

Meaning in the Miracles: Blessing in Death and Brokenness

Matthew 9:18-22
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Go ahead and grab your Bible and open it up to Matthew chapter 9. If you are new with us this morning we've been in Matthew 8 and 9 for the last couple months looking at several miracles Jesus performed to prove He had the authority to say the kinds of things He was saying.

So Jesus was constantly talking big about Himself. Last week Spencer's friend Graham pointed out that, for the Jews, the way Jesus spoke about forgiving the sins of the paralytic would have been blasphemous – only God can forgive sins. And then Jesus said things like "I and the Father are one"¹ and "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."²

Jesus was always saying things only God should say – this is one of the main reasons the religious leaders couldn't stand Him – and He did this openly and without apology. But He didn't just speak like this, drop that kind of bomb, and then leave us to figure out what was going on. He said:

I am God's Son... [But] Do not believe Me unless I do the works of My Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father. (John 10:36-38)

Jesus' miracles, the works of His Father, were the credentials He provided to give credibility to His incredible claims.

Now in these two chapters Jesus does nine miracles in three sets. So in the first set Jesus He restored an untouchable leper to health, He cured a gentile centurion's paralyzed servant and healed Peter's fevering mother-in-law. Here He was proving He had authority over disease, but He was also making it clear that the kingdom of God was for broken people on the outskirts of society. People with need are the people who find God.

In the second set of miracles Jesus spoke and calmed a storm, cast out the demonic and forgave the sins of another paralytic before healing him. So here Jesus proved He has authority over the natural, the supernatural and the sin-induced chaos of our lives. And His authority mirrors YHWH. YHWH spoke order into chaos to create, and Jesus spoke healing into chaos to recreate.

And now in the final section of three miracles Jesus proves His authority over the ultimate enemy - death.

¹ John 10:30

² John 14:6

And as we get into the text there are two avenues I want us to take. First, we are going to look at the miracle itself, in this case the healing of the bleeding woman that Jesus accomplishes while He is on His way to raise a dead girl. But as with the other two sections of miracles, everything Jesus does here has layers to it. And so Jesus isn't just proving He has authority over death – as though that were a small thing – but the way He restores life demonstrates the accessible compassion of God and redefines what blessing looks like in Jesus' kingdom.

So isn't it true that when things are going good we talk about being blessed, and when we are confronted by difficulty, our first response is often to ask "why has this happened to me? I don't deserve this. Why is God so distant? Why doesn't He hear my prayers? We feel forsaken and abandoned.

And certainly the people in our text felt that way. But Jesus takes this and turns it on its head. The difficulty is the blessing. So in another place, just after Jesus encountered a man who had been blind his entire life, He answered the people who were wondering these exact things saying:

This [blindness] happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:3)

And then He reached into that man's life and both restored his eyes and saved his soul. And at the end of the story it is obvious that the cost of blind eyes, which everyone had thought were a curse, were actually a blessing. They ironically enabled this man to see Jesus.

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Now there are a few things that make this final section of miracles stand out. Like the other two sections there are three miracles in this section – but one of them, the one we are looking at today, is 2 in 1 combo. So we are going to take two weeks to look at the raising of Jairus' daughter and the restoration of the bleeding woman.

A second thing that is unique about this section is that the miracles here are accomplished as Jesus touches people. The power of His word was enough to calm chaos, and it's just as potent here, but Jesus uses the softness of His touch instead – this isn't an accident. He's showing the accessible compassion of God.

A third distinction in this section is that the faith involved in the healing is tied to the individuals who get healed in a way that is distinct from the second set of miracles. So in the chaos of the storm Jesus rebuked His disciples for having little faith – and yet He stops the storm anyway. The two demon possessed men obviously didn't have any faith, and in the forgiving and healing of the paralytic, Graham noted that it was the faith of the friends, rather than the man himself, that stirred Jesus' passion and led to the miracle. But in this third section, each person who comes to Jesus comes in faith, and if you could speak of Jesus having a weakness, it is the faith of needy people.

So look with me at Matthew 9 starting in verse 18.

[Read Matthew 9:18-19]

Verse 18 starts with the words “While He was saying this.” And what He was saying was that things were going to change now that God’s kingdom was breaking into the world.

So in verse 16 Jesus says:

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved. (Matthew 9:16-17)

It is as Jesus is saying this that a synagogue leader runs up and kneels before Him.

Now if you remember back a few weeks we said that between the three sections of miracles are two intermissions. And this teaching here is Jesus’ second intermission. And His point in this intermission is that things are changing now that the kingdom of God is breaking into the world.

And people can’t believe it. Just before Jesus says this He calls Matthew to follow Him, and Matthew is a sinner! He wears his brokenness on His sleeve; it’s on his resume. Matthew is a tax collector which was a Jew the Romans had hired and turned into a professional thief. He’s like a greasy used car salesman. He’s smiling at you while he takes your wallet. Now not all car salesmen are like this.

But Matthew was broken. There’s nothing good about Him. And this is Jesus’ point! This is the new wine. Jesus’ kingdom isn’t for good people who have their lives together, it’s for people who are a mess. It’s for people who need a Saviour.

And while Jesus is talking this synagogue leader kneels at His feet. Now Mark and Luke both contain this story.³ And in their accounts we learn this man’s name was Jairus and his only daughter, a 12-year-old girl, was dying.

Matthew says she has already died when Jairus comes, but that’s because he is shortening the story. Luke tells us the girl dies while Jesus is dealing with the interruption of the bleeding woman. And we will touch on that in a minute.

But Jairus comes. And he was a respected man in the city. He was someone everyone thought was on the in with God. He was the leader of the synagogue.

³ Mark 5:21-43 and Luke 8:40-56

Now synagogues were like churches. The Jews set them up during the Babylonian captivity because they weren't able to worship at the temple any more. And each synagogue was run by 10 men, called elders. And one would be elected to be the leader.⁴ And this is who Jairus was. He was like the chairman of the board.

If anyone should get their prayers answered it is this guy. And yet his aren't being answered. God is distant. His little girl is going to die and he's tried everything. He would have been wealthy, so on top of praying he would have taken her to a doctor, but nothing had worked. And now he is so desperate that he's willing to lay down his reputation and come to Jesus.

We know from lots of other texts that the religious leaders weren't fans of Jesus. Jesus threatened them because there was all this new wine around Him. And religion isn't about new wine, it is about the right way things have always been done. And so this guy has a lot on the line as he comes to Jesus.

But he comes. He kneels in front of Jesus knowing full well that everyone is watching. Actually Luke tells us he falls at Jesus' feet – he worships. The Greek for this implies he lays himself out flat on the ground and kisses Jesus' feet. Now when was the last time you saw a well-dressed business executive lying on his face in the street? This doesn't happen, but that's what this guy does.

So what possesses him to act this way? What enables him to overcome all the friction that would have made him want to do anything else?

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Well it's two things: first it is his brokenness. It's the worst kind of brokenness. "My daughter has just died" – or "My daughter is dying." Brokenness brings this man to the end of his rope. And so he swallows his pride, gets on his knees, and pleads for Jesus' touch. It's his little girl. She's 12, so she has just gone through her bat mitzvah. She's technically a woman in Jewish culture. But instead of coming into the strength of womanhood she is teetering on the edge of death. And so this dad comes. Desperate need has rendered the social pressure, and all the systems Jairus has spent his life living for, inconsequential. He is willing to throw it all away for the chance that Jesus will heal his daughter. Brokenness.

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There is a second thing that brings Jairus to his knees, and that is faith. Look at the way Matthew describes him speaking in verse 18. "[Jesus] come and put Your hand on her, and she will live."

Now prior to this Jesus has performed some incredible miracles. He's healed all sorts of diseases, kicked out the demonic and calmed chaos, but He's never resurrected anyone from the dead. And so there is no precedent for what this guy says. There is no story he's read, no event he's seen where anything like this has happened before. And yet he believes that Jesus is able.

⁴ Courson, Jon. "Courson's Application Commentary" (Nashville; Thomas Nelson), 2003. Pg 66

This is marvelous faith. This is saving faith. And this is the kind of faith Jesus has a soft spot for. When people come to Jesus laying everything on the line and falling at His feet He is moved to compassion. And so Jesus begins to move away from the crowd He is teaching to reach His hands into Jairus' brokenness.

How badly do you need Jesus' compassionate hands to touch your brokenness?

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But He gets interrupted. Jesus is on an important mission. This respected man has just emptied himself of everything to garner Jesus' assistance, and Jesus is going to go raise his girl, when out of the pressing crowd comes a woman. Look at verse 20.

[Read Matthew 9:20-22]

Now this is a very unique miracle. It's the only one on record that Jesus does involuntarily. In Mark 5 we read:

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched My clothes?" (Mark 5:30)

This is a bit funny. Not often does Jesus get portrayed as not knowing what is going on. Now some commentaries think He speaks this way just to get the woman to confess what it is she has done. But we don't know that. The text says Jesus realized power had gone out of Him and asked who touched Me? Jesus had been surprised.

Now this isn't completely without precedent. Jesus is God and man. So this means He does things only God can do. He performs miracles that prove He has the authority to say the kinds of things He does. Sometimes He knows peoples' thoughts. He is God with skin on. But at other times He gets hungry and tired, and He gets surprised – when it fits His agenda. And the one thing Jesus loves to be surprised by is faith.

Remember the centurion back in chapter 8 with the sick servant who asked for Jesus just to speak the word? Matthew tells us:

When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those following Him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." (Matthew 8:10)

A little later in Matthew Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman living in Israel with a demon possessed daughter. Talk about a broken woman. She comes to Jesus asking for help. And three times Jesus tries to turn her away. At first He ignores her, and then He makes two comments that sound pretty close to rude – it's a strange story. But this woman just won't take no for an answer. Instead she falls at Jesus' feet in worship. Her famous words are "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." When Jesus hears this His countenance changes. It's like He's been beaten by her faith. And He responds:

"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted. "And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Matthew 15:28)

On a few occasions we come across strange stories where Jesus is bested, as it were, by the faith of broken people. And this bleeding woman fits this category.

So this woman has been bleeding for 12 years – the same number of years the girl was old. But while the girl's life, we presume, had been one of happiness up to the point sickness took her, this woman has been living in a shadow of ostracism. She probably had a fibroid tumor or something similar in her uterus that meant her bleeding never stopped. These are things we can treat today, but in the first century this condition meant she was perpetually unclean. And it wasn't for a lack of trying.

Luke, who was a doctor, tells us she was a lost cause. Lots of doctors had tried, but "no one could heal her."⁵ Mark has a little different perspective. He says, "she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had."⁶ Anybody ever come across a doctor who was pretty sure it was your fault you weren't getting better?

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But the end result was that she was unclean, and had been unclean for 12 years. This meant she wasn't allowed in the temple. She would have ended up divorced from her husband and ostracised from her family. And this is because in the Old Testament the Law stated:

When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge.... Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean..., and anything she sits on will be unclean.... Anyone who touches them will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening. (Leviticus 15:25-27)

So this woman had been living in isolation for 12 years. Just like Jairus, she has been incredibly broken by her circumstances, and she has incredible need. And just like Jairus, she was full of faith. She believe Jesus could make a difference in her life.

Could Jesus make a difference in your brokenness?

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Now this woman isn't going to try to talk to Jesus. She doesn't need to. All she needs to do is touch the edge of His cloak. And so she breaks through the crowd. Everyone is pushing around Jesus, but she pushes through. And the word "touch" here could better be translated grab.

It's not a polite gesture. It's a desperate gesture. In verse 21 the Greek says as she pushes through the crowd she keeps on saying to herself "If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed". This is something someone only does if they've lost all sense of propriety. She grabs Jesus' shirt! And then lets go. And in that instant, she gets healed.

⁵ Luke 8:43

⁶ Mark 5:26

And Jesus turns around and tells her what has already happened. “Take heart daughter, your faith has healed you.”

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Now here’s the crazy thing. Jesus is in a crowd of people, and everyone’s got a need. Right? You’ve got a need. Everyone’s living with some level of brokenness, and our own brokenness is the only brokenness we know.

Our lives are unique to us. We’ve never lived anyone else’s. And we’ve never faced today’s problems before. So our problems always seem significant. Right? I mean, it doesn’t work to comfort someone saying “Don’t feel so bad that you lost your job, and your spouse has cancer and you had a huge fight with your son. Just remember that there are children starving in Africa.” That’s true, but it doesn’t comfort because our brokenness is the brokenness we know. Everyone is broken, and everyone’s brokenness feels real. But not everyone comes to Jesus with their brokenness.

So here Jesus is in a crowd of people – in Luke He asks “who touched me?” And His disciples respond “Are you crazy? Everyone is touching You.” But only one reached out and grabbed His cloak. And in that it is like everyone else disappears and Jesus is just there alone with the woman. And Jesus looks at her. The power has already gone out of Him. She has already been healed. But then He speaks: “Your faith has healed you.” And the word healed here is the Greek word “sodso” – usually we translate that “saved.”

So why wasn’t anyone else healed? Why didn’t anyone else in the crowd get saved? It’s because they were still handling their brokenness themselves. Their brokenness hadn’t gotten out of control. Only Jairus and this bleeding woman had situations so bad they didn’t have any other choice.

So let me ask you, who was blessed? The people without in your face symptoms who were able to smother Band-Aids on their cancer? Or the two who were so broken they had no where else to turn to but Jesus?

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I would argue that the perspective Jesus invites us into here is the perspective of 10,000 years from now. As you are looking back on life, you are never going to say “Man, it was a blessing I was healthy into my 80’s. It was a blessing I had a stable job.” You are never going to say that. 10,000 years from now the blessings of this life will be those points of brokenness that forced us beyond ourselves and into the compassionate arms of Jesus.

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This week Elliana, my six-year-old, made this come alive for me. We were at the kitchen table talking about faith. And I was sharing stories with my kids about times when I found myself in difficult places and God showed up and saved me – not just from the difficulties I’ve faced – though I have lots of those stories – but really saved me.

These are the moments when Jesus changed from being the Guy I learned facts about in Sunday School, to the sovereign Creator of the universe who reaches compassionately into my life to reveal Himself and embrace me in love. These stories are about Jesus proving Himself to me. These stories are how I know God is real.

So after almost an hour of finishing one story and being told “tell us another one dad,” dinner time had turned into bed time and I ended by saying: “Elliana, these stories are about God showing me that He is real. Now you need to pray that God will show you that He is real.”

And that’s when she stung me with the words “Dad, I sure hope something bad happens so that God can show me that He is real.”

I sat there stunned for a second. But then I realized, with her 6-year-old logic she had grasped an eternal truth. It’s out of the midst of brokenness that blessing arises. It’s here that we have the opportunity to grab onto Jesus and receive His touch. And this is worth it.

Now none of us have to pray for brokenness to happen – it’s going to happen. But we can pray that when it does we will be soft enough to run to Jesus with it rather than hide under the guise of health.

So how badly do you want Jesus’ touch today? Are you Jairus and bleeding woman desperate? Or are you comfortable just applying band aids?

Brothers and sisters, wealthy and powerful people like us need to come to the end of ourselves to meet Jesus. And Jesus wants this blessing for us. So don’t ask “why is this happening to me?” Let your brokenness spur you to reach out and grab Jesus’ shirt. Fall at Jesus’ feet, and let Him reach His hand into your life and touch you with compassion.