

# Life and Light

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we are continuing this little series on the kingdom advances and today we've come to Matthew chapter 9 verses 18 to 34.

That's our reading for today. You'll find that on page 814. Matthew chapter 9 verse 18. While Jesus was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.

And Jesus rose and followed him with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment. For she said to herself, If I only touch his garment, I will be made well. Jesus turned and seeing her, he said, Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well.

And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making commotion, he said, Go away, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.

[ 1 : 17 ] And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, Have mercy on us, the son of David. When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, Do you believe that I am able to do this?

They said to him, Yes, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done to you. And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, See that no one knows about it.

But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man, who was mute, was brought to him.

And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowd marveled, saying, Never was anything like this seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casts out demons.

[ 2 : 26 ] Why, the prince of demons? Amen. Amen. That is the word of the Lord. Let's have a moment of prayer. Father, as we rejoice in the beautiful sunshine and realize that you are so good and care so much for your world, we recognize that there is also tragedy and distress in that same world.

We particularly remember the victims of the terrible earthquake in central Italy. We ask that you will help the rescue and emergency services to save those who can be saved.

And, Lord, we realize that this is a vulnerable and broken world. And look forward to the day when it will be transformed. And as we draw aside for some moments to listen to your word, we pray that your word will speak to us and shape our lives.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm not quite sure what that humming noise is.

I can assure you it's nothing to do with me. Or at least because I'm technologically illiterate.

Anyway, forget that. Faith in Jesus is our title.

[ 3 : 48 ] And both these words are important. It's not enough just to know about Jesus, to know who he is. Most people in the street do.

They may have a confused and vague idea, but most people, if you mention the name Jesus, even in those biblically illiterate days, will have some understanding. But it's not enough to have that head knowledge.

We need to have faith. On the other hand, it's not enough to say, I have faith. Because faith can be in all kinds of unworthy and undeserving objects and people.

I'm sure in the course of our lives, we've all had faith in certain people and in certain institutions and in certain activities, which have let us down. We've let people down.

This is part of living in a fallen world. So both matter. We need to have faith, but we need to have it in Jesus, who will never let us down, who will never disappoint us.

[ 4 : 54 ] And here we come to the last cluster of three miracles in this short section we are looking at. Miracles which focus on Jesus' authority. And here he is the promised Messiah, who does all the kind of things that the prophets, particularly Isaiah, said the Messiah would do.

When the Messiah came, eyes would be opened. Lips would speak. Even the dead would rise. It's also, as I've said already, fascinating to compare these stories, the way that they're told in Mark. Especially the first story. The story of Jairus' daughter. Now here, neither the ruler nor the girl is named.

The focus is entirely on the power of Jesus to bring her back to life. Mark makes the story into a real tear-jurker. It's a very exciting and vivid and moving story, the way that Mark tells it.

Matthew's purpose is different. They're both good writing. But Matthew strips it down to the essentials. Mark draws us into the world of the story.

[ 6 : 05 ] Matthew brings us face to face with Jesus. Now both of them are doing what the other is doing. But here, the stories are told swiftly. They are told clearly and concisely.

And the first thing we are told is that Jesus gives life. Verses 18 to 26. You see, Mark tells us the story longer and the suspense of Jairus and the apparently unnecessary stopping to heal this woman.

After all, she had had this discharge of blood for 12 years. Couldn't she have waited another hour or so? It was no doubt what Jairus thought. And Jesus could still have healed her.

But the emphasis here falls on Jesus' power and on the response of faith. Because Jesus is the center of attention. In Mark's account, the spotlight falls on Jairus, who is not named here.

And the story of the woman is developed. But here, the authority of Jesus is that, Behold, the ruler, verse 18, came and knelt before him. Now part of that, of course, is a distressed father who is badly wanting help.

[ 7 : 20 ] But at the same time, remembering the kind of attitude that other rulers, other leaders had to Jesus, the fact that this ruler kneels in front of Jesus shows that he at least respects him.

And for a synagogue ruler to do this is quite something. And he also refuses to be deflected by scorn. The girl is not dead, but sleeping, and so on.

And, you see, the problem is, the problem is that in spite of the growing evidence, the establishment did not believe that Jesus was who he said he was.

And did what he could. Now, of course, when he says, the girl is not dead, but sleeping. Now, that does not mean, as some say, that she was just in a very deep sleep or in a coma.

She was very clearly dead. And the point is, though, sleep and death do have certain resemblances, don't they?

[ 8 : 22 ] When you sometimes still use the phrase, so-and-so's dead to the world, they fall asleep. And they fall asleep at embarrassing moments. Over my life, I've often fallen asleep during boring meetings.

I'm sure many of you have done that as well. I suppose there must be some meetings that are not boring, but we'll... And one of the things about the new creation is there won't be meetings.

Or if there are, I won't have to go to them. And no one will disapprove if I'm not there. Anyway, be that as it may, this girl is certainly dead.

But sleeping points to a profound truth as well, doesn't it? It is no more difficult for the Lord of life to raise someone from the dead than to rouse someone from sleep.

The early Christians, when they buried their dead in the catacombs under Rome, called the places cubacula, sleeping places, realizing that death, although permanent and awful in this world, nevertheless death is temporary.

[ 9 : 37 ] Death will be destroyed. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, says Paul. So Jesus is the center of attention. And Jesus responds to faith.

Now, once again, it's not the greatness or smallness of faith. It is the fact of having faith that opens the way for Jesus to work. For example, in verses 20 to 21, this is not about magical healing.

This shows that even a little faith has healing power. She said, only I could touch the fringe of his garment. Now, we don't know.

We don't know if she had any real idea who Jesus was. Indeed, it's not until chapter 15, when Peter says, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, that even his intimate friends actually realized

fully who he was.

And that's so important. We mustn't tell people that they have to strive harder to have faith. It is faith that unlocks the door, not the greatness or the quality of our faith.

[10:49] And it's almost certainly, there's almost certainly an element of superstition in what the woman thought. But Jesus responded even to that.

After all, when someone comes to Jesus, you don't expect them to know everything, do you? I mean, sometimes I think we expect far too much of new converts.

We expect them to understand what mature believers actually understand. And those of you who have been on the journey a long time know very, very well how easy it is for us to slip into bogus ideas about who Jesus is and what Jesus can do.

Jesus responds to genuine faith, and here he blasts open death itself. Jesus raised three people from the dead during his earthly life.

Jairus' daughter, a young man from the village of Nain, who was actually being carried to his funeral, mentioned only by Luke in chapter 7, and then, of course, the raising of Lazarus, who had been four days dead.

[11:58] But the cemeteries didn't empty. And these people, these three would all die again. And the point is, these are pointing to the power of Jesus over death.

They're token miracles, if you like, showing that what will be true in the new creation. Revelation tells us their death has passed away.

There'll be no more death. Not just no more dying, there'll be no possibility of dying. I think that's the point. So he raises the dead, shows his power over the grave, tramples on this grim demon that haunts us all and gets us all in the end in this world.

And then he opens eyes, verses 27 to 31. Now, remember, Jesus did many miracles of the same kind at different times. It's later on, chapter 20, he's going to talk about the better known healing of blind Bartimaeus.

And in that story, the emphasis is on Jesus' compassion. But in this story, it's the emphasis on his authority and on the blind man's faith. Notice what they call him, the son of David.

[13:17] Reminder of the beginning of the gospel. This is the promised king, the expected one coming from that line. And that shows already faith. They believed, they obviously had heard the stories, and they believed that one day someone would come from David's house who would be greater than David and who would set up his kingdom.

And David, the son of David, is a title used of Jesus in this gospel about over 50 times. Prophets talked about a time when the eyes of the blind would be opened, the dumb would speak.

Now, blindness and deafness are real physical conditions. There are also pictures of the inability to see the truth and to speak it. Blindness is often used in the Bible as a symbol of darkness, the darkness of unbelief, or the darkness in which we hide our sins.

People love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. So the son of David, this is the promised Messiah, this is the one who is to come to institute the kingdom.

And then their faith, although they were blind, they saw further than others. Jesus said, do you believe that I am able to do this? They knew their need and they recognized they had met someone who could deal with that need.

[14:44] And here, once again, Jesus questions and tests their faith. Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to him, yes, Lord.

And he touched their eyes saying, according to your faith, be it done to you. Now, I said the other week that there are always two elements in Jesus' miracles. He touches. He takes the person in his arms to show his solidarity.

He really, he really cares. But then he speaks, he speaks, and listening to his voice, new life, the dead receive, the blind, the blind have their eyes opened.

I always misquote that text. I always say things like, the blind speak and the deaf see and the lame speak. But anyway, it's wonderful truths.

It's the healing miracles and the response of faith. Now, faith is not to do with feelings, fundamentally.

[15:44] Feelings matter. Faith is actually believing in something or someone enough to risk your life. Faith. A missionary to the New Hebrides in earlier days, a man called John Paton, who translated the parts of the scriptures into the native language to have great difficulty in deciding

what word would be appropriate for faith.

That's an important word. And just at that moment, one of his, one of his colleagues came in and sank down, thankfully, on the seat, said, I've been working hard and it's great to have somewhere to rest my weight.

Paton thought, that's what faith is about. Something we can rest our weight on. A chair that won't break when we sit on it. A rope that will not fragment when we take hold of it.

That's what faith is. And Jesus is also anxious to avoid misguided enthusiasm. We saw this in the cleansing of the leper.

They don't go and tell anyone. Of course, the problem is Jesus was afraid of what did actually happen. Many, many people were fascinated by him. But they were fascinated by him as a miracle worker.

[17:04] They did not believe that he was truly the son of God. give him the wrong kind of popularity as a miracle worker and obscure his coming as the saviour.

So when the son of David comes, he raises the dead. When the son of David comes, he opens blind eyes. And when the son of David comes, in the third of the episode, 32 to 34, he causes the dumb to speak.

In a way, the miracle is almost a minor part here. It's about who Jesus is and two possible reactions. Now, you see, the demon-possessed man was dumb.

This is what Satan always does. Satan either makes people dumb, not physically dumb necessarily, or he causes them to speak lies. That's the way that Satan uses our voices.

Silences us, prevents us from telling the truth, and he encourages us to tell lies. All dumbness, of course, is not demonic.

[18:14] But in this case, clearly, it was. And in chapter 15, he's going to hear another dumb person, hear another dumb person, where there's no demon possession involved.

So, dumbness is something that is really from the devil in a metaphorical sense. Now, don't misunderstand us.

We must not get into that dreadful idea some people have, that suffering is caused by sin. Now, clearly, some is.

If I drive my car at 100 miles an hour on a wet road, I can scarcely expect not to have a serious accident. If I destroy my body with drugs and drink, on the other hand, many illnesses have no such cause.

They belong to the fallen world. A baby born in Uganda with the AIDS virus is clearly not guilty of that. It's because she's born into a fallen world.

[19:19] We need to remember this. Otherwise, we're going to become very pastorally insensitive. Now, in the new creation, there will be no fallenness any more than there will be no sin.

But I think this is so important because otherwise, we're going to feel that God is punishing us for sin. Now, God does punish sin, but we must be careful that we don't get this twisted idea.

And the second thing that Jesus does is he opens mouths. The mute man spoke, and the crowd marveled saying, never was anything like this seen in Israel.

the authority of Jesus' words was such that everything was changed. Now, you'll notice the crowd said, never was anything like this seen in Israel.

Obviously, like any large crowd of people, they would have different reactions to what happened. They were all amazed. For many of them, it would simply be this is the latest deed of the great miracle worker.

[20:22] just imagine if a healer like Jesus was active today. It would be on every television channel, wouldn't it? If he appeared in Glasgow, the planes, the trains, everything, we were coming to see this healer.

It will not, of course, happen, because Jesus is the unique healer, the incarnate Son of God. And we can be pretty certain that an awful lot of it would simply be sensationalism.

But, you'll notice the Pharisee's reaction, he casts out demons by the prince of demons. This is what they're saying, is this man can only deal with demons because he's in league with Satan himself.

And that's what is later is to be called the unforgivable sin, looking at the work of God and attributing it to Satan. Now, that's a very dangerous position to reach.

And, these Pharisees, they couldn't deny what had happened, but they had an alternative explanation for what happened. And that's why we can never base our faith on miracles. [ 21 : 33 ] If there's a miracle, there's always more than one explanation as to why it happened. I think that's so important. Faith is not, faith is not based on miracles.

Faith is based on the word of the gospel. And, these signs show the kind of kingdom that will come, where the blind will see, where there will be no illnesses, where not just our souls, but our bodies will be transformed and made like his glorious body.

And what our faith does is it brings our weakness in touch with Jesus' power. our weakness and our helplessness in touch with the strong name of the Trinity.

And when that happens, the miracle takes place. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for these wonderful things, these amazing truths of what Jesus did and of what Jesus still does.

We thank you that he still opens blind eyes, he still makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.

[ 22 : 47 ] And we pray, Lord, that as we look forward to the new creation, we will indeed be blessed and strengthened in our faith. We ask this in his name.

Amen.