

The Person of the King Answers the Terrible Helplessness of Sin

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[0 : 01] Well, do turn with me again to Matthew chapter 9 and to the passage that we read there together. Now, as you know, I've titled these three studies on Matthew 8 and 9, The Transforming Joy of Jesus and His Kingdom.

And it is a message of great joy about the transformation that the gospel of Jesus brings to the world and to human beings.

It's great, great joy as the choir were singing. But it is, of course, therefore a message that needs a response. Because if Jesus came to transform the whole world, then that means he came to transform human beings too.

And as Matthew comes to the climax of his three-point message in our passage today, I think he leaves us with authoritative and unmistakably a summons to respond to Jesus as the King and the Lord of this world.

And it's a summons that is to everyone. Everyone who listens to the message of Jesus proclaimed in word and in action and in his own ministry. But also as it's proclaimed today.

[1 : 15] And also it's a call to all disciples, both then and now. And a challenge to all the world, then and now.

There's a decisive call, first of all, to all of those who are already following him, to understand and to embrace the meaning of true discipleship. That is, it's to follow Jesus' own pattern, both in this world and in the new world, the regeneration that's to come.

And, of course, there's a stark challenge to the world, to the crowds who are outside, but who are listening in. A challenge to them to be confronted with Jesus' authority and to live and to respond to him as their King and Lord.

And remember, there are always crowds listening in. Beginning of chapter 5 tells us that when Jesus was gathering his disciples to teach them on the Sermon on the Mount, there were many crowds gathered around.

And it's always that way in a church service, just like this morning. There'll be people who are regular disciples of Jesus. But I suspect perhaps some of you are just in the crowd listening in.

[2 : 27] And Jesus has a stark challenge to you as well. And we'll see, I think, when we come to the end, that that is Matthew's final application today.

But first of all, let's recap. Because, as I said, these two chapters are really part of one coherent message. It's Matthew's sermon, if you like, in three clear points. So remember, back at the beginning of chapter 8, verses 1 to 22, first of all, he shows us Jesus' power and authority over sin's power to exclude human beings from true and fulsome humanity.

And he reverses that tragic hopelessness of sin. Remember, we saw those three hopeless people. The unclean leper, the untouchable Gentile soldier, and the unnamed woman.

And he gives them hope, belonging, in every case. But, of course, remember, the cost to Jesus, as we saw, was that he became the excluded one in this world.

He became our sin bearer, just as the prophet foresaw, chapter 8, verse 17. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. Those are Isaiah's words, aren't they, about the suffering servant who would win our salvation.

[3 : 46] And also, of course, as Matthew reminds us, all true disciples who are at home in Christ's kingdom will also find that they, too, are exiles in this world.

There's no false promises in Jesus' gospel. The small print is always right up there at the front for all to see. Then, of course, in chapter 8, verse 23, through to chapter 9, verse 17.

Last time, we saw that Jesus has authority and power over sin's power to enslave human life. And Jesus destroys that terrifying hold of sin.

Not just sin's penalty, which is released, but also sin's dark power is removed. And sin's dark personality behind that power, the evil one himself, is rebuked with absolute heavenly authority. Jesus overcomes, as William Still once famously put it, the fruit and the root and the brute of sin in this world. And therefore, true disciples of Jesus Christ are truly liberated people.

[4 : 59] They are new men for a new world. Like Matthew himself. And, of course, we saw Matthew gives us his own testimony here, doesn't he, in chapter 9, verse 9 and following.

These people are not patch-up jobs. They're new wine in new wineskins. They're wholly new garments, new people for the kingdom of everlasting joy.

And yet again, Matthew shows us that that is so misunderstood by the people of this world. No matter how religious they might be, and, of course, everybody has their own brand of virtue signaling, their own self-righteousness.

But these kind of people just can't understand what makes Jesus' people feast. They can't understand the joy of seeing sinners who know they are sinners and hopeless, liberated by the power of Jesus.

They just can't understand that. Nor can they understand the things that make Jesus' people fast, which is the longing for the coming again of our Lord and Savior to this world.

[6 : 06] But now, finally, in these three last miracle stories, beginning at chapter 9, verse 18, Matthew shows us that not only did Jesus reverse the tragic hopelessness of sin, not only does he destroy the terrifying hold of sin, but his very presence answers the terrible helplessness of sin in the human condition.

Look at verse 18 of chapter 9 and following. We have these three stories that ring with pathos, don't they? And they speak so eloquently of sin's power to exhaust, to extinguish human life as it was meant to be.

And that's so true in the Bible. Everywhere it shows us that the effect of sin is not just to condemn humanity because of our guilt, but also to render us utterly helpless in our mortality, unable to do anything at all to really help ourselves long term.

We're just harassed, according to Jesus. Utterly helpless. We're like sheep. A sheep has lost itself completely halfway down a cliff and has no one to rescue, no shepherd.

And that's how the Bible describes the human condition. Paul speaks in Ephesians chapter 2 like that, doesn't he? He says we're dead in transgressions and sins.

[7 : 41] He says we're separated from Christ. He says we're alienated without hope and without God. That is the real human predicament.

We're as good as dead. We're silenced. We have nothing to plead in our defense. We're blind. We don't know where to go for help. And we're on our knees, helpless.

And the only hope that we have is in the sheer mercy of God. And that's the reality about humankind in sin.

But, says Matthew, the gospel of the kingdom declares Jesus marvelous authority over all the helplessness of our human condition.

And that's the wonderful reality that we're seeing from Matthew in these verses here. Look at verses 18 to 26 and this story of the woman and the girl. It's aching with pathos. While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came and knelt before him, saying, My daughter has just died, but come lay your hands on her and she'll live.

[8 : 48] And Jesus rose and followed him with his disciples. Behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years came up behind Jesus, touched the fringe of his garment. For she said to herself, If only I touch his garment, I'll be made well.

And Jesus turned and seeing her, he said, Take heart, daughter. Your faith has saved you. It's made you well. And instantly she was made well.

And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, saw the flute players, the crowd making a commotion, all the dirge that was going on, he said, Go away. The girl's not dead, but sleeping.

And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put the crowd outside, he went and took her by the hand and the girl arose. And he said, To life. Three accounts that ring with pathos, that speak so eloquently of sin's power to exhaust, to extinguish life.

Interestingly, if you read these stories in Luke's gospel and Mark's gospel, they actually give quite a lot more detail in their account. And by the way, just as an aside, that's quite interesting to see because just one little evidence, isn't it, of the authenticity of the genuine, real human testimony that we receive in the gospels.

[10:09] The personality of the writers comes through and we see it. It's real. Read it later on in Luke chapter 8. Luke was a physician, remember. Luke was a doctor. And this is what Luke says.

He notes that she'd spent all her living on physicians. That's probably not a bad thing to do in Luke's eyes. He's a physician, so he's quite happy with physicians' fees. But he just says she could not be healed by anyone.

So that's restrained medical speak, isn't it? Don't criticize your profession. Although it is a clear acknowledgement, isn't it, from a professional man that this woman's case was intractable.

No one could help her. Read Mark's gospel in chapter 5 and he's not so restrained. Mark, too, talks about this woman's plight, but actually he speaks much more like someone who's maybe an angry relative or a friend.

Mark says this. This woman had suffered much under many physicians. And he says she'd spent all she had and she was no better but rather grew worse. So Mark isn't a great fan of the medical profession.

[11:11] They're a bunch of charlatans who rob you blind. They don't actually help you get better. They make you worse, according to Mark. But you see, two very different perspectives. I suppose one is the restrained broadsheet.

The other is a tabloid, perhaps. But both saying exactly the same thing. This woman is in an utterly helpless situation. But Matthew, actually, in his account, he admits quite a lot of that detail because he wants to starkly make the point that here are two human beings in a state of extremis.

A helpless woman and an utterly distraught man. A ruler, indeed, but utterly helpless because his beloved 12-year-old daughter is dead. It's Mark, actually, who tells us explicitly the girl was 12 years old.

It's a great contrast, isn't it? 12 years of joy in that little girl's life snuffed out in a moment in death. Her life extinguished. Just as in a very real way, this woman's life had been extinguished slowly, exhaustingly, miserably over those same 12 years.

But both of them now utterly helpless. But both of these helpless cases cast everything on the mercy of the person of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

[12:34] Verse 18. A man who knows he's utterly helpless kneels at Jesus' feet. And verse 21. A woman who knows she's utterly helpless reaches out to Jesus Christ.

That's what the Bible means by faith. Throwing everything, all your hope, on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we see here.

Now look at the next story of the two blind men. It's just the same, isn't it? It's the case of total helplessness. Verse 27. And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying out aloud, Have mercy on us, son of David.

And when he entered the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, Do you believe that I'm able to do this? And they said to him, Yes, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done unto you.

And their eyes were opened. Wonderful. They can't even see Jesus.

[13:45] But they persistently stumble on after him, crying out, Have mercy, son of David.

Interesting thing, by the way, that all the blind men in Matthew's gospel use that title of Jesus, son of David.

Why does he record that? Well, I think it's to say to us that even though they're blind, they actually did see. They saw the truth of what was really important. They knew that the only help for them would be in the Messiah, in the son of David, promised by the prophets.

And in the great day of the Lord that was promised of the dawning of the world to come. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened. Then shall the ears of the deaf be unstopped.

And the lame man will leap like a deer. And the mute will sing for joy. They believed the promise of God.

And they cast themselves at the feet of the Savior Jesus, the son of David, when he came. Look at verse 32 now. The mute man, who's also demon-possessed.

[14 : 55] Verse 32, 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 crowds marveled, saying, Never was anything like this seen in Israel.

Another one, utterly hopeless. He can't even speak. He can't even ask for help. He can't even cry out. And he's doubly oppressed. He's mute and or tilt.

He's demon-possessed. But you see, all of these helpless creatures are brought face to face with the person, with the presence of the Messiah, the son of David, Jesus the Lord.

And the power of sin that renders human being helpless, that extinguishes, that exhausts human life, is broken by the very presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord of life itself.

It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? All through of the abject helplessness of human sin, transformed by the mercy of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 07] And notice the focus all the way through. Do you see? On faith. Simple faith in the person of the Savior, the son of David. The woman with the hemorrhage, she's confused, isn't she?

She's superstitious. Her theology is not all correct. Touching Jesus' cloak and all of that. But verse 21, she knew in amongst all that she was confused about, she knew that Jesus was the one she needed.

And she came to him. That's faith. And then the distraught father, he was the same. He came and he kneeled down before Jesus. That's faith.

And the blind men, stumbling along in the dark. But verse 28 says they knew they needed him.

That's faith. And those who brought the dumb man, the demon-possessed man, verse 32, they knew it was the person of Jesus, the Savior.

That's where we've got to bring our friend, they said. That's faith. You see, they all represent, don't they, a world that's confused, that's blind, that's lost, that's helpless.

[17 : 20] And oh my goodness, just look around at our world today. Is that not the world that we live in? A world that needs the person of Jesus Christ as its only hope.

To come to him. And to have faith and trust in him. And that's why, of course, Matthew's last piece of application in his message has the emphasis that it does.

It's a call and a challenge to real faith. First of all, there's a call, isn't there, to all true disciples.

Verse 35 there, you see, that's the bracket, isn't it?

The summary bracket marking the end of the section. It's identical to chapter 4, verse 23. Matthew's telling us, now we've come to the end. This is the climax of my whole message.

And what is that message? Well, look at verses 36 to 38. It's so clear, isn't it? Real disciples must join in the mission of the gospel of the kingdom to this hopeless world.

[18 : 23] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them. Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And he said to his disciples, See, he confronts the disciples, doesn't he?

With the truth about the world. The world of people who are estranged by the hopelessness of sin. And enslaved by the terrible hold of sin.

And exhausted in the helplessness that sin has brought to their mortality. And what is Jesus' reaction? Verse 36, it's compassion. Compassion.

Because they're harassed and helpless, the sheep without a shepherd. I'm sure there he's recalling the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34. Where he speaks about his people Israel like sheep without shepherds.

With evil shepherds. Evil leaders. And he says, So I will come and be their shepherd. I will gather the flock into the fold.

[19 : 35] But all through this chapter, we've seen, haven't we, that Jesus' message is so clear. As it is for me, the master, so it's going to be for you. My followers, my disciples.

And that's what he says here. He's calling his disciples to join in his mission to a helpless world. So what do true disciples do? Well, they heed the call of the king.

They'll see with the eyes of Jesus their master. Verse 36, who saw and had compassion. They'll see with real gospel compassion as they look at this world.

They'll have compassion for a helpless world lost in its sin. Notice that's what distressed Jesus. And that's what should distress us above everything else that we see in this world.

Jesus' primary concern is not with illness or with poverty or with loneliness or with injustice or with climate change or anything else.

[20 : 37] All of these things might be real enough and might need our attention at times. But all of them are just manifestations of the real problem. The sin that leaves us helpless.

Just like lost sheep adrift from our shepherd. And that's what Jesus' mission is all about. Chapter 1, verse 21 of Matthew's gospel says, And friends, that's what Jesus is telling us our mission is all about.

Real compassion, according to Jesus, is recognizing the cause of all people's deepest problem. And it's sin.

And therefore it's joining in Jesus' mission to rescue people from sin. And that's still what real mission is.

That's what real mission will always be. We need to be very careful. Because all sorts of, well, nonsense really, is taught today about what mission is. As though the mission of the gospel today was so different, so unique from every other age of history.

[21 : 49] Nonsense. Friends, the human heart is exactly the same. People's hearts haven't changed. It doesn't matter whether our world is ancient or modern or postmodern.

I remember one of the most helpful things I heard my friend Rico Tice say years ago was he talked about being at a seminar all about the influence of postmodernism on evangelism. And he said, I couldn't understand what he was talking about with this postmodernism.

And eventually, suddenly it clicked. It's just another word for sin. And that's right. Every manifestation of the foolishness of man is just another word for sin.

We are lost sheep. People are helpless. They're estranged from God by sin's hopelessness. They're enslaved by that terrible hold of sin.

They're exhausted. They're extinguished by the helplessness of our fallen mortality. And the true disciple will have real gospel compassion.

[22 : 53] They'll see with the eyes of Jesus and want to meet that greatest need in human beings. And secondly, you see in verse 37, the true disciple will also sense with the heart of Jesus.

He said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful. It's the laborers that are few. The true disciples will sense the opportunity that God has given, that God has promised, that God has sovereignly decreed.

The harvest is plentiful. God has declared that that will be. And so we'll also sense at the same time the urgent need, that the laborers are few.

Notice how Jesus sees absolutely no conflict there between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of God's people. The harvest is plentiful. God is the Lord of the harvest.

The laborers are few. You must respond to his call. We are made responsible. And you see that just as clearly in Jesus' third thing, verse 38.

[24 : 00] He says, we are there for to share in the work of Jesus. Praying earnestly that the Lord would send out laborers. We're to have a real gospel commitment in our lives.

In other words, we're to trust that God is sovereign and we're to ask him to send out laborers. But also, as the whole of chapter 10, if you read on, goes on to make very, very plain, we're to pray that the Lord would send out and then we are to send out and be sent out ourselves into that harvest field.

The whole of chapter 10 is Jesus briefing and teaching his disciples about mission. Our part is to prepare and be prepared for kingdom mission.

We're to pray for God to be at work, but we're to know that wherever God is at work, well, his people are going to be at work too. And that's always the pattern through the scriptures.

Paul says, doesn't he, in Colossians chapter 1, verse 29, that I toil, struggling with all his energy that is so powerfully at work in me.

[25 : 10] The sovereign God is at work and I'm toiling at work. And the two are always together. And that's the call of true discipleship.

To see a lost world as Jesus sees it, helpless because of its sin. And to share in his heart of compassion. And therefore to share in his mission of compassion as an absolute priority in our lives.

A compassion that manifests itself, as you'll see plainly if you read through chapter 10. Not primarily in feeding and clothing lost sheep, but in saving lost sheep.

A compassion that manifests itself in the proclaiming of the person of Jesus and his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, as the only answer for people who are harassed and helpless, without a

shepherd, without hope, because they're without God in this world.

That's the call of real Christian discipleship. We can't rejoice, can we, in the transforming joy of Jesus over all the powers of sin.

[26 : 21] Unless we also submit to his power and authority to transform us. And to place a call upon our lives. To turn us into people who live not for this passing world and for the dominion of sin, but who live for the new world of his everlasting kingdom.

The gospel of the kingdom has a powerful call to a real mission. And if we profess to be Christians, then we have to ask ourselves, don't we?

Have we really got to grips with that call? Have we? Am I really a disciple who shares the priorities of my master?

That's my calling. I quote Eurico Tice again. You can't be a godly person if you're disinterested in evangelism and mission.

That is practically the definition of godliness and discipleship. There's a powerful call to real mission. But there's also, finally, there's a powerful challenge, isn't there, to the whole wide world.

[27 : 32] And if you're just listening in, if you're not a Christian disciple, this is something that you need to take very, very seriously. The challenge is always presented to every person when there's a confrontation with the person of Jesus Christ.

Because he has utter and absolute authority over us. And you see that challenge in the climax here in verses 33 and 34. When the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke.

And the crowds marveled. Saying, we've never seen anything like this in Israel. But, the Pharisees said, he casts out demons by the prince of demons.

And always, friends, when people are brought into a real encounter with the real Jesus Christ, there are each of these two reactions. Some, verse 33, respond with joy.

They marvel. Never seen anything like it. Wonderful. Well, that's faith. Joy in Jesus and his marvelous works.

[28 : 36] But there are always others, like verse 34, aren't there? Who show scorn. This is just the work of the devil. He casts out demons by the prince of demons.

He's a demon. That's unbelief. Rejecting Jesus and his works. And if you go back and read through the whole of chapter 8 and 9, you'll see, won't you, that these two reactions are there all the way through.

Along with the joyful reception of Jesus, well, that's what we've focused on. But there's another side, isn't there? Always. Look at chapter 9, verse 3.

He's blaspheming, they say. The scribes, the religious establishment, can't stand the real Jesus.

Chapter 9, verse 11. Oh, he mixes with sinners. He mixes with all those dreadful people.

That's the Pharisees. That's the virtue signallers on Twitter. Chapter 9, verse 24. They laugh him to scorn when he speaks about the little girl. Oh, well, that's the crowds on Facebook, isn't it?

[29 : 41] Nonsense. Perhaps worst of all, chapter 8, verse 34. After he's marvelously released those demon-possessed men, they beg him to leave their region.

There's a culture that's absolutely threatened by his authority. And then here in verse 34, the climax. He's a demon. He's evil.

This kind of intolerant extremism must be silenced. We won't have that gospel preached in our city in the SECC. We won't have a church preaching its message in the Usher Hall.

Silence that dreadful thing. That's why Jesus says what he says in chapter 8, verses 11 and 12.

And that's why it's so sobering.

Look at those verses. Many from all over the world, he says, will come and reign in his kingdom. But others, even those who are very religious, who are very sure of their own right on virtue, they'll be cast out forever, says Jesus.

[30 : 44] I tell you, many will come from east and west and will recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.

And in that place, there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Whether Jew or Gentile, whether you're from the west or the east, whether you're churchy or whether you're secular by background, the only thing that counts in the end is your attitude to the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He and he alone has authority to welcome into his heavenly kingdom, to feast with his one worldwide family of faith. And he and he alone has power to cast out into utter darkness.

And the gospel of the kingdom tells us both of these things, the whole truth. But it urges you to choose the former, to choose life, all through the Bible.

That's the message. See, I set before you life and death, says Moses. Choose life. See, I'm setting before you life and death, heaven and hell, says Jesus.

[32 : 01] Choose life. Don't ever doubt Jesus' power and authority to do both of these things.

To welcome you into glory unimaginable or to exclude you into a horror that is everlasting. But don't ever, ever doubt his mercy and his willingness to rescue from every power of sin, to transform you and to transform those you love for a wonderful new world of everlasting joy.

As we close, listen to the words of the leper again. Chapter 8, verse 2. Wonderful words. Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

And Jesus said, I will. I will. Be clean. Jesus Christ has the power and the authority over every power of sin in this world and in your life.

And he is willing. I will. Don't you be unwilling. Don't withstand him yourself.

[33 : 29] And withhold him from others who need him. Let's all join the transforming joy of Jesus and his kingdom.

And that joy, friends, will begin now. And it will never, ever end. Let's pray together.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that this world has seen the presence and the power of heaven in the person of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

How we long for his coming again when his presence at last will transform this world forever. But how we thank you, Lord, that you have not left us as orphans.

But that this very day, every day and always, your Holy Spirit brings his power into our human hearts and into this world. The power, the same power, to transform for eternity those who are hopeless.

[34 : 36] Those who are helpless. Those who are gripped by the terrible hold of sin's power. May that power, Lord, and that joy and that message fill our hearts and fill our lives and fill our voices.

And may we live to proclaim this transforming message. For the everlasting glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.