decision to ask Jesus, he must now interrupt what the Lord is saying to make his plea known. But Jesus, too, is willing to interrupt an important discussion (and what discussion of His was NOT important?) to heal the broken heart of this grieving father. Discussion was important, but the actual call of human need, to practice God's mercy in actual cases, drove Jesus to action. His doctrine did not stop with discussion and theory but ACTION!

**Behold, there came a ruler,** named Jairus, one of the Jewish elders, responsible for the administration of the synagogue (Mk. 5:22), a pillar of Jewish orthodoxy in Capernaum. But his wealth and position meant nothing when death visited his home. Standing helpless before the tragedy that is at this moment threatening to strike his little girl, he comes to Jesus. That Jairus lived in Capernaum, hence had many excellent opportunities to see Jesus' miracles for himself and come to this position of faith, is decided by comparing Mt. 9:1: "Getting into a boat He crossed over and came to **His own city,**" with Mk. 2:1 where it is learned that Jesus was "at home" in Capernaum. This had been Jesus' headquarters since His removal there early in His career (Jn. 2:12; Mt. 4:13). Had Jairus earlier joined his colleagues in accusing Jesus of blasphemy? (Mt. 9:2-8) Had he discussed the healing, done by Jesus at long distance, with the government official (Jn. 4:46b ff.)? Had he been among the delegation sent by the centurion to request Jesus' healing for his servant? (Lk. 7:3-5) Whatever had been his conviction earlier, the circumstances in his family were facts stronger than theories. Now as never before he must decide what he thinks about this Rabbi from Nazareth! But he must decide carefully for a man in his position has everything to lose, should he choose wrongly: the disgrace brought

about by failure, would be impossible to bear, his townspeople impossible to live with. He could be turned out of his influential position and laughed out of town! Jairus must have reckoned with this possibility as he weighed every facet of this question. He must now decide whether he believes Jesus or not. But this internal struggle is rendered most severe by the rapidly deteriorating condition of his only daughter who lay dying before his eyes. Surely all of the past miracles of Jesus now loom large in Jairus' mind, tipping the balance in favor of appealing to Jesus for help now. So he goes.

**A ruler worshipped Him.** (See on 2:2; 4:9, Vol. I) This homage is deeply significant, not because somebody falls at the feet of Jesus, but because *THIS* man, this member of the school board, this leader in religious matters, does it. As a man of position high in Jewish society, he stands to be disgraced if Jesus could not do exactly what he now asks. If he is trusting his cause to a Nazarene Rabbi, with whose views his unbelieving colleagues violently differed, he has more than personal pride to forfeit. Thus, this act requires great courage, born of love for his only child and confidence in and respect for Jesus, to grovel in the dust not only in front of Jesus, but in full view of the large crowd of people gathered about Him. (See Mk. 5:21; 8:40).

What is most noticeable here is that, while Jesus refused all forms of human ostentation and preached against it mercilessly, He accepted without blush this worship. (Contrast the proper response shown by His servants: Peter, Ac. 10:25, 26; the Angel, Rev. 19:10) Who is this that permits such high, respected religious officials to worship Him?

**Saying, My daughter is even now dead.** The problem immediately arises here how to harmonize this declaration of the father, as reported by Matthew, with his statement recorded by Mark and Luke: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." (Mk. 5:23) "She was dying." (Lk. 8:42) Later, according to Mark, and Luke, a messenger from Jairus' house reports the actual moment of death, after this appeal of Jairus had been made to the Lord. Two principle solutions have been offered to this apparent contradiction:

1. Either Jairus did not say it, in which case Matthew puts words into his mouth. Those who seek to point out that Matthew merely abbreviates the account, while Mark and Luke give the fuller version, must face the resultant weakness in Matthew's historical reporting that such a harmonization involves. Here