

Lesson 6

Healing a Man Unable to Speak

Introduction

This lesson is based on the text found in Matthew 9.32-34 and a parallel story in Luke 11.14-15. Matthew details it in 38 words and Luke 34. And the way this miracle is explained is different from most of the others. (An exception being the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Matthew 8.14-15.) What is different in that there is no mention of the faith of the individual being healed. There is also no recording of the dialogue between this man and Jesus that most certainly would have taken place after he was healed. Instead, the focus here is *on the reaction* of those who witnessed the miracle. Those in the crowd recognized that something like this could only come from God, while the Pharisees claimed that Jesus' power came from Satan.

It is hard for us to relate to the type of heart that is so hard that it refuses to be amazed at Jesus' power, much less believe when personally witnessing such incredible super-human power. They've witnessed Jesus heal a leper, a paralyzed man, two blind men, and now this demon possessed mute man. Who knows how many other miracles Jesus worked that the gospel writers didn't record for us? These men, above all, should have recognized what they were seeing fit in with what had been written by the prophets:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy, for water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

– Isaiah 35.5-6

The Story

Just before this, Jesus has healed two blind men. This is not the same story listed later in Matthew with Blind Bartimaeus. The events of Matthew 9.27-34 take place in Galilee just after the raising of Jairus' daughter. The events of Matthew 20.29-34 take place on a road, these events take place in a house. After Jesus healed the two blind men He warned them not to tell anyone who healed them. They promptly disobeyed *and went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area*, 9.31.

Just as Jesus was preparing to leave the house where he was, someone brought to him a *demon possessed man who was unable to speak*, 9.32. Depending on how you read the text, it could be that it was the two just-healed formerly blind men who brought this person to Jesus. If so, that is an amazing testimony to the authenticity of their faith. No matter how he got to Jesus, it is clear that he did not come by himself.

The inability to speak was often accompanied by deafness, was not uncommon during Jesus' time. Disease often caused it. Ear infections and accidents could also be a leading cause. In this case however, Matthew says the man's condition was caused by a demon who lived inside of him.

No details are shared concerning the miracle itself, but we do see the results. And note the choice of words Matthew uses: the demon *had been driven out*, 9.33a. While Jesus had ultimate power and could

command demons who would have no choice to obey, this is in no way implies a willing response. Jesus forced the demon out of the man.

The Two Reactions

As we read Matthew 9.33-34, other places are few in the gospels where we see such a great gulf between the reactions to Jesus' divine power. The crowds were stunned and amazed at what they had seen. In 9.33, you can almost hear their emotions when you read, *nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!* But yet, on the other side you can almost hear the embittered grumbling of the Pharisees who were saying, *he drives out demons by the ruler of the demons*, 9.34. It has been said, *what the eye sees depends upon what the heart feels.*⁵²

Not everyone, but certain many in the crowd saw Jesus as having the power to meet their deepest needs. The message they were receiving was that He could meet those needs with super-abundance. It has been said that the deeper sense of need leads to Jesus being seen in a more wonderful way. Again, this stands in total contrast to the Pharisees, who could not deny His power, but were left with only one thing: attribute His power to Satan. It is hard to explain the level of hostility here. Their response is a total and offensive repudiation of Jesus' authority. This just cements what was probably already obvious. There would be no reconciliation or repair in Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees.

There are some powerful lessons for us. Are we open to an examination of our spiritual heart? What kept the Pharisees from responding to Jesus in a positive way? What can harm our proper response to Jesus today?

1. **Stubborn pride.** They were so set in their ways that change was impossible. The greatest things were in the past. Religion was not a relationship, it was a set of laws. Do's and don'ts. Any deviation was a sin. New ways of thinking, a fresh look, times of refreshing were all looked upon with suspicion and steadfastly resisted. Besides, they may have thought that if God were still doing miracles like what He had done through Elijah and Elisha, surely He would have been doing it through *them*. They were the ones with the correct doctrine. Surely this uneducated country person from rural Nazareth wouldn't be the one.⁵³
2. **Self-Satisfaction.** These men saw no need to change. They had arrived. If someone came along urging them to examine themselves or change what was lacking . . . instead of responding with humble hearts they sought to destroy and remove. Self-satisfaction and repentance do not go together.
3. **Prejudice.** It is no wonder that the largest category of Jesus' miracles recorded in the gospel accounts focus on His healing people of blindness. During Jesus' earthly ministry there was no one more blind than the Pharisees, Scribes, and Teachers of the Law. They were so blinded by

⁵² Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Third Ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 405.

⁵³ Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009, p. 307.

their traditions and viewpoints on the law that they could not see the Truth that stood right in front of them.

How Jesus Saw Neglected Souls

The last four verses of Matthew 9 summarize the heart of Jesus. He always moved with tender concern for those on the fringe of society, the rejected, lost, and ignored. There were those who were neglected by those who should have cared. For those who were looked upon as *sinner*s, they were in desperate need of teaching ... not condescension. Matthew 9.36 says Jesus was moved with *compassion*. Many were in hopeless situations, helpless to remove themselves, physically dying. This moved Jesus to pity. He could not see these things and not be emotionally stirred.

Today is no different. How do we feel as we look across the landscape and see people *distressed and dejected* ... many living life *as a sheep without a shepherd*? Are we moved with compassion? Have we pity for the spiritual destitution they find themselves in? How far are we willing to go to point them to the way to Christ? And by this I do not mean ... stand aloof and bark orders ... but take the time to get our hands dirty and do whatever is necessary to make a positive impact? Yes most of our local churches have a sign in front of the building that welcomes guests. Putting out the welcome mat and having a website aren't enough. Look at Matthew 9.38: we need workers to *go out into His harvest*.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Where does the story in Matthew 9.27-34 take place? In Galilee or Jericho? Why is this important to know?
2. What did Jesus tell the two blind men not to do? What could the early part of 9.32 seem to indicate?
3. What was the cause of this man's condition?
4. Did the demon willingly come out of this man?

5. When compared to most of the other miracle stories in the gospels, what makes this one different?

6. What was the reaction of the people to Jesus' miracle?

7. What was the reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus' miracle?

8. What are some of the things that kept the Pharisees from accepting Jesus' miracle? What was the condition of their heart?

9. What can we learn about our attitude toward the neglected as we examine Matthew 9.35-38?

10. What will it take for us to fulfill the prayer in Matthew 9.38?