

Title: What kind of a Jesus do you want?
Text: Matthew 9.27-34
Theme: There are only a few who really follow Christ.
Series: Matthew #55
Prop Stmtnt: Discipleship is only for a few

Read Text:

As if often the case, I initially read the text that I am going to be preaching on and get, what I think is a pretty good idea of what it is about. But, in the week before I actually preach the text, I dig into it and realize that there is so much more here than what I saw at first. These verses 27-31 sound like another pretty straightforward account of Jesus healing someone, right? A couple of guys who are blind follow Jesus and create a commotion by crying out loud and by continually crying out loud. Jesus finally heals them and tells them to keep it to themselves (he does that from time to time) but, of course they don't, and we empathize with them because after all, how would you expect these guys to actually not say something about it. I mean – seriously, right? So, what's the point of the text? If you bug Jesus enough, he will give you what you want. Is that it? If you have enough faith, you will get your healing, right? After all, that is what Jesus said, isn't it? "According to your faith be it done to you?" So, what's this bit about Jesus telling them not to say anything about it?

Memorial Day weekend is the first of 3-summer type holidays that around here we love to celebrate by lighting off things that explode. Before fireworks were made legal, people would caravan to other states and buy trunkful's of fireworks. If you bought those in another state, you were asked to sign a waiver statement that said, amongst other things, that you would not transport them across state lines, or shoot them off in states where it was illegal, etc. Now get this. The stores that were selling these would be set-up 50 feet across the state line. What was going on? Here sign this (wink, wink) so that if you get into trouble we can claim that we had absolutely no idea that you had any plans whatsoever to take these back into Michigan and turn your neighborhood into a reenactment of Gettysburg. After all, you signed this statement. Forget the fact that the store is practically sitting on the state line that you drove here from MI, that you live in MI and that you are driving back to MI. For all they know, you were simply storing these for a friend who was going to drive to TN after work one afternoon to fire them off.

So, is that what is going on here? Is Jesus giving them a perfunctory warning, sort of like having them sign a disclosure statement promising not to say anything (wink, wink). That way, when the Pharisees went into orbit (predictably so) Jesus could cover his bases and tell them, "Look, I told them not to say anything." No. But in order to understand what is going on here, let's take a step back for a minute.

Matthew writes this gospel account in order present Jesus Christ as the King. I have entitled this series: Behold, your King! But, he is a king, unlike any king you have ever seen before. In order for us to know what kind of a King he is, Matthew spends most of

his gospel account focusing upon the words of Christ. There are five major teaching sections in Matthew's gospel that are separated by accounts of miracles, then opposition, miracles and then opposition. All of this culminates in the ultimate form of opposition; that is his rejection, trial and crucifixion which resulted in his greatest miracle – rising again from the dead. We are about a third of the way through the book and we are coming to the end of the section that focuses upon the miracles of Christ. These miracles illustrated and supported what Jesus said (Sermon on the Mount, 5-7) and they prepared the disciples for what they were going to face when they were sent out to announce the kingdom of God (chapter 10). There are 3 sections of miracles, each section divided by a call to follow Christ.

We also see two seemingly different reactions to Christ's miracles. On the one hand, Jesus appears to be very popular with the crowds, but there is a growing opposition and even hostility against him on the part of the Pharisees. So, I keep asking myself, what is the point of these two miracles? What is the Spirit of God through Matthew telling us here? I see and agree that these two miracles show the authority of Christ over blindness and muteness and this helps to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy (35.5-6) that Jesus quotes for John the Baptist when John questions whether Jesus is really the actual Messiah (11.5). But I also think there is something else and when I take the time to actually read the text carefully, it really is not that subtle.

Here we have two miracles performed by Christ that appear to bring two different responses. The blind men who were healed respond by spreading the fame of Jesus through all that district. The Pharisees respond to the healing of the demon-possessed man by accusing Jesus of utilizing demonic powers himself in order to exercise authority over a demon. And yet, when we get toward the end of the book, Jesus is no longer being carried along by this massive wave of popularity, is he? No! And this is stunning. Jesus is condemned to die and no one comes to his defense. Doesn't that just baffle you? Where is all of his support? What happened to all of these people that he healed and these thousands of people whom he fed? Why aren't these people storming the Sanhedrin, rioting and demanding justice from their own leaders at such an egregious miscarriage of justice? Why does the crowd cry for the death of Christ instead of demanding the death of the Pharisees? What happened to the crowd?

I am convinced that Matthew is giving us a preview of that answer in this text. The obvious answer is that they really did not believe in who Jesus was and what he demanded did they? That is obvious with the Pharisees, but it is not as obvious with the crowd. But, even here, there is evidence of it. Let's get right to the point and then go back through accounts and see how it fits together.

After Jesus healed the two blind men, he "sternly warned them." The word (embrimaomai) that Matthew uses here is very strong. It only occurs five times in the NT. It means to scold and speaks of such conviction that it is used in other literature to describe the snorting of horses. It is used by Mark (1.43) in a similar context as we have here in Matthew 9, but it is used by John in John 11. (SLIDE, John 11.33-38) Can you

pick out which English phrases are the translation of this word? So, you can see how earnest, how deep, how intense, how focused, how clear Jesus was with his instructions to these men here in Matthew 9. He STERNLY WARNED them. “But” (v.31) they went away and spread his fame through all that district. But, that’s okay, right? After all, they were telling people about Jesus, right? Isn’t that what Jesus really wants us to do? Who can blame them? They were just healed! Of course they are going to tell others about it. No, it is not okay. Jesus gave them very clear and specific instructions. He was also very intense so that there was no mistaking the seriousness of his command. And in spite of this, they blatantly disobeyed.

But, we protest, is that really fair? Would it not have been hard for these men to have NOT told anyone? Sure! But, that was the order. And who are you to think that it is ever okay to disobey a direct order from the King? And this is why I think that these events happened this way and why Matthew included them here. Here is your king. Behold your King! But what kind of a King is he? He is obviously a good King. He is obviously a merciful King. He is obviously a powerful King. But are you willing to accept His authority? Are you willing to obey Him, even when his commands do not make sense to you? Are you willing to trust Him even when it goes against your instincts? If you are not, then He is King in name only and not in truth. Which is why I think that these two accounts are answering the same question: What kind of a Jesus do you want?

I. We want a Jesus who will give us what we want, but not one that we have to obey. (27-31)

This first account is an example of incomplete faith. These men certainly had some faith in Jesus; in fact, they had a lot of faith in Jesus.

A. They followed him.

We can certainly understand the scene. Word of Jairus’ daughter being brought back to life is spreading around. These two blind men rightfully conclude that if Jesus can raise someone from the dead, then he can certainly restore their sight. Somehow they found out where Jesus was and they followed him. Matthew says nothing about people helping them. And we are given the impression that Jesus does not initially respond to them because they continue to follow him, and are crying out and end up following him even into the house that Jesus was going to.

B. They professed faith in him.

Notice what they said. “*Have mercy on us, Son of David.*” That is a powerful confession of faith. By calling Jesus, “Son of David” they were recognizing that he was the Messiah. They show more awareness of who Jesus is than anyone so far, except the demons (8.29). Once inside the house, Jesus questions them. It is clear that Jesus did not want this miracle to be known publicly. I will speculate about that in a minute. But, once inside, Jesus asks them, “*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*” Their answer is immediate.

They believe. So, Jesus touches their eyes and says, “*According to your faith be it done to you.*” And they can see. I wish the account ended right here. I would love to talk about what it must have been like to open your eyes and to see Jesus before you see anything else. We don’t know if these men were blind from birth or became blind through disease or accident. But, to open your eyes and to see Jesus is a powerful example of faith being made sight. It is all good up to this point. And here is where the train runs off the tracks.

C. But, they disobeyed him.

The command was extremely clear. “*See that no one knows about it.*” It is not always easy to keep something to yourself. This week, Chris Dilley was picked to sit on a jury for a criminal case. The instructions from the judge to the jurors are very clear. You cannot speak about this to others. I was asking him about the jury selection process because I knew that it was okay to ask him about that. But, even though I wanted to say, “Hey, what is the trial about? You can tell me, I am not going to say anything” because I am very interested in those sorts of things, I didn’t. But I was tempted to say that because I am tempted like you to think that the rules are for other people. I am the exception. So, even though Jesus said this to these men, somehow they rationalize it away. It is okay that they disobey Christ because, after all, they mean well. They were trying to do a good thing. They had good intentions. Good intentions do not make up for disobedience.

Now, it is a fair question to ask, why would Jesus command them not to say anything? I think their response illustrates why. They wanted Jesus to heal them, but they did not want to obey him. They knew and believed in a Messiah who was good enough to heal their eyes, but not good enough to earn their allegiance. Jesus did not want that kind of publicity. He did not want people promoting his powers to heal, but who were not willing to submit to his authority. After all, as we see over and over, the miracles that Jesus did were a means to an end. The miracles were there to authenticate his message. He obviously knew their heart. They were not all in, no matter what. They may have thought that they were. I find it curious that Jesus questions them so intensely. “*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*” Jesus did not do that with the others. But he presses them. I think that Matthew’s point is that even though they can see, in some ways they are still blind. They were satisfied with their sight and sadly were satisfied with their disobedience as well.

Tim Keller said, “If you say: I believed in God, I trusted God, and He didn’t come through-You only trusted God to meet your agenda.” Related to this statement are these two blind men. They believed in Jesus enough to heal them, but not enough to obey. They believed, but incompletely so. Jesus was only good enough for their best life now, he was a messiah who was good enough to benefit them, but not worth their obedience. There is a sense in which these men wasted the miracle. The next account also answers the question, what kind of a Jesus do you want.

II. We want a Jesus who will affirm us, not one who exposes us. (32-34)

In this account, there is precious little detail given about the man who was demon possessed. In fact, this account is not repeated in Mark or Luke. Matthew does this because he wants us to focus on the response and not on so much on the miracle. So, while the first account is an example of incomplete or inconsistent faith, this is an example of brazen defiance.

The man who was brought to Christ was not able to speak because he was under the control of a demon. When the demon was cast out of the man, then the man spoke. The evidence of the power of Christ was clear and the reaction of the crowd attested to it. They were not just saying that they had never seen anything like this. They were saying that nothing had ever been done in Israel like this. In other words, someone greater than Elijah, Elisha and all of the prophets is right here!

That is too much for the Pharisees. Their response is that Jesus must be in cooperation with Satan in order to make it appear that he is doing a good thing, when in reality he is doing a bad thing. How can you look at Christ and come up with that? The evidence for the authenticity of Christ is indisputable, unless you refuse to believe. No amount of evidence can change an unwilling heart. So how can they explain this? And what exactly is the evil thing that Jesus is doing that would be evidence that he is in league with Satan? He is not playing by their rules.

Do you realize how seriously stupid, pride is? Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except for the one who has it. A U.S. Air Force transport plane with its captain and 5 crew members was flying over Alaska in the mid-50s when they entered an unusually fierce snowstorm. The navigator contacted an air base only to be told that he had veered several hundred miles off course. Correct coordinates were given to the navigator, who continued to insist that his own calculations could not be that far off. Soon the plane ran low on fuel. The six men decided to abandon the plane and parachute to safety, but because of the -70 degree Fahrenheit temperature and winds that gusted to 50 mph, they were all frozen within minutes of hitting the ground. As a result of the navigator's pride, 5 other people went to their deaths. A lot of people die because of stubbornness. But what is even worse, is that a lot of people refuse to accept the possibility that they could be wrong about Christ. And the consequences are even worse than death. Matthew's point: They too can see, but are also blind.

What kind of Jesus do you want?

I suspect that in the past 2,000 years people have not changed a bit. I say that based on what kind of Jesus attracts many followers in our own country. When we tell people that we are Christians, it is often rather confusing since the majority of people in our country would associate themselves with Christian, but only 9% have anything that would resemble a biblical definition of Christian. Christian in our culture means that we like God because God is there for us and he wants us to be happy. The Bible gives us some principles for success, so that if you do your part, then God is obligated to do his part and to come through for you. If you have enough faith, he will come through for you. He will

change the game to be in your favor. He will do something for you, because He loves you no matter what. It is easy to preach this because it sounds so good. Jesus is, whatever you want him to be. The problem with that is rather obvious. We do not want a Jesus who is King. We do not want a Jesus who makes demands. We do not want a Jesus who calls us to suffer. We do not want a Jesus who calls us to surrender. We do not want a Jesus who demands obedience, even when it does not make sense. We want a Jesus that we can limit. We want a Jesus who does what we want. We want a Jesus who is there to help me get a good grade so I can get into a good school, and get a good job and get the life that I am deserving of and that God owes me. Actually, come to think of it, if I had a genie, then I wouldn't need Jesus. That is a good question to ask your self isn't it? If you had a genie, would you still need Jesus?

The kind of Jesus that you can limit and define according to your terms can't save you. The kind of Jesus, who does what you want, won't change you. The kind of Jesus who shows up to affirm you, and whose only job is to help you get a good grade on the test and get into a good college and get a job, and get that home that you always wanted is your little genie, not the real Jesus. The kind of Jesus that you can rule is not worth your obedience. The kind of Jesus that you can direct is not worth your trust. The kind of Jesus that follows you is not worth your surrender. The kind of Christianity that promotes that kind of Jesus is not legitimate.

What kind of church do you want? Do you want a church that will give you a customized Jesus? Or do you want the whole truth?