

“Powerful Compassion”

Matthew 9:18-34

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Let’s say I pick up the newspaper tomorrow morning and read this bold headline: “Doctor Brings Dead Girl Back to Life.” Now, this is not some wild tabloid, but a respectable newspaper, the Duluth News-Tribune. I read the story and find out this was not some “near death” experience. A 12-year-old girl in Minneapolis had really, truly, been dead for 12 hours.

Numerous witnesses report the physician had simply taken the girl’s hand and she had come back to life, stood up and started talking. I don’t know about you, but I would be skeptical. “That is crazy, that cannot be true.” Then I go to my computer, check both the Fox News and CNN websites, and sure enough, they are reporting the same story. They have interviews with the girl’s parents who say they were making funeral plans for their daughter. Yet now the girl is standing beside them. The Fox report says numerous sources claim this doctor has done things like this before.

I am starting to feel a sense of awe and amazement. Yet one thought keeps filling my mind. I need to find out more about this man, this doctor. Who is he? How can he do things like this?

Now, folks I don’t expect we will ever read a credible story like that in the newspaper. Yet if we did, I think most of us would be very, very interested. However, when people read an account quite similar to this in the Bible, many of them seem pretty apathetic. “Ho-hum, Jesus brings someone back to life, no big deal.” The lack of interest and excitement over the gospel reports of what Jesus did is rather puzzling. I suspect there are three reasons for the seeming indifference. 1) Some folks don’t think the Bible is a reliable source of what actually happened. They treat it as an ancient tabloid, reporting fantastic stories without any root in what actually happened. If that is your view, I would love to sit down and chat. I believe you are mistaken and that the historical evidence shows the Bible is a very reliable source. 2) It has been about 2000 years since Jesus was on earth, and many mistakenly assume things that happened a long

time ago cannot be very important. We have the attitude C.S. Lewis called, “Chronological snobbery.” There is no rational basis for thinking things that happened in the past are not important, and it is an attitude we simply need to overcome. 3) Reason, which is probably the one most common in this room, is that we are too familiar with the story. Some of you have been coming to church for many years. You have heard countless times how Jesus healed sick people and even brought dead people back to life. It is no longer news. That is what we expect Him to do. Our familiarity causes us to miss the wonder of His power and compassion.

Friends, this morning I want you to hear about Jesus as if you were doing so for the first time. I want us to read the gospel account as if it were a newspaper headline: “Jesus Brings Dead Girl Back to Life!” “Jesus Enables Blind Person to See!”

To help us do that I have asked Candie to read our text today. Just keep your Bibles closed and listen to this story as if you were hearing it for the first time. Pretend you have heard of this Jesus fellow, but rally don’t know what type of man He is. As you listen, ask yourself some questions: What am I learning about Jesus? What type of person is He? How should I respond to Him? Okay Candice, read!

The text that was just read was **Matthew 9:18-34**. Now, I encourage you to open your Bibles to that passage. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use this account to cause our faith in and love for Jesus to grow.

In this passage, we see Jesus performing four different miracles. Let’s take a quick look at each of them.

#1 In verses 20-22 we have the woman with excessive bleeding, menstrual bleeding. Matthew’s report of these first two incidents is pretty condensed. Mark 5 and Luke 8 contain more details. Note that Jesus heals this woman as He is on His way to the house of a girl who just died. We might assume Jesus would be in kind of a hurry to get there, but He takes time for this

woman. Verse 20 says she “had suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years.” The episode in The Chosen that recounts this story does a good job of pointing out this woman not only has a physical problem but also social and religious problems. According to the Old Testament Law, Leviticus, she is continually unfit to participate in temple worship. For 12 years, this woman was a total outcast. She was no doubt very discouraged. But then she heard about this man, Jesus. He touched sick people and healed them. And so, **Matthew 9:21 she said to herself, “If I only touch is garment, I will be made well.”** This may be a mixture of faith and superstition. The woman pushes her way through the crowd, touches Jesus’ garment, and the bleeding stops. Jesus then tells her there is nothing magical about His clothes, but that her faith was the vehicle through which she experienced God’s healing.

#2 The dead girl. Verse 18 tells us how the girl’s father asked for Jesus’ help. Mark and Luke tell us his name is Jairus, a ruler of a Jewish synagogue, which means he was a very important man in the community. The man’s words may have been rooted in genuine faith, but there is also probably some desperation. He can do nothing for his little girl, but perhaps this Jesus can. In verse 23, Jesus arrives, and it is clear the girl is dead and has been dead for some time. The flute players and noisy crowd are preparing for a funeral. In our day, people who attend a funeral are usually very solemn and quiet. But in Jesus’ day, loud outbursts of grief and wailing were the norm. **Matthew 9:14 Jesus said “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him.** Now, he does not mean she is napping. He knows her heart has stopped beating and her brain waves are flat. Yet, Jesus also knows her death is temporary.

The crowd laughs. This great healer says the girl is only asleep, but He has arrived too late. Yes, maybe He has helped some sick people, but He cannot revive a corpse. The mocking crowd is then ejected from the house. Mark tells us five witnesses remained and that Jesus spoke to the girl. Matthew simply reports that Jesus touched the corpse, something a good Jew is not supposed to do, and the body, instead of defiling Him, comes back to life. Amazing!

#3 Verses 27-31 reports that as Jesus leaves the home of Jairus, two blind men call out. **Matthew 9:27b “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”** This is a title used for the Messiah, and reveals the faith of these two men, who, though physically blind, have spiritual insight. When Jesus reaches His destination, the two fellows follow Him inside. **Matthew 9:28b Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.”** Their cries are not merely out of desperation, but out of faith. Jesus then heals them, restores their sight and admonishes them not to publicize what He’s done. Jesus knew His soaring popularity as a healer, could interfere with the role God, His Father, had called Him, Messiah and Savior. The men, however, allow their enthusiasm to get in the way of their obedience. **Matthew 9:31 But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.** Jesus’ reputation is spreading like wildfire.

#4 In verses 32-34, Jesus drives a demon out of a man who could not speak. In Jesus’ day, and I believe in ours, diseases were sometimes, but certainly not always, connected with the demonic. In this particular case, Jesus realizes the reason the man cannot talk is because he is demon possessed. Jesus casts the demon out and the man is able to speak.

Most Bible scholars believe these four events all occurred in a single day. Can you imagine the reporters flocking to the scene if something like this happened today?

At this point, Matthew notes two opposite reactions to what Jesus has done. Some are amazed by Jesus’ power. They say, **Matthew 9:33b “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.”** However, not everyone shares that opinion. The Pharisees, Jewish religious leaders, remain total skeptics. **Matthew 9:34 The Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”** In other words, Jesus gets His power from the devil. Their spiritual blindness is total. They have no idea who Jesus really is.

So, folks, what is your reaction? As you listened to Matthew’s account, what did you learn about Jesus? Pretend you really know little about Him, other than what you learn in this text. What type of person do you think He is? The folks in the so

called, “Jesus seminar” concluded Jesus was “ a social activist with a good sense of humor.” One writer says Jesus was a moral teacher on par with Buddha. Yet, even in these few paragraphs, Matthew gives us a very different picture. I think two characteristics of Jesus stand out.

First, is Jesus’ power. Whether it is disease, disability, demons, or death itself, Jesus is more powerful. His power has no limits. When we hear the name Jesus, I think the first thing Matthew wants to come to our minds is “power.” Nothing is too hard for Jesus. There is nothing He can’t do. Yet, there is a **second** important quality as well: **compassion.** If all we see when we look at Jesus is power, we need to take a closer look. When the gospel writers tell us about Jesus, they do so in such a way that His power is always accompanied by compassion.

The miracles Jesus performed are evidence or signs that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Yet not one miracle is done solely to demonstrate His power. Jesus never makes a camel disappear, never turns a donkey into a dog, never escapes from a padlocked safe to who His power.

His miraculous works always demonstrate a concern and a compassion for other people. His first miracle, turning water into wine, John 2, was done primarily so the wedding host would not be embarrassed. He calms the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Matthew 8:23, so that the disciples will not be afraid. In our text, the healing, raising the girl from the dead, and casting out the demon are all done for the benefit of those individuals.

What we see in this chapter is something we see throughout the four gospels, Jesus does miracles because He cares about people, He has compassion for people who need help. In Jesus Christ, we see absolute power and perfect compassion residing in the same person.

Folks, this is a very unique combination. Think of the two most powerful people you know. Now, think of the two most compassionate people you know. It is unlikely that anyone appears on both lists. Power and compassion seem like an unlikely combination. Physical beauty, athletic ability, intelligence and charm can all be found in one person. However, power and compassion seem to be almost mutually exclusive.

The most powerful political leaders of the past 100 years have been dictators like Stalin, Hitler, and Mao. They were men who determined the structure of their societies to the smallest detail. They determined what clothes and jewelry millions of people could wear. Yet, these men were not compassionate. The blood of 60 million Chinese was on Mao’s hands, and Hitler and Staling were anything but “kind” men.’ The 20th century confirmed Lord Acton’s little saying to be very true: Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Except in the Case of Jesus. In a world where power and compassion seem incompatible, it should thrill our souls to see Jesus embody both of them perfectly. Absolute power and perfect compassion. Those are two of Jesus’ most outstanding characteristics and both flow from the fact that He was and is the eternal Son of God. Friends, I believe whenever we read the gospel accounts and really hear God speak to us through His work, that is a big part of what we will see. Power and compassion. That is who Jesus was and is.

So, what is the practical value of recognizing Jesus’ power and compassion **First**, when we keep these two qualities in focus, I think it helps us to avoid some serious mistakes. Some folks, for example, see only Jesus’ power and miss His compassion. They know He can do anything, but they tend to be afraid of Him.

They often do the right thing out of a sense of duty. They go to church and try to obey the Ten Commandments because they realize that if Jesus can raise people from the dead, He is not the type of guy one wants to mess with. Now, I certainly don’t want to mess with Jesus, either, but obedience out of fear is a poor substitute for obedience that is rooted in love.

Others are struck by Jesus’ compassion but miss His power. They see a gentle Jesus meek and mild, who readily forgives any offense. They cannot, however, imagine Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, who rules the nations and to whom one day every knee will bow.

Friends, these distortions do real spiritual harm. A Jesus that is anything less than absolutely powerful and perfectly compassionate is not the

real Jesus. Without absolute power and perfect compassion, Jesus is not really God's Son and our Lord and Savior.

Second, recognizing Jesus' power and compassion strengthens our prayer life. Because of Jesus' power, He is able to do whatever He pleases, and because of His compassion He cares about our needs. Knowing that motivates us to pray. Knowing that the Lord is totally able and perfectly willing to answer our prayers, gives us reason to pray! If you struggle with your prayer life, a good remedy may be to spend time reflecting on Jesus' power and compassion.

Third, having a clear view of Jesus' power and compassion also encourages us in tough times. **Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.** I think that is one of the best verses in the Bible. How do we know it is true? Because of Jesus' power and compassion. The Lord's power enables Him to make sure that everything works out just as He desires. The Lord's compassion guarantees He will use His power for our ultimate good.

Thus, when tough times come, when we have one of those horrible, rotten, no good, very bad days and feel like moving to Australia; when Murphy's Law, if anything can go wrong it will, seems like our life's theme, we can still hang in there because of Jesus' powerful compassion. His absolute power and perfect compassion assure us God is indeed going to work out all things for His glory and for our ultimate good.

Friends, maybe you came here this morning without any strong opinions about Jesus. Yes, you have heard of Him, but you cannot imagine how someone who lived on earth 2000 years ago could have any relevance for life today. Perhaps as you hear these verses you feel a sense of awe and amazement. Yet, let me remind you, I have only told you a part of the story. You need to get together with someone you know, or you can give me a call, but you need to hear the rest of the story.

You need to hear how Jesus' perfect compassion leads Him to a Roman cross where He is killed, where He dies as a sacrifice for sin, dies as a substitute for people like you and me so we can

experience God's salvation if we put our trust in Him.

You need to hear how through His absolute power, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and has now exalted Him to a place of authority at the Father's right hand. From there, He will one day return to this earth, reign as King. Friends, if you are not sure who Jesus really was and is, pray and ask God to reveal that to you. I am confident that when that happens, you will then embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Those who are believers of Jesus, which I know is most of us in this room, can also benefit from focusing on Jesus' power and compassion. With all that is going on in the world, with all the things that go on in our lives each week, with our hectic schedules and multiple responsibilities, it is so easy to lose sight of who Jesus is and what He has done. I hope God's word and our time of worship this morning have reminded you of the glory of Jesus Christ, of the beauty of His power and compassion. May our lips and lives express our praise to Him today, and in the days ahead.

