

The challenge and call of the King

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn, Mithfeth, if you would, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8 and 9. In the last few studies, we've been looking at Matthew's Gospel, and we've covered that well-known section, the Sermon on the Mount.

But now, in chapters 8 and 9, the Sermon on the Mount is finished, but Matthew's sermon is not finished. And these two chapters show us the kingdom which Jesus has proclaimed in words, now proclaimed also in action.

It's a demonstration, along with Jesus' words, of what the Gospel of the Kingdom really is, what it's all about. And what it's all about is the transformation of the world, the transformation of the universe, a total spiritual transformation, nothing less than new creation.

And it's also about the transformation of men and women for that new creation. And it all happens by the power and the authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Power over all decay, over destruction, over enslavement, over alienation. Power over everything that is the evidence of the curse of sin in the world.

[1 : 17] And Matthew is showing us the kingdom of heaven proclaimed, announced by Jesus in his words and in his action. It's all together, it's all of a piece. And that's why he structures his sermon to us as he does.

Just look at the last few verses there of chapter 9, verse 35. Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

I'll just turn back to chapter 4, verse 23, that comes just before the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction from among the people.

And there we are, you see. Those are the two brackets. In between is Matthew's sermon. Matthew's preaching to us. He's got a message and he's speaking to us.

That's what the Bible is, remember. It's not just a series of events that we interpret. It's the events plus God's authoritative interpretation given by his Holy Spirit. The Bible is God preaching to us.

[2 : 25] And so that's what we're listening to this morning. We're listening to Matthew's sermon to us. In chapters 8 and 9, he's still preaching to us the gospel of the kingdom. And if I may say, it is a brilliant piece of preaching.

We could take each of these nine miracle stories and the bits in between. We could take each one of them individually. In fact, that's what we've done last term on Wednesdays at lunchtimes.

That's a very valid way of doing it. We can see the detail then. But nevertheless, if we do that, we miss something of Matthew's brilliant sermon construction. So we're going to look at it today as we read it as a whole.

We're going to get a bird's eye view just to focus on what Matthew's message is and how he applies the gospel of the kingdom to the life of Christian discipleship.

I really think it is a brilliant three-point sermon. Each of his three points has three miracle stories and then at the end of each one, it's applied to the life of discipleship.

[3 : 26] And as it goes through, it works up to a climax. And at the end, both challenges the crowds to make a decision. Remember, he's talking to the crowds as well as to his disciples.

And at the same time, calls his disciples to see the real significance of their new life in Jesus. And the ringing message all throughout this whole sermon of Matthew's is this, the authority of Jesus.

The authority that Jesus has over the power of sin in the world, in humanity, in the spiritual realm.

His power to drive out, to reverse the effects of the curse of sin and to bring restoration to the whole cosmos.

So this morning, we're going to have a quick gallop through Matthew chapter 8 and 9 and look at it under three headings, Matthew's three sections. He shows us the authority of Jesus displayed first of all over the tragic hopelessness of sin.

That's the first 17 verses. And then applies that lesson to the cost of discipleship. Verses 18 to 22. Then he goes on to show Jesus' authority over the terrifying hold of sin.

[4 : 37] Verses 18 to chapter 9, verse 8. Then he applies that to the character of discipleship. Chapter 9, verses 9 to 17. And then finally, his last three stories show us Jesus' authority over the terrible helplessness of sin.

And then finally applies that to the call of discipleship. Verses 35 to 38 of chapter 9. So Matthew's first point here, the reason that he groups these three stories together in a different way from Mark and from Luke, is to show Jesus' power and authority over the tragic hopelessness of sin.

The emphasis in all these three stories in the first 18 verses of chapter 8 are his authority over sin's power to exclude from life.

Look at these stories. In each one of them, we see the story of a human being, someone made in the image of God, but that image somehow vitiated, reduced to far, far less than God meant it to be and excluded from participation in the life of God and in the life of his people as a result of the curse of sin.

You see, the whole message of Scripture is that mankind is under a curse, separated from God because of the tragedy of man's rebellion. Man's created for intimate fellowship with God, but now he's been excluded.

[6 : 13] The image of God is diminished. It's a pale shadow of the true humanity it was meant to be. But you see, Matthew's message is that the gospel of the kingdom in Jesus Christ has come to put an end to that alienation, that exclusion.

To call men and women back again to a true humanity, what they're meant to be. And that's the glorious message that Jesus is acting out here in these three stories.

He's dealing with three people who by their nature are excluded from the people of God, from full access to the life of God in Israel. But Jesus, Jesus has authority to bring each one back into the very intimate presence of God, in the presence of the Son of God himself.

Look at verses 1 to 4. The first man, he is a man who's unclean. He's a leper. That means he's excluded from society.

It means he's excluded from the temple, from the synagogue, from any access to the life of God. It was a disease, yes, but it was considered an uncleanness.

[7 : 22] That's why verse 3 says what he needs is not so much healing, but cleansing. And leprosy, whatever the skin disease it was, whether it was our leprosy or something else, whatever it was, it was considered an absolutely hopeless case.

Nobody thought there was any cure at all for leprosy, except for divine intervention, except for the mercy of God. And notice Jesus touches this unclean man, something nobody else had ever done. And then he speaks a word of power, verse 3, and that word of power instantly cleans him. And the first thing he's to do is to go to the priests and give them a proof.

In other words, to allow him access again to the people of God and to the temple, the place where God was. But also to be a testimony for them. The priests of all people would know that surely God's kingdom must be here if a leper is being cleansed.

The second man is not so much unclean but untouchable. He's a Gentile. He's a centurion. He's someone who's a Gentile and therefore excluded from the people of God by race.

[8 : 38] That's clearly Matthew's focus here. We see it in the description itself. The man doesn't ask him a direct question in verse 6, does he? He just tells him. Maybe he's uncertain.

My servant's ill. Verse 7, I think, is probably a question. Jesus says, Am I to come and heal him? Verse 8 shows that the man knows that he's excluded.

I'm unworthy for you to come to my house. Maybe there's more than that. Maybe he truly is conscious of his own sin. But what astonishing faith he displays.

He grasps the authority and power of Jesus. It even astonishes Jesus, the exercise of this man's faith. It is amazing, isn't it, sometimes how somebody with no background at all in the Christian faith, no Christian family, no church background, how they just amaze us by the maturity, by the grasp that they have of the things of God that can sometimes outstrip those who have had a lifelong time in the church.

It's a great encouragement there, you know, isn't there? Somebody's a new Christian. Maybe they feel like the centurion. Don't really know. Well, Jesus loves to answer faith and trust when that faith and trust is put in him.

[9 : 59] He loves people who maybe don't know an awful lot of theology, but they know that they want Jesus. And so they throw everything on him. They know the power of a Savior.

And that's what this man did. He threw himself on the only one who could help him. The third story tells us of a woman who's unnamed.

She's just called Peter's mother-in-law. We don't hear any more. Got to be careful about mother-in-law. The mother-in-law is coming for lunch today, so I better be careful what I say. I often used to think it was funny that Peter would be a follower of Jesus after he'd gone and healed his mother-in-law.

But the point here, you see, is that this is a woman who's excluded. Women were second-rate citizens in the world of that day.

I was just listening on the radio this morning, actually. Maybe you heard it too, that in the Arab world today, women are still not just second-rate, but very, very third-rate citizens. In ancient Israel, women had far higher status than anywhere else in the ancient pagan world.

[11 : 05] But nevertheless, they weren't allowed to go into the very central courts of the temple. Certainly no rabbi would have ever spoken to a woman.

But Jesus touches her. He says, you're not excluded from me. And he heals her. You see, verse 16, Matthew is back to his favorite theme, isn't he?

Fulfillment. All of these stories, all of these things are happening over and over again. And verse 17, he says, this was to fulfill everything that the prophets had spoken about.

He's quoting here from Isaiah 53. He's saying that this is the great hope that people longed for, the world being transformed, the world being freed once and for all from the curse of sin.

It's what Psalm 98 that we sung spoke about. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. No more will sin and sorrows grow and thorns infest the ground.

[12 : 12] He comes to make the blessings flow far as the curse is found. You see, that was the prophetic hope. That explains verses 11 and 12. It's an explicit reference to the great banquet of the Messiah.

He's quoting Isaiah 25, verses 6 and 7. Just listen. On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, a rich food full of marrow, of well-aged wine.

And he'll swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever. And the Lord God will wipe away all tears from faces.

Do you see? Matthew is saying this is the beginning of the cosmic transformation for all peoples, even for the excluded ones, the Gentiles, the lepers, the women.

It's a transformed world that he's talking about, one where every single trace of the curse of sin is gone. All blots will be gone, all uncleanness, all sickness, everything that excludes will be banished.

[13 : 24] And the veil of darkness that's spread over all peoples will be pushed aside. And the veil, the covering of sin that has cloaked mankind in the shadows, making us half human, half people, tarnished images of God in place of the glory of his original creation, that will be swallowed up.

That's the gospel of the kingdom, Matthew says. It truly is a world transformed, a humanity restored to the integrity in Jesus Christ.

There'll be no more exclusion. But look at verse 17 again. See how this happens. What is the source of Jesus' great authority to work this cosmic transformation?

The answer is he drives out the curse of sin by bearing the curse of sin for us. He took our illnesses. He bore our diseases.

He's quoting Isaiah chapter 53, the servant song of the one who himself becomes the sin bearer. Remember, we saw it already in chapter 3 at Jesus' baptism. He stands in the place of transgressors.

[14 : 42] Remember where Matthew's gospel is going right from the very beginning. It's going to the cross. The very verse that precedes this one says he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

You see, he was going to be excluded so that the excluded could come home, could be brought in. That's the great paradox.

That's the great exchange at the heart of the Christian gospel. I came across this week once again G.K. Chesterton's poem, you'll maybe know it, The House of Christmas.

Begins like this. There fared a mother driven forth out of an inn to Rome. In the place where she was homeless, all men are at home. The crazy stable close at hand with shaking timber and shifting sands grew a stronger thing to abide and stand than the square stones of Rome.

The last verse says this, To an open house in the evening home shall men come, to an older place than Eden and a taller town than Rome, to the end of the way of the wandering star, to the things that cannot be and that are, to the place where God was homeless and all men are at home.

[16:07] The place where He is excluded is the place where we are brought home. And that's why in verses 18 and 22, you see, Matthew goes on to apply this directly to the cost of Christian discipleship.

Do you see the verses? Here's two would-be followers of Jesus confronted with what it really means to follow Jesus. Jesus says, you see, that that transformed world comes about through the rejection of Him.

He's the Son of Man, verse 20. That's what it means to say He's got no home, He's got nowhere to lay His head. That means He's rejected by the world.

He's the Son of Man, not obviously the Son of God. You see, on earth, His glory is veiled. He's scorned by the world. The Son of Man in the world's eyes is just the man of the cross.

And that was shocking to the Jews of Jesus' day. It was shocking to their national pride. Yes, they had a great hope for the coming day of the Lord.

[17:20] They had a hope of salvation, but not for lepers, not for Gentiles, not for the excluded. It was for them. And yes, they had a hope of a great Messianic King, but not for a man who would be scorned and ill-treated and suffer on a cross.

No! You see, the world, even religion itself, has no time for a Son of Man. It wants a powerful Savior, a glamorous Savior, something to see.

It wants glory now. But you see, Jesus says, my kingdom is not of this world. It's the kingdom of heaven. And nothing, nothing can any longer exclude from that great feast any who have faith in Jesus.

If they come to him from east or west, north or south, Jew or Gentile, they'll be restored in him. Nothing can exclude the faithful from his kingdom.

That's the great glory of the gospel. And he says in verse 11, many will come from east and west. But you see, the old creation doesn't want anything to do with the new creation.

[18:30] This world will exclude Jesus from its table. This world will reject the man of sorrows. And so, Jesus is saying, so it will for his disciples also.

Verse 22 shows the starkness of the divide, doesn't it? His kingdom is a kingdom of life, but this world is a world of death. Those two things just don't mix life and death.

You can't be at home in both. You can't be at home in the kingdom of heaven and at home in the world. So friends, be very clear about that if you want to be a Christian disciple and follow Jesus wherever he goes.

Being at home with Jesus, being brought in to be at one with him, means that you will be excluded in the world. Discipleship is for aliens.

It's for strangers. It's for misfits. That is absolutely inevitable as long as this world is here. Matthew chapter 10, Jesus says, so it is for the master, so for the servants.

[19:40] If they call the master Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those who follow him? I've got to say to you this morning, if you're saying in your heart, I'll follow you everywhere, the Lord Jesus.

He says to you in your office, in your hospital, in your school, in your university, wherever it is, you mustn't be naive. You'll find a world that does not want you in your Jesus.

Don't be naive, but at the same time, don't be blind in the midst of that. Remember that Jesus is remaking the world and that those who are excluded and scorned and hated and looked down upon now because you're a follower of Jesus Christ.

You will be among those who rejoice at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus Christ has the authority over the tragic hopelessness of sin and he breaks its

power.

He breaks its power to exclude and whoever has faith in him will be transformed to be part of the new people for his new world.

[20 : 54] That's the gospel of the kingdom, says Matthew. But there's more, you see, in his second three stories. Matthew tells us that Jesus has authority over the terrifying hold of sin.

He has authority over sin's power to enslave life. You see, the Bible clearly teaches us that sin is not just the fruit of man's rebellion against God, the sins, the wrong things we do, the consequences of it, the guilt that we have before God.

It is that, but it's more than that. It's also a mighty power that has become the ruler of the cosmos to enslave us. God created man in his image to rule the cosmos, but because of man's rebellion, sin and the power of darkness has taken over the hold in this world.

And a terrible hold it is. And it's got a hold over men and women so that the only, only hope we have is in divine intervention. We're enslaved under a dominion of sin.

That's what Paul calls it in Romans chapter 6. And we are ruled by a sinister power. That's what Matthew is demonstrating here. The world and the world of men is in slavery to sin and to evil.

[22 : 11] That explains our newspapers, doesn't it? When you read your newspapers, aren't you struck by the depth of depravity and sheer wickedness abroad in the world?

Even our atheistic newspaper editors have to adopt this kind of language to explain it, don't they? Their headlines have words like evil, like wicked, like demonic, like devilish.

But you see, Matthew is telling us that the gospel of the kingdom declares Jesus' authority over all the powers of darkness. First of all, here, in this first story, we have the authority of the power over, over, Jesus' power over creation.

He rebukes with authority this storm. Now, we often look at this and say, well, it's displaying Jesus' authority over the natural world, but actually, it's something far deeper. He's speaking about his power over the supernatural world that lies behind the world.

In the Bible, right the way through, the sea is so often a symbol of chaos over the forces of evil.

That's why in Psalm 46, we are told that faith doesn't even fear, although the mountains fall into the depths of the sea, although the sea and the waters foam and surge.

[23 : 33] That's why Revelation chapter 21 tells us that the mark of the new heavens and the new earth will be that there's no more sea. That's not there to depress people who love sailing or surfing.

It's not to say that there'll never be any more beach holidays or sandcastles. Goodness, perish the thought. What he's saying is that there'll be no more evil, no more wickedness, no more forces of dark powers that lie behind nature.

That's why in verse 26, Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves. Why? Well, because the wind and the waves are rebelling against their rightful Lord. not, not I think because he's their creator, although of course he is, but because at last here is God's true human being, God's true man, the ruler of the cosmos.

Verse 27 says, what sort of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey him? And the answer is, he is at last the true man, man as he's meant to be, ruler over the cosmos.

Nature no longer is under the power of darkness, but it's ruled at last by the Son of God, God's true, last Adam. It's impossible to overcome him then, even if he's asleep in the boat.

[24 : 52] To even attempt to overcome him will be silencing. The disciples can't quite grasp that yet. It's rather like the image that C.S. Lewis captures so wonderfully in the book, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Do you remember the land of Narnia is cursed and it's held in the thrall of winter. There's never any spring, never any summer. It's winter, winter, winter all the time. And then at last, one day, people begin to notice that a thaw is starting and flowers are coming up and spring is coming.

Why? Because Aslan is there. And where the son of the great emperor comes, the curse is gone.

Jesus Christ has the power and the authority over sin's power to enslave even the whole creation.

And that means that the creation that he is bringing in will be one in which there is no more earthquakes, no more tsunamis, no more volcanoes to blight the life of humanity.

All of these things they may happen, who knows, but they will be under the power and the authority and the control of God's new humanity.

[26 : 10] The gospel is not that we're trying to make the world a little bit of a better place. The gospel is that God is transforming the world and making a whole new creation.

The second story here, the story of the demon-possessed man, shows us Jesus' authority over the personality of sin that lies behind the power and he removes that authority completely.

That's represented by these two demons because behind the power of sin is the personality of the devil himself and his demons, fallen angels, who hold humanity in darkness and in bondage.

But Jesus has the power over them also. The Bible is very clear. There are dark powers at work. Behind so much of the bondage in humanity, we can't deny that.

We mustn't get unbalanced about it of course, but we cannot deny it. But the most important thing that the Bible teaches us is that Jesus Christ in the gospel of the kingdom has authority and power to drive out Satan and all of his.

[27 : 18] Notice in verse 29 how good the demon's theology is. They're the only people in this place that recognize who Jesus really is. He's the Son of God as the devil did in chapter 4.

They know who he is and they know what he's come to do. He's come to torment them before the time. That's what surprises them. They know that he's coming at last to judge them and destroy them.

But they're shocked that it seems to have begun now. Well, Jesus in Matthew chapter 12 tells us that of course before he destroys the evil one he's come to bind him and to rob his household.

And that's what Jesus is doing here. The gospel age is the time of rescue of humanity from the powers of evil. That's what the gospel does. Jesus says it's the truth that sets you free from bondage and that includes the bondage of the evil one.

Paul says the gospel shines the light into the darkness of eyes that have been blinded by the God of this world the devil. But Jesus has authority over the personality of sin as well.

[28 : 24] He came to destroy the works of the devil. And we see that here in what he does to these demons. And then thirdly we have Jesus' authority over the penalty of sin and evil in the healing of the paralytic.

The forgiveness of the paralytic shows how Jesus releases us from the guilt of sin with total divine authority. Of course our focus is on the healing that takes place physically because we can't imagine anything worse than that kind of paralysis.

But not Jesus. His whole point verse 6 is to declare his authority to forgive sins. To release humanity from a far greater paralysis the paralysis of guilt before a holy God.

Something far far more crushing than any physical ailment. Do you see Matthew's message? Over and over again he's saying the same thing. Jesus Christ has the power and the authority over every power of sin to enslave humanity.

He bursts the gates. He breaks the fetters of sin. As Charles Wesley says, he breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free. And that's why he applies this in verses 9 to 17 to explain the character of Christian discipleship.

[29 : 45] It doesn't such a personal way does Matthew. It's his own testimony. It's the testimony you see of a man who's made totally new. Do you see? There he is. He's called out of the tax booth.

He's a slave of the occupying power but not now. He's a follower of a new master, Jesus. He's liberated not only from his isolation from God. He was a tax collector.

He was a sinner. But he's brought into fellowship with the Son of God. He's brought into the fellowship of God's people. All God's people are now in his house. They're part of his family. He's a new man.

All because of the victory of Jesus over the power of sin and sins and Satan and their power to enslave and destroy. And so we have this joyful feasting in Matthew's house at Matthew's table. A foretaste of that great heavenly banquet. The victory feast. A foretaste of what Romans 8 says all creation is waiting for when it longs to be liberated from its bondage to decay.

[30 : 51] When at last it will bask in what Paul calls the freedom of the glory of the children of God. And that's what characterizes true disciples even now. They are people who are set free.

They're liberated from the power of sin. They have a new master. Not just a little bit of something new, a little added extra to your life. It's a total new creation.

They're men made new. It's a wholly new people that Christ is making for a whole new world. That's the point of verses 16 and 17. The new garments and the new wineskins.

He's not just doing a patch up job on humanity. It's a whole new garment. Christ liberates us from sin. He's giving us a whole new clothing. He's giving us His righteousness.

righteousness. It's not just a little bit of new experience added to our life. It's like whole new wine in new wineskins. It's a whole new life altogether.

[31 : 49] Not just something poured into the old. And Matthew's saying, that's me. I'm a new person. I've been set free. I've been transformed by grace. I'm rejoicing in the presence of the bridegroom Himself, Jesus Christ.

He's my new master. He's my Savior. He's my Jesus. And that's discipleship. That's Christianity. It's being new people for a new world.

People rejoicing in the presence of their Savior. But again, you see, it's never so clear, is it, that the old and new just can't mix.

The old world just can't understand the new world. They're polar opposites. People of the new world are joyfully feasting in the presence of Jesus. Verse 15. But the old world is fasting.

Doesn't understand. Then the people of the new world will fast, longing for the presence again, the return of Jesus Christ. Well, the people of the old world are quite happy to feast.

[32 : 51] In fact, they're much more comfortable without the thought of Jesus coming again. That's true to life, isn't it? How true it is when we see nominal religion and its reaction to genuine conversion.

When you see parents who are nominally to do with the Christian church, and one of their children is set on fire by the Lord Jesus Christ, becomes a true believer, it's a bit of an embarrassment.

It's fanatical. They can't understand it. That's the reaction of the world to the living reality of Christ's new creation. That's religion.

It's just part of this world. You see, believers' greatest joy is fellowship with Jesus and with his people. It's there in Matthew's home, but the world just can't see that.

People out in Buchanan Street this morning can't see that your greatest joy is being here this morning in the presence of Christ and his people. They can't see that. Otherwise they'd be here.

[33 : 52] They think we're mad. Religious moralists can't stomach it, actually. tax collectors and sinners.

Look at that motley crew in that church. Not the sort of thing we really want in our place. But Jesus Christ has authority to liberate all the excluded and all who are under the power of sin and bring them into his family, his new people for his new world.

God. And only those who've experienced that like Matthew, only those who've experienced it can understand it. The world of dead religion just can never grasp it at all.

And we've got to learn that if we're disciples of Jesus Christ. To love the joy, but to recognize that it's a joy none can understand unless they too have tasted it.

Matthew's final point in the last three stories is to show Jesus' authority over the terrible helplessness of sin. These last three accounts speak of the power of sin to exhaust, to extinguish life.

[35 : 04] And the Bible everywhere shows that the effect of sin doesn't just condemn humanity before God, but also renders them utterly helpless before God, unable to do anything at all to help ourselves.

As good as dead, silenced because we've got nothing to plead in our defense. Blind because we just don't know where to go for help. On our knees and helpless, only hoping in the sheer mercy of Christ.

But the gospel of the kingdom, says Matthew, declares Jesus' authority over even the helplessness of sin and the human condition. Verse 18, this woman and the girl, the one is dead, the other is as good as dead.

Twelve years of exclusion, isolation, misery. Absolutely helpless. But both of them simply cast everything on the mercy of Jesus.

And Jesus says that's faith. Then there's two blind men who are just the same. They are utterly helpless. They can't even see Jesus. I've got this picture of them stumbling along the road, grasping after him, trying to hear where he is, persistently saying, have mercy, have mercy, son of David.

[36 : 16] David. It's interesting that all the three blind men in Matthew's gospel use that term, son of David. It's the name of the Messiah because they knew that the Bible promised that the Messiah would have hope for people just like them.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, said the prophet. And they grasped the son of David.

Then finally, the mute man, verse 32, is utterly helpless.

He can't even ask for help when he's brought to Jesus. He's doubly oppressed. He's got a demon. Yet every one of these helpless characters is brought face to face with the son of David, the Messiah, the promised Christ.

And the power of sin that renders helpless, that extinguishes, that exhausts life is broken by Jesus the Christ, the Lord of life.

It's a wonderful picture isn't it, of the helplessness of human sin. Transformed by the mercy of God in Christ in the presence of Jesus. And notice that the focus in each of these stories is just on faith.

[37 : 29] Simple faith. Faith in the son of David, even faith that isn't theologically correct. This woman is all mixed up and superstitious.

She just thinks she can touch him because it's magic. But the point is she's got faith in him. The blind men are stumbling along in the dark. They don't really understand what to do but they've got faith in the son of David, the Messiah.

And they represent a world that is totally confused, that is helpless, that doesn't really know what it needs. And what it needs is simply the person of God in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that's why Matthew's last application here leads right on, doesn't it, to the call of discipleship. Verses 36 to 38 have a very clear message for us.

It's simply this. Join in with the mission of the gospel of the kingdom to this helpless world. See, he's confronted the disciples with the truth about the world.

[38 : 33] And it's still the same world that we as Christian disciples are confronted with today. It is a world that is estranged by the hopelessness of sin. It is a world that is enslaved by the hold of sin's power.

It is a world that is utterly helpless in sin. And he's confronted us with that. And what is his reaction, verse 36? Compassion.

Because he sees a world harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. He's recalling the words of the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34 where he speaks about Israel as a people like sheep without a shepherd.

Indeed, with evil shepherds. And the Lord says, I will be their shepherd. I will gather the flock to myself. But all the way through this chapter the message has been clear, hasn't it?

As for the master, so for the disciples. And so he's calling his disciples, that includes us, he's calling them to join in his mission. He's saying, look at the world outside today, look at the hopelessness, look at the hold of sin, look at the helplessness.

[39 : 45] Look at the church all around the western world today, which sadly is so often full of false shepherds and evil shepherds. That's why people in this country don't know anything about the gospel of Christ.

What do true disciples do? Well, verse 36, they heed the call to see with the eyes of Jesus and have compassion on a helpless world.

Verse 37, they sense the heart of Jesus, the opportunity, the harvest is plentiful, but also the urgent need, the laborers are few. And verse 38, therefore they share in the work of Jesus, they pray earnestly for laborers.

And as the whole of chapter 10 goes on to show us, and we'll look at that in the next weeks, they're prepared to send and be sent, to prepare and be prepared for that mission.

And friends, the message for Christian disciples today is very, very clear. We cannot rejoice in the authority and the power of Jesus Christ over the power of sin and the glory of his kingdom that transforms men and women.

[40 : 59] We cannot rejoice in that unless we also submit to his authority to transform us by the call he has on our lives into people who live for that new world, not for the old world, who live for the kingdom of heaven, not for the domain of sin.

That means that the gospel of the kingdom has a powerful call on the life of this congregation, St. George's Tron. It has a powerful call on the life of every individual, you and me within this congregation.

It calls us to take Jesus' call to discipleship and mission seriously. We're going to be looking at chapter 10 over the next few weeks and see what that call is and what it involves. But it's a call to join the mission of Christ to a helpless world.

But just as we close, notice also the great challenge all the way through this chapter. It's a challenge presented by confrontation with the person of Jesus and his authority.

It comes to a climax there, doesn't it, in verses 33 and 34. Always when you're confronted with Jesus, always there are two reactions and we see them here. There's the reaction of faith and unbelief.

[42 : 17] Verse 33, joy. We've never seen anything like this. Welcoming the message, that's faith. Joy in Jesus and his work, that's faith.

But also, verse 34, there's scorn. This is the work of the devil, they said. That's unbelief. And the same two reactions come all the way through the chapter.

You'll have noticed it as we've read it. Along with the joyful reception of Jesus by so many, there was another side to it. He's blaspheming, they said. He mixes with sinners, they condemn him. Go away and leave our region. They laugh him to scorn. At last, they say, he's the devil himself. And see, verses 11 and 12 of chapter 8 speak of a stark reality, don't they?

They speak of salvation and judgment. Only two ways. Only two. Throughout this chapter, both Jews and Gentiles accept Jesus and both Jews and Gentiles reject him.

[43 : 30] And the message is very clear. Whatever your background is, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you're from a Christian home or a pagan home, wherever you're from and whoever you are, there's only one thing that counts and that is your attitude to Jesus Christ.

He alone has authority to welcome into his kingdom and he alone has authority to cast out into utter darkness. Aren't those terrible words? The gospel of the kingdom isn't one-sided.

It includes both of those things. But it urges us, it urges us to choose the former. You can't doubt his power and authority when you read these words.

don't doubt his mercy. Don't doubt his willingness to receive all who will have faith in him. Listen to the words of the leper that we began with.

Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. Jesus says, I will be clean. Jesus Christ is the Lord of glory.

[44 : 38] He has the power and authority over all sin and all sin's power in this world and in your life. And he is willing to exert that power on your behalf.

He's willing. So don't you be unwilling. Listen to his voice. Well, let's pray together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Lord in God, as we're presented with the presence of the King of Kings, we acknowledge that we are confronted by one in whom is all power and authority in heaven and in earth.

And so we pray this morning that you would give us humble and faithful, obedient hearts, that nothing would keep us from you, from joining the joy of your family and entering the feast of your great kingdom to be made new and transformed.

But also we pray, grant us to see with your eyes, to feel with your heart, and so to serve with you in the power of your Holy Spirit in this great and wonderful transforming work of the gospel message, that we would be found faithful disciple makers.

[46 : 15] And on that day rejoice with the great multitude who have heard the message and believed, because we have followed you wherever you have taken us.

We have been unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So hear us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.