

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 5

Matthew – Part Five The Miracles

I. BACKGROUND

An integral part of Matthew is the reported miracles of Jesus. Miracles were important in establishing the credentials of Jesus as Messiah – but these miracles do more than that. These miracles also provide insight into God’s character as compassionate and caring. We see God’s value placed on people and earthly situations. We will spend this week looking at those miracles Matthew records. Then, we anticipate spending three more weeks in Matthew dealing with the parables, the teaching/discourse of Jesus, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Matthew does not put the miracles into any specific category. We will, however, look at them in four groups: (1) HEALINGS; (2) EXORCISMS; (3) SUPERNATURAL ACTS; and (4) RESURRECTIONS.

II. HEALINGS

Jesus healed many during his ministry. Matthew does not go into detail on all of them; however, Matthew does provide a good number of healings that offer valuable lessons. One point to remember as we work through these healings concerns the Greek word for healing “*Sozo*.” *Sozo* not only means “heal,” but it is also the Greek word for “save.” We will see that Matthew purposely speaks of Jesus’ healings in a context that easily applies to all of us who have the sickness/disease of sin.

For example, after the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 8, Matthew sets forth the healing of a man with leprosy in verses 1–4. The leper approaches Jesus and kneels before Jesus exclaiming, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus responds, “I am willing,” and the leper was cleansed. Reading the story prompts a request in the heart of all who understand their spiritual leprosy. We have the assurance that should any of us kneel before Jesus and ask, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean,” Jesus will do so. Certainly, Jesus cares more about our souls than the skin we wear.

An interesting side note to this healing is Jesus’ instruction to the ex-leper to “see that you don’t tell anyone.” This instruction will crop up again and

again throughout the gospels' teaching about Jesus' healings. It becomes readily apparent that Jesus was concerned about people trying to set him up as an earthly king, when that was the furthest thing from Jesus' mind. Think about your willingness to put your life on the line fighting for a king who could speak and heal! That would certainly be the kind of earthly king worth fighting for!

Following the leper's healing in verses 5–13, Matthew records the healing of a servant belonging to a Centurion (a Roman military officer). The Centurion asks Jesus to heal the servant, and Jesus expresses a willingness to go with the Centurion to see and heal the servant. The Centurion stops Jesus from going with the statement:

Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, "Go," and he goes....

Jesus is amazed that a non-Jew has such faith. Jesus heals the servant with a word without venturing to the servant's side.

This miracle emphasizes the faith that can be found outside of Judaism. It also underscores the authority Jesus has over disease and malady. It is not the presence of Jesus that heals, but the authority of Jesus.

Among the many Jesus healed was the apostle Peter's mother-in-law (8:14–17). Jesus heals her of a fever and then spends the evening ministering to a number of others who were brought before him. Matthew confirms that these actions of Jesus were in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

Matthew 9:18–26 has Jesus on a mission to help a ruler whose daughter had died. While en route, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years come behind Jesus and touches the edge of his cloak. The touch, although coming from behind, did not escape the notice of Jesus. Jesus turns and tells the woman that her faith healed her. She was in fact healed at that very moment. We see here Jesus healing where one with faith sought him out but not with enough courage to come face to face with Jesus. Our Messiah was one who honored even the hidden reach of a wounded soul.

Later in the same chapter (verses 27–34), Matthew records two blind men following Jesus and calling out for healing. Although Jesus went into a house, the blind men still followed. When they got to Jesus in the house,

Jesus asked, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” The blind men said, “Yes.” Jesus then touched their eyes and healed them on the spot. This healing came with the injunction Jesus stated earlier: “See that no one knows about this” (Interestingly, these men were not the best at obedience. Matthew notes that they went out and blabbed about the healing all over the region.).

In Matthew 12:9–14, we read of Jesus going into a synagogue where there was a man with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees were out to prove Jesus an evil lawbreaker, so the Pharisees seized the moment to ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” In their eyes, such action was “work” and in violation of the 10 commandments where we are charged to keep the Sabbath holy (Ex. 20: 8-11). Jesus reminded the Pharisees that they would pull a sheep out of a pit if it fell in on a Sabbath; certainly, a man was more valuable than a sheep! So, Jesus healed the man. From this miracle, we see Jesus understanding and better interpreting the Law of Moses than the most holy ones among the men in Israel. Those “holy” folks did not take to Jesus out smarting them, and Matthew points out that the Pharisees left and plotted on how to kill Jesus.

Our review of Jesus’ healings takes us next to Matthew 20:29–34. Again, we observe blind people having the vision to see Jesus for who he really was that they shout from where they stood by the road, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd tries to hush the men telling them to be quiet. The men would not, however. They just shouted louder. Jesus stops by the men and asks them, “What do you want me to do for you?” The men wanted to have their sight, and Jesus moved with compassion, touches their eyes, and heals them. Instructive in this healing is the constant requesting for mercy in the face of folks discouraging it. May more people have the sight of the blind men and see Jesus as their solution to their problems!

III. EXORCISMS

Matthew records a number of times where Jesus stands in conflict with Satan and the demonic world. None of the gospel writers are hesitant to write about the spiritual battle as it intersects the lives of people and the fallen world in which we live.

In Matthew 8:28–34, Matthew notes that while Jesus was in the region of the Gaderens, two demon-possessed men come from the tombs to meet Jesus. The demons know Jesus. They call Jesus “the Son of God.” The demons ask Jesus whether Jesus has come to torment the demons “before

the appointed time.” Realizing they were to be cast out of the men, the demons request that Jesus allow them to indwell a herd of pigs. Jesus commands the demons, “Go,” and they went into the pigs. The pig herd then rushed down a steep bank into the water where they drowned. The town hears about Jesus casting demons out of men into non-kosher pigs and pleads with Jesus to leave the region.

Matthew writes in such a way as to warn us against being folks who do not like how the Messiah deals with our uncleanness and request him to leave, even though his work is for the best.

If we go back to Matthew 9:27-34 where Jesus healed the blind men, we also read that a man who was mute due to demon possession was brought to Jesus. Jesus drives out the demon and the man was able to speak. Confronted with such a miracle worker, the Pharisees began to declare that Jesus must be on Satan’s payroll! They said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.” Funny how even the best deeds can be painted wrong by those who do not know the Lord.

In Matthew 15:21-28, we again have a non-Jew confronting Jesus to seek Jesus’ help. A Canaanite woman has a daughter suffering terribly from demon possession. As she seeks Jesus’ help, Jesus explains, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman does not accept rejection, but she kneels before Jesus and begs, “Lord, help me!” Jesus then replies that his work was for the Jews saying, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” The woman does not accept the second rejection, but instead replies, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Jesus is moved by the woman’s faith and heals her daughter.

In this story, we notice the reward for persistence before God. We also see that Jesus honored respectful dialogue over what he would or would not do. Finally, we should note that the story does not say that Jesus would not have healed should the woman have been less persistent. We just know that Jesus walked her through the understanding of who he was and what his purpose was. Then, the gentile’s faith was the basis for healing.

The final demonic possession story from Matthew is found in 17:14-23. A boy is suffering from demon-induced seizures. Moreover, Jesus’ apostles were not able to heal the boy on their own, even though Jesus had specifically given the men the authority over demons. Jesus rebukes the demon and heals the boy. The disciples approached Jesus in private and asked why they were not able to drive out the demon. Jesus says the

disciples lacked the faith necessary to do so. Faith, Jesus explains, can move a mountain. Interesting that as holy and faithful as mankind can be, there are some matters that need the faith and hand of Jesus.

IV. SUPERNATURAL ACTS

Certainly, the miracles we have already discussed are all supernatural acts. Here, we are looking at those supernatural acts that do not fit into the classifications we have already covered. These set out Jesus' mastery over the elements of the earth.

Matthew 8:23-27 shows Jesus asleep in a boat when a storm starts raging. The scared apostles awaken Jesus fearing they were going to capsize. Jesus cites their lack of faith and then rebukes the wind and waves, bringing instant calm. The Apostles are amazed that even the winds and waves obey Jesus.

Matthew 14:13-21 has Jesus feeding 5,000 men (with an unnumbered amount of women and children) with merely five loaves of bread and two fish. The following chapter (15:29-39) has Jesus feeding 4,000 men (again, with an unnumbered group of women and children) on seven loaves of bread and a few fish. These miracles, aside from showing the compassion of Christ, further Matthew's intent of showing Jesus greater than Moses, as one who feeds the masses much like the manna and quail fed the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings. While God gave the manna and quail (not Moses!), Jesus himself does the feedings here having first blessed the bread with thanksgiving to God.

In a similar manner, Matthew relates the story of Jesus going up on a mountain where Moses and Elijah appear before Jesus. The three have a conversation of which we know no details. WHAT was said was not what was important to Matthew: WHO was involved is the important thing. The greatest priest and prophet of the Old Testament being at Jesus' availability certainly positions Jesus as their superior.

A final incident of Jesus acting in a supernatural way over nature is found in 21:18-22. Jesus is hungry and sees a fig tree. Looking for a fig, Jesus finds the fig tree barren. Jesus speaks to the tree and says, "May you never bear fruit again!" and the tree immediately withered. The disciples were amazed and Jesus used this episode to reconfirm to them the importance of faith in our lives. With faith, the disciples can do far more than make a fig tree wither.

V. RESURRECTIONS

There are two resurrections in Matthew. We will save the second one (the resurrection of Jesus) for later. This week, we focus on Matthew 9:18-26. Here, a ruler comes to Jesus explaining that his daughter had died and he wished Jesus would come resurrect her. Jesus goes to the man's house and sends out all the mourners and watchers. Jesus tells them to leave because the girl is not dead, but asleep. Jesus then calls the girl back from the grave. Jesus knew that death was not an extinction where one exists no more; death was just a time of waiting for the full resurrection. The girl was readily available to come back and re-inhabit her body.

VII. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Jesus is a miracle worker.
2. Come to him with your needs.
3. Intercede with him for others.
4. No job is too big.
5. He overcomes EVERYTHING.