

Matthew Round / General

Matthew: The Promised Messiah / Authority; Messiah; Obedience; Faith; Responses to Jesus / Matthew 9:27-34

Seeing is (not) believing

[slido to poll]

intro me

We've been following the story of Jesus through the book of Matthew in the bible for getting close to a year now - and we're only up to chapter 9 out of 28 so we have a while to go still - yep, we're taking our time! Maybe we'll take a wee break before getting all the way through?!

These last weeks we've been working through a series of events through which Jesus demonstrates his awesome authority as he walks the earth. We've been thinking about this as a sort of **ladder** we're going up rung by rung, each story showing us another height of Jesus' authority. Authority over **defiling disease**, over **sickness**, over his **disciples**, over the **natural**, over the **supernatural**, over **sin**, over who he chooses to **call**...

And last week we got to Jesus' authority over **life itself** - David helped us examine one of a very few stories from the bible where someone who's dead is restored to life. There's so much authority here, our musicians wrote us a song to help us remember what the bible teaches about Jesus' authority. And we're going to practice that one last time together - you get a free pass if this is your first week, but regulars, hoping this is locked in your memory banks! Jon, can you help me out here?

[all authority]

Now if you ask me where the top rung is going to be on that ladder of authority, that would have been my guess. Life and death. I'd have thought that would have to be the top drawer, right?

But there's more. No cheating, no reading ahead - closed book exam! Quick poll: what do you think could go higher on this ladder of authority than restoring someone dead back to life? What would you imagine being above and beyond everything we've seen so far? above all this demonstrated authority?

[**poll** + live interaction]

Well, let's read the story together and find out! And as we read, it's important you know we're not seeing the last of Jesus' amazing works in this chapter of his life - in fact, right after this we're told he was still working wonders, 'healing every sickness and disease'. As John, another of the authors in the bible tells us, Jesus did loads

more than could be written down **Jn 21:25**

John 21:25 NIV

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

His biographers, writing some of the books that make up our bible, are always selecting which bits to include in detail and what to just summarise - so as you listen, ask yourself why what we're just about to read is important enough to be recorded in full; why Matthew chooses these particular incidents to put at the top of the ladder, to underline.

And Alex is going to read for us today - we're on page 974 in these blue bibles if you want to follow along - and if you want to look back or look ahead later. Matthew chapter 9 - big nine - verse 27. Page 974. Matthew chapter 9, verse 27.

Matthew 9:27-34 NIV

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."

[slido to Q+R]

Ok, so, top rung of this ladder we get.. [drumroll please] sight for the blind and the mute speaking. Now these are remarkable things, no question. If this happened today, we'd expect it to be all over the news. People would be amazed. But we do have to stop and wonder why this comes at the top of this ladder that's been set out for us. It's not at all obvious this is a bigger deal than what's come before. Or at least *why* it's an even bigger deal. So let's dig in - we'll find our way to some answers, and there's really important truths for us to see here today.

The first thing I want to explore is the title these blind men give Jesus: **"Son of David."** This is the first time Jesus is identified as this "Son of David" so we should sit up and pay attention. Now the David in view here is King David of ancient Israel who ruled about a thousand years before Jesus - in many ways the high point of ancient Israel's history. David and Goliath-David. Star of David-David. Psalms of David-David. A great poet and musician, a great military leader, a great spiritual leader - and the recipient of a great promise from God: that someone from his line would be king forever: here's God speaking to David through the prophet Nathan: **2 Sam 7:12-13**

2 Samuel 7:12–13 NIV

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Here's what these two men have rightly seen even though they are blind: Jesus is the ultimate Son of David who will build God's true house and rule over it as King forever. But I'm getting ahead of myself - and I'm pretty sure they didn't understand all that. Let me show you why.

In Jesus' day, this phrase, 'Son of David', would have meant something pretty explosive to the people hearing it first hand: these blind men were effectively labelling Jesus as a King in the line of David - meaning he would be coming for the throne as a warrior blessed by God to deliver Israel from her foes and to rule over her.

And I think that might help us understand Jesus' strict instructions to keep things under wraps here. **Mt 9:30** See, it's not Jesus' power or authority that's a secret - most of the rungs of the ladder up to here have been pretty public.

Matthew 9:30 NIV

and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."

Some very public indeed - the restoration of life we looked at last week ended with **news** about Jesus spreading through the whole region and we didn't hear anything about him trying to stop that. He's just about to start someone speaking, and then to send out his disciples to speak - so why does he try to stop these ex-blind guys speaking?

Matthew 9:26 NIV

News of this spread through all that region.

I think it's down to **the title they are using**, and what people would imagine that meant. I think that's why Jesus won't engage with them until they are in private too. See, Jesus is not coming as some revolutionary to lead a uprising against the Roman oppressor - much thought the people of his day would have loved that. The Middle East was a powder-keg back in Jesus' day much like it is today. And if the buzz anywhere and everywhere he went suggested he *would* be playing that role, if it smelt to the Romans like revolution, they were bound to wade in - and that would get in the way of Jesus' real mission.

And thinking about it, if those blind men had truly seen who Jesus was, truly grasped what it meant for him to be the ultimate Son of David - or even if they just had an inkling - what they do after they're healed makes no sense at all: moments after experiencing his power, they completely ignore his command. **Mt 9:30-31**

Matthew 9:30–31 NIV

and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows

about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

Now fair's fair, I can see why they might like to talk about the amazing thing that had happened to them, about the one who's touch restored their sight - but there's no way they could have missed Jesus' command here - it's a really strong expression. His instructions are not at all ambiguous.

I guess they must just think they know better than this "Son of David", think they have a better grip on the right way to go about things, on what should happen next - which says quite a lot about who they think Jesus really is.

We haven't gotten far at all on understanding why these signs are placed at the very top of that ladder of authority yet, but don't despair! Let's dig into **the very last sign** and see if that helps. Initially it seems pretty unremarkable - at least in Jesus terms: we've talked in previous weeks about possession - we've already seen Jesus dispatch a whole legion of demons - so why would this particular case be so special?

Well, the man that's brought to Jesus was mute - he couldn't talk - and most likely he couldn't hear either; the same word is used for both because in those days they were often linked. It's true that we've not met this specific condition in Jesus' story up to this point. But it's hard to see why this would be so categorically different that it should get special billing at the top of this ladder given we've already covered the blind, the paralysed, even the dead...

Yet this story ends with a surprising response from the crowd: Mt 9:33

| Matthew 9:33 (NIV)

| The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

That may well be factually true - the mute speaking may never have been seen before in Israel - but is it really that amazing given everything else that's been going on? Most likely this is a summary of the crowds' reaction to this whole ladder of authority we've been walking up as the section draws to a close rather than something specific to these last two signs: Jesus' power and authority amazes the crowds.

It amazes the crowds - but **not the religious pros**, these Pharisees. We've seen flashes of opposition to Jesus before - this seems to be the point where that hardens into consistent opposition. Rather than marvelling at Jesus' authority, they attribute his works to the prince of demons. If they're right - even if that's just what they really think - then of course they should oppose Jesus, tooth and nail.

But there's a powerful irony here - and perhaps now we are starting to get into why these signs have been saved by Matthew for last. As the blind are healed right in front of their eyes, as the mute is delivered and their own ears hear the first words, they are choosing to ignore the evidence of their ears and eyes. As Jesus moves things one direction: blind see, mute speak; they are moving in the other direction: though seeing, they choose to be blind; though hearing, they choose to be deaf. Blind and deaf as Jesus demonstrates his authority and identity. For them, seeing is

not believing.

As I've studied this passage through the week, there are some amazing connections here you wouldn't immediately spot with the writings of the ancient prophet Isaiah in our Bibles. This voluntary blindness, this voluntary deafness, is one of them. Take a look at **these words from Isaiah** chapter 42 where God is speaking through the prophet Isaiah to his people, here called his servant, his messenger - because that's what God's people were meant to be in his world: his servant, sent as his messenger.

Isaiah 42:18–20 NIV

"Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen."

God's people - and these religious experts in particular - are wilfully ignoring the evidence of their eyes and ears. They are rejecting the role God has for them: they will not be his servant, will not be his messenger.

But there's one last thing I want to show you: these Pharisees were famous for their religious dedication. They would memorise huge chunks of the bible, know it off by heart, back to front, side to side - put the best of us to shame.

So when they come across a Jesus who gives sight to the blind and who gives speech to the mute, they should have known, and they probably would have known, there is exactly one place where these two come together in the whole of the Old Testament: **Is 35:5-6**

| Isaiah 35:5–6 (NIV)

| Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
| Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Everything described here they've experienced first hand with Jesus. The sign is given - the sign they choose to ignore, they close their eyes and ears to. But what does it signify? When is 'then'? Zoom out a touch and we see **Is 35:4-6**

Isaiah 35:4–6 NIV

say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

It signifies that, at last, God has come, come to save his people. Christmas is just around the corner now - if we rewind for a moment to the start of the story of Jesus, perhaps you might remember an angel has a chat with Joseph about the baby to be born? Right at the start of the book of Matthew, **the angel's words to Joseph** are recorded for us:

Matthew 1:21–23 NIV

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Jesus will save, and will be called Immanuel - Hebrew for "God with us". This is what those Pharisees' eyes and ears are closed to. And this is what Christianity is ultimately about: God coming to rescue.

Let me give you one last slice from that section in Isaiah we were looking at, one last 'zoom out' which describes just what it means that God has come to save, that Jesus will save:

Isaiah 35:10 NIV

and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Zion is just their way of describing where God is. At the heart of the Christian message is Jesus who makes a way from our broken world back to God, back home to joy. This is the hope that's at the heart of Hope City, a hope that's such good news we want to share it with our city - hence our church name. Keeping it to yourself wouldn't make any sense.

I know we've covered a lot of ground here - this is a pretty deep passage with lots of connection, with lots to consider. But the question we always like to ask at Hope City is **"so what?"** What should we take away from this passage? What difference does this make in real life?

What stands out to me is the two very different responses to Jesus: amazement and rejection. That was true when Jesus walked the earth, and it's still true today. And this is important: the dividing line between these two isn't whether you've experienced Jesus' authority in action or seen a miracle for yourself. Both the crowd who are amazed and these religious leaders who reject have seen it. **The dividing line is a choice.**

Don't be fooled into thinking if something remarkable happened right in front of you, you'd believe. Don't tell yourself "if I just saw that with my own eyes, well *then* I'd believe" ... so until you do, nothing for you to worry about.

Seeing is not believing. People can still choose to be blind - even when it's right in front of their face. You can choose to wilfully ignore the God who has come to rescue you, closing your eyes and ears to him. Closing them to the ways he's made himself known in your life - for example, the fact that you're here today. Though it's hardly as exciting as the blind seeing, it could be the sign for you.

But just as people can choose to be blind, you can also choose to see - to open your eyes to who Jesus really is: the Son of David - the promised rescuer - God himself, come to save. Many of those around you have done that. Maybe it doesn't all make sense yet - but you get *something!* This is fundamentally about your heart, your will,

not your eyes, your experiences. It's about what's going on inside you, not what's outside.

And you can make this choice even today - even this morning. A simple "Have mercy on me, Jesus" is all it would take for you to share this hope we've been talking about. Your life could change in just a moment. You could have the comfort of this hope, real comfort as we live out our often hard lives in this broken and hurting world. You could have this sure and certain hope that you will ultimately come back home to joy with God himself.

So today, will you choose to open your eyes and see? [wait]

And if you've already done that, already chosen to open your eyes to who Jesus really is, what does this passage have to say to you?

First, let it remind you, as you seek to share this hope, that some will accept and some will reject. That some will see and some will choose not to. That some will be amazed and others will call you names. And that would be true even if you did signs and wonders right in front of their eyes. So don't let rejection stop you. Instead, let this hope drive you on.

But second, and more importantly, be amazed. Let it remind you that **Jesus is God come to rescue**; that he has done it: opened your way back to joy; that you will enter His place with singing; that everlasting joy will crown your head. That gladness and joy will overtake you. That sorrow and sighing will flee away. This is our hope. It's good news that we very much need in this often hard life.

I'm going to give us a moment of silence just now to reflect - and to respond in our hearts. Be amazed. Rejoice. Speak to Jesus. Perhaps for the first time.

And then we'll sing together of this hope.

Q+R Prep

'according to your faith' -> sufficient for healing? if that was the big point, why the second story with apparently passive character brought to Jesus, and no indication of the delivered one's faith? Morris: "according to" not correctly understood as proportionality i.e. "as much as", but according to the presence of faith "since you have". cf littlefaith disciples in the boat still afloat.

strange command to silence -> unique context, probably political; exception to the normal pattern - next he makes the mute speak; sends his disciples out to speak. Sure, if you have a direct command from Jesus to keep quiet in a particular situation, you'd better do that - but if you've been given a command to go make disciples, you need to take that seriously too.