

JESUS' AUTHORITY-OVER DISCIPLES

March 12, 2017

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Matthew 8:16-22

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SERMON SERIES: MATTHEW: JESUS, THE SOVEREIGN KING

SERMON TITLE: "JESUS' AUTHORITY - OVER DISCIPLES"

SCRIPTURE TEXT: MATTHEW 8:16-22 (P. 813)

TOPIC: MATTHEW

DATE: MARCH 12, 2017

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INTRO.

-- We're in the Gospel of Matthew and in a section of that Gospel where Matthew places great emphasis on Jesus' authority. So, turn to Matthew chapter 8.

Matthew 8 (p. 813)

-- When he talks about Jesus' authority, Matthew means the right and power that Jesus possesses because of who He is. That means that when Jesus demonstrates His authority He is giving us insight into His identity. In chapters 8-9 Matthew shows us that Jesus possesses supreme authority, pointing to the fact that Jesus is "Emmanuel," God with us (cf., 1:23).

-- Last week we looked at the first part of Matthew 8, where Jesus demonstrated His authority over disease by healing a leper; a centurion's servant (whom Jesus healed with a command without actually being in the servant's presence); and, finally, healed Peter's mother-in-law, who was in bed with a fever.

In today's passage we're going to see more about Jesus' authority over disease and then see that authority also claimed over Jesus' disciples.

Cf., vv. 16-22 / read vv. 16-17

I. A Question about Jesus' Healing Miracles

-- What we see here is that Jesus possesses authority over demons and diseases - both are subject to the power of His command. What I want us to focus on right now is verse 17, where Mathew quotes from Isaiah 53:4.

v. 17

A. The Question

-- Now, here's the question that I want us to consider before we move on: was taking away sickness part of Jesus' mission as the Messiah?

B. Pentecostal Theology

-- Pentecostal theology believes that Jesus died on the cross not only to take away our sins but also to take away our diseases. That's the theological foundation for what is often termed the "health-and-wealth gospel." Those who take this view would point to this verse in Matthew as biblical proof.

C. A Review of Biblical Truths

-- So, let's evaluate this view in light of some key biblical truths.

1. The Cause of Sickness & Suffering

-- Let's start with the cause for sickness and suffering - Adam's sin in the Garden.

Everyone agrees that the sickness and suffering are the consequence of Adam's disobedient decision to eat from the forbidden tree. God had warned Adam that eating from the tree would result in Adam's dying. That death would be brought about by physical sickness and disease.

2. Why Jesus Came

-- The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus came to save us from the judgment of sin by His atonement death on the cross. Remember the angel's words to Joseph about the baby with whom Mary was pregnant:

Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

1 Peter 2:24-25 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. **²⁵**For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

-- Peter says that what Jesus bore on the cross was our sins - not our sicknesses. And Peter says that the "healing" we receive is a spiritual healing that restores us to a relationship with God.

3. "Already" Delivered from the Power But "Not Yet" the Presence

-- Through His death and resurrection Jesus has already delivered us from the power of sin but not yet from the presence of sin and its consequences. Those who are in Christ have been delivered from the power of sin that separates us from God, but the presence of sin is still with us. We still struggle against sin. We still get sick. And we still die. To say that Christians should never be sick in this present Church Age makes as much sense as saying that Christians should never die.

In His earthly ministry Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God; but in this present age it's an "already / not yet" kingdom. It is already started but not yet complete. It won't be complete until Christ returns. He started it in His First Coming and will complete it in His Second Coming. In the First Coming Christ delivered us from the power of sin; in the Second Coming He will deliver us from the presence of sin.

Rev. 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

4. Why Jesus Performed Miraculous Healings

-- Jesus performed miraculous healings as part of His earthly ministry for at least three reasons: (1) as an expression of His love and compassion; (2) as a sign to confirm His identity as the divine Son of God in human flesh; and (3) as a preview of what is to come when the Kingdom of God is fully here.

-- But Jesus knew that people would be tempted to misinterpret the meaning and importance of His miracles. He knew that for some their infatuation with the miracles would be greater than their love for the miracle-worker, and that's what I believe is the case in the example of the volunteer disciple.

II. Jesus and Two Would-Be Disciples

A. The First Would-Be Disciple (vv. 19-20)

1. The Volunteer Disciple

-- For us pastors this man is like a dream-come-true. He's a volunteer - and he's ready to go wherever Jesus goes and do whatever Jesus wants him to do. You might expect Jesus to be excited about this guy. After all, he's a scribe - a biblical scholar; and the scribes have been opposed to accepting Jesus. It would make Jesus look more legitimate to have a scribe as one of His Disciples.

2. Jesus' Response

-- But Jesus isn't excited and seems to even throw cold water on the man's fiery enthusiasm. At first, we might be puzzled at Jesus' response, but it's not as strange as it might appear. For example, imagine someone was visiting here at North Center for the first time and checked all the things on the back of the worship card - wanting to join the church and get involved in every ministry. You might think that we'd say, "Quick, let's sign him up before he comes to his senses." The fact is that we've had that happen before. The first time someone was here they checked just about everything on the back of the card - become a member, help in the nursery, the youth ministry, the prayer ministry, and get offering envelopes. The truth is that I wasn't excited; I was uneasy. I wondered about the person's motivation and stability.

-- What Jesus sees in this man's overly-enthusiastic volunteerism isn't commendable commitment but troublesome shallowness, like the seed growing on rocky soil. Here's a man who has seen all the miracles that Jesus is doing and wants to be with someone who can do things like that. But this man hasn't really considered what it means to follow Jesus. He hasn't thought about what it will involve - not having a bed to lie down in or having a roof over his head or being rejected and condemned by the other scribes. He's ready to follow Jesus to another miracle, but is he ready to follow Jesus to the cross?

3. The Lesson about Discipleship

-- The discipleship lesson here is that following Jesus is costly. Discipleship isn't only about where you are willing to go but what you are willing to leave behind, what you are ready to sacrifice.

Luke 9:23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

-- As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in his classic *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die."

B. The Second Would-Be Disciple (vv. 21-22)

1. The Disciple

-- There are two differing opinions about what this disciple is intending in his request. Some believe that the man's father isn't dead yet and that the man is saying that before he can follow Jesus he needs to take care of his father until the father dies and has a proper burial, and then the man will follow Jesus.

The other view is that the father is actually dead and needs to be buried. After the man has had the opportunity to give his father a proper funeral and burial, the man will come to follow Jesus.

-- Whichever view you take, I think that Jesus' reply to the man would have been the same; so, I'm more inclined to take the view that the father is already dead.

2. Jesus' Reply

-- In that case Jesus' reply appears rather insensitive and shocking. It sounds as if Jesus is saying that an obligation to parents isn't important. But we know that isn't what's happening here. Throughout His ministry Jesus repeatedly placed high value on families and family relationships. Indeed, when Jesus hung on the cross, dying, one of the last things He did was to instruct His disciple John to take care of His mother, Mary.

-- A key to understanding this incident is the word "first." The first priority in this man's life is not Jesus but his parents. Jesus is important but not first. Following Jesus is something he wants to do, but it isn't at the top of his list.

3. The Discipleship Lesson

-- The discipleship lesson that Jesus is giving us here is that absolutely nothing can take priority over our commitment to Christ. Even the most sacred of human relationships - those in our families - are to be secondary to our commitment to Christ. Think of it this way: if the man's father had been a godly man and was dead and in heaven and could have advised his son on what to do - bury the father's body or follow Jesus - which choice do you think the father would have urged the son to make? Unquestionably, to go with Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Helen Roseveare was an English missionary to the Congo, who died this past December.

Helen was born in England in 1925. While studying medicine at Cambridge University, she came to know Christ personally at a student retreat. After coming to follow Christ she had a growing sense of being called to be a missionary and declared at a missions gathering, "I'll go anywhere God wants me to, whatever the cost."

After receiving her medical degree from Cambridge she did some missions training and went as a medical missionary to the Congo in 1953, at the age of 28. In the coming years she would start a school for training nurse-missionaries; a center that cared for lepers, mothers and children; a training school for paramedics; and nearly 50 rural clinics.

In 1964 civil war erupted in the Congo. All of the medical facilities that Helen had started were destroyed, and she was imprisoned. She was repeatedly beaten severely, and in October of 1964 was brutally raped. Following that horrific experience Helen descended into a deep despair, questioning God's faithfulness, until one dark night she sensed God saying to her:

"You asked Me, when you were first converted, for the privilege of being a missionary. This is it. Don't you want it? . . . These are not your sufferings. They're Mine. All I ask of you is the loan of your body."

The word "privilege" became especially significant to Helen, and she later wrote:

"One word became unbelievably clear, and that word was privilege. He didn't take away pain or cruelty or humiliation. No! It was all there, but now it was altogether different. It was with him, for him, in him. He was actually offering me the inestimable privilege of sharing in some little way the edge of the fellowship of his suffering.

In the weeks of imprisonment that followed and in the subsequent years of continued service, looking back, one has tried to 'count the cost,' but I find it all swallowed up in privilege. The cost suddenly seems very small and transient in the greatness and permanence of the privilege."

Helen continued serving the Lord in the Congo and established a new medical center with a hospital, maternity ward, training college for doctors and a center for lepers.

Health problems forced her to return to England in 1973. She continued to serve as a missions advocate until this past December, when the Lord called her home to be with Him at the age of 91.

Helen knew that following Christ was not a health-and-wealth life of ease. She knew that being Christ's disciple mean being surrendered to His sovereign authority - having Christ as our greatest priority and being ready to pay any cost to follow Him. As she wrote:

"God never uses a person greatly until He has wounded him deeply.

The privilege He offers you is greater than the price you have to pay."