

Introduction

In the 8th and 9th chapters of Matthew's gospel Jesus performs two sets of three miracles.

Last week, Caleb looked at the first three miracles that Jesus performed after his Sermon on the Mount.

Those first three miracles are more private in nature.

They are glorious, but they don't provoke the kind of public response of the next three.

The three miracles in this morning's text each generate significant responses to Jesus.

These miracles either agitate those who resist Christ's authority.

Or, they cause Jesus' disciples to marvel and rejoice at his authority.

In these three miracles Jesus shows his authority over the creation, over the spiritual realm, and over sins.

Jesus shows his authority over the world, the flesh, and the devil;

Over all that is visible and invisible.

What I hope to show is that there are three different reactions to these miracles.

But in my sermon this morning I plan to take these reactions in reverse order.

I want to begin with the response of the scribes to Jesus' forgiving the paralytic's sins.

Then I want to consider the response of the Gadarenes to Jesus' exorcism of the demoniacs.

And I will conclude with the response of Jesus' disciples to the calming of the storm.

In these three responses we find people resisting Jesus, rejecting Jesus, and rejoicing in Jesus:

1. You can resist Jesus
2. You can reject Jesus and ask him to leave
3. Or, you can rejoice at Jesus

Resist (9:1-8)

Let's begin with verses 1-8 of chapter 9 where Jesus heals the paralytic and is confronted by the scribes.

After leaving the country of the Gadarenes Jesus comes back to his own city of Capernaum.

And after he arrived, some people brought him a paralytic man that was lying on a bed.

Matthew's account of this story is one of the few places in Matthew where he offers less detail than Mark's gospel.

But this is the same story where, in Mark and Luke, the friends of the paralytic lower him down through the roof of the house.

The last time Jesus was in Capernaum, he healed the paralyzed servant of the Centurion.

But what Jesus does this time is different.

Jesus doesn't merely heal the paralytic man, instead, he looks at the paralytic and says,

“Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Praying for Others

But what is worth pointing out very practically here at the beginning of this sermon, is the significance of bringing other people to Jesus.

Last week the centurion brings Jesus' attention to his paralyzed servant.

Now, people are bringing a paralytic to Jesus and placing the man before Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we do when we pray for others and bring them to Jesus.

When you pray for the healing of those you care for,

or when you pray for God to intervene in a difficult situation one of your friends is going through,

You are acting like these people who brought the paralytic before Jesus.

You are bringing those you care about before the one who has authority to heal them, forgive them, and providentially order their lives.

Let us not grow weary in this but be encouraged in it, knowing that we can approach the throne of grace in all boldness because of Christ.

Authority to Forgive Sins

But what stands out here with Jesus is, of course, the fact that Jesus doesn't merely heal the paralytic man, he forgives his sins.

It is at this point that we see the reaction of those who are set to reject Jesus.

Matthew describes them as “the scribes” but Luke informs us that the Pharisees are present as well.

What is at issue here is that Jesus forgives sins with zero reference or use of the sacrificial system or the priesthood.

The scribes and the Pharisees didn't have any issue with sins being forgiven, but there was a proper way to deal with your sins.

In their estimation Jesus was disregarding this and claiming an authority for himself that only belonged to God.

On these grounds they begin their conflict with Jesus.

It All Pointed to Jesus

But what Matthew wants to make clear to us is that *the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins*.

The Temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood; all these things that dealt with the forgiveness of sins ultimately point to Christ.

He is the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He is the sacrifice. He is the Temple. He is the high priest, a high priest not after the order Aaron but of Melchizedek.

But because they had chosen in their hearts to reject Christ, they found themselves questioning the substance that the shadows were pointing to.

The Healing

Jesus knew their hearts and their intention to resist him.

So he said to them, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive—he then said to the paralytic—”Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

Jesus gives them a sign of his authority.

But, as we know from the rest of the gospels, they are not interested in Christ's authority.

The scribes and Pharisees see Jesus as a threat to their own authority, and so they attempt to resist and fight him.

The Folly of Fighting God

But this is great folly.

They are trying to resist the one who has all authority.

This is one of the themes that Matthew's gospel drives at.

Here in these early chapters of Matthew the crowds question the extent of Jesus' authority.

But Matthew's gospel ends by stating plainly that Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth.

To fight against Jesus is to fight a losing battle.

Every knee will bow to Jesus.

Every tongue will confess him as Lord.

You can only fight against Christ with the very effort that he has graciously granted to you.

Remember what Jesus tells Pilate at his own trial:

“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”

Do not resist Christ, for in doing so you will only be resisting the one who has made you, who sustains you, and who wishes to give you his life in exchange for your death.

Let us turn now to the second reaction...

Reject (8:28-34)

While the scribes and Pharisees actively resist and combat Jesus' authority, the people of the Gadarenes wanted nothing to do with him.

It was after Jesus had calmed the storm and come across the sea that he came to the country of the Gadarenes and met two demon-possessed men by the tombs.

If the healing of the paralytic man reveals Jesus' authority to forgive sins, this account reveals his authority over the unseen realm and demonic powers.

Threefold Uncleaness

But the story begins with the some details that might easily be missed by modern readers.

It begins with a trifecta of uncleaness:

Jesus is dealing with unclean spirits.

These unclean spirits, these demon possessed men, are living near the tombs, an unclean place.

And finally, when Jesus casts out the demons, he does so by sending them into a herd of unclean animals, pigs.

Uncleaness is prominent theme in Matthew's gospel.

Under the Old Covenant, if you came into contact with something that was deemed unclean, the uncleaness spread like a contagion to you.

There was always some sort of baptism to make you clean again, but the idea is that uncleaness spreads.

But in the gospels, things work differently for Jesus.

Rather than become unclean in his contact with unclean things, Jesus causes those who are unclean to become clean and filled with his life.

Authority Over Demons

That said, this story isn't primarily about uncleaness.

It is primarily about about the authority of the Son of Man and the reaction of the people to the Son of Man.

By presenting Jesus as having complete authority over demons, Matthew's gospel presents Jesus as the authoritative ruler over the heavenly sphere.

There are no powers or principalities or thrones or dominions that do not answer to him.

He has all authority not only on earth, to heal the sick and to calm the storms, but he also has authority over the heavenlies.

All authority in heaven and on earth is granted to him.

According to Luke, these two demoniacs are possessed by a legion of demons.

They address Jesus as the “Son of God”.

The demons recognize Jesus’ authority and as the judge.

In [Matthew 12](#), the Pharisees claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

When Jesus answers this claim he asks a question: “how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.”

In the gospels there are demons everywhere oppressing God’s people.

It is as though Satan is a strong man who has taken over the house of Israel.

But Jesus is the one who has authority to bind the strong man Satan and plunder his house.

Just as Israel plundered the Egyptians, Jesus plunders Satan’s house, and drowns his Legion in the sea just as Pharaoh’s army was drowned in the Red Sea.

Rejection

But, as is often the case in the Bible, God’s victories aren’t always appreciated.

When the people of the city come of to meet Jesus, there response is quite odd to us.

Verse 34 states that they begged Jesus to leave their region.

In this story Matthew is playing with the idea of being “cast out”.

The demon-possessed men seem to have been cast out of the city by the people.

But then the demons are cast out of the men into the pigs.

And then the pigs are cast headlong into the sea.

And now the crowd comes to Jesus and wants him cast out of their midst.

But why?

Jesus has upset the social order.

And the people would rather have their social order and their economy intact than to have Jesus with them if it means Loosing those things.

This is what we do when we reject Jesus, we reject him for other goods that we think are better than what Christ comes to offer.

But this is what the Bible calls idolatry.

Social order and economy are can be good things, but they cannot be things that we value above Christ.

If they are, then we will find ourselves rejecting the pearl of great price and casting it out before the swine.

Rejoice (8:23-27)

This brings us now to our final point, to rejoice in the authority of the Son of Man.

And continuing in our reverse order, we now come to our first miracle, Jesus calming the storm.

The Sign of Jonah

It is pretty clear that the Gospel writers have the story of Jonah in the background when they retell this story from Jesus' life.

In both stories a storm arises at sea, people on the deck of the boat are frantic about the storm, and Jonah and Jesus are both asleep in the boat.

And, in both stories, the storm subsides after Jesus and Jonah get up; but for very different reasons.

The storm is calmed in Jonah when the disobedient prophet is cast into the sea.

But here, the sea is calmed when Jesus stands up and rebukes the storm so that there is a great calm.

Authority Over Nature

One of the things that is clearly on display here is that Jesus has authority over nature, and especially the sea.

Throughout the Scriptures, this kind of authority is reserved for God alone.

[Job 38](#), [Psalm 29](#), [Psalm 65](#), [Psalm 89](#), and [Psalm 107](#) all ascribe to God the power to command the waters and the sea.

When the disciples saw this they rightly asked the question, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Matthew is building out the answer to that question:

Jesus is the God-man, and as such, he has authority over the winds and the sea so that they obey him.

The winds and the sea obey Jesus because it was he who spoke to Job out of the whirlwind and asked him,

Job 38:8-11 NKJV

⁸ "Or *who* shut in the sea with doors,
When it burst forth *and* issued from the womb;

⁹ When I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band;

¹⁰ When I fixed My limit for it,
And set bars and doors;

¹¹ When I said,
'This far you may come, but no farther,
And here your proud waves must stop!'

All things were created through him and for him and in him all things hold together.

Earthquakes and Faith

But I conclude now by considering the response of the disciples.

Yes, they are the ones who have the right response to Jesus, they “marvel” at him.

But that isn’t the only response of the disciples in this short account.

Their first response, not to Jesus but to the storm, is fear.

Jesus had just told his disciples about the cost of discipleship, and now he is showing them what following him looks like.

Often times, following Jesus looks like following him into danger.

What’s more, during the times of danger, it can seem like Jesus is not there to help you.

It seems like he is checked out, asleep in the boat.

The disciples are wrong to fear and Jesus rebukes them before he rebukes the wind and the sea.

But even though the disciples were wrong to fear, they did have faith.

It may have been “little faith” but it was still faith.

We should all have more faith than we do in Christ.

But even when we are filled with fear, we should turn to Christ with what little faith we have.

Trusting that he is more than capable to calm the storms of our lives, cleanse us, and to forgive us.

So let us turn now to Christ in faith as we come to his table, trusting in his love for us and submitting to his authority.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!