

Lighthouse: Meaning in the Miracles: Loosing tongues and Lighting Eyes

Matthew 9:27-34

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Go ahead and grab your Bible. Open it up to Matthew 9 starting in verse 27.

As you are turning there look at the images I've put up on the screen. Perspective is a funny thing. Often what we see says more about us than it does about the reality around us – at least that's what the Rorschach, the famous psychologist who used these ink splotches to gain insight into people's minds thought. Everybody sees something different. We will come back to this.

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The premise behind the series we are in is that Jesus was a big talker. He spoke as though He had the authority to forgive our sin. That means Jesus thought that He had and has the ability to make sinful people pure before God. In fact He said He was the only path to God.

Now in a world of tolerance like ours, people who talk like this are called bigots and fundamentalists at best and insane at worst. And it was the same in first century Palestine. Nobody normal talked like this. And so when Jesus spoke, His words hit people as blasphemous. And so, unsurprisingly, it was for His words He was killed.

But throughout this series we've argued that Jesus didn't just say things only God should say, He also did things only God can do – He performed miracles. And these weren't slight of hand tricks like we might see at a magic show, they were impossible things that cannot be naturally explained.

So Jesus restored lepers. Now Oil of Oley makes some bold claims about what can happen if you use their products. You are going to have baby fresh skin until you're 90. But interestingly, they never market these claims to lepers. But Jesus marketed His claim to lepers, and He healed them.

And Jesus changed weather with His words. He spoke and calmed storms. In the 1950's, at the height of the Cold War, the States was hit by several devastating hurricanes, and the fear was that Russia had figured out how to manipulate weather. But of course this turned out to be fanciful thinking. Nobody controls the weather, especially not by talking to it. But Jesus did. With a word a sea so troubled by storm it was terrifying red-neck sailors became crystal glass.

And then with a touch death itself released its grip on a 12-year-old girl. Modern medicine has stories of resuscitation. But resurrection doesn't happen. Never. Only God has this power. And yet Jesus wielded it at will on several occasions.

And Jesus performed these miracles to prove His words had weight. Today we are going to get into that again. But a second thing we are going to encounter is the somewhat weird but incredibly common phenomena that occurs when two people encounter the same thing. And that phenomena is that people often leave the same experience with completely different ideas about what happened.

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So look with me at Matthew 9 starting in verse 27.

[Read Matthew 9:27]

So here is the context. Jesus has just healed the bleeding woman that Jared talked about two weeks ago. And He has just walked out of the used-to-be funeral where He resurrected Jairus' daughter.

And as He walks outside He is again surrounded by the crowd the crowd that has been following Him all day because they were intrigued by His miracles. Except now it had grown because a bunch of recently unemployed professional wailers and flute players who had been at the funeral had joined it – awesome right? So there is this hodgepodge of humanity pushing in around Jesus. And in the middle are two blind men bumping along. And out of the bustle they cry out “Have mercy on us, son of David.”

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Now we have touched on this before – but it bares repeating because it keeps popping up – desperate need is the catalyst that enables people to get over themselves and reach out for Jesus.

So Jesus was surrounded by crowds of people, and He taught them all. But only a handful within the crowd garnered His personal assistance. Hear this: Jesus didn't heal everyone who bumped into Him. People were bumping into Jesus all the time, but none were healed until a bleeding woman reached out and grabbed His shirt.

Sometimes when we read scripture we think that the stories it contains were normal occurrences. We think guys like Moses and David and Elijah were walking around all the time in Bible days, but there are hundreds of years of history between them. And likewise, every story we come across in the Gospels is a special occasion. But virtually all these special occasions have four things in common.

Here is the first: unmanageable brokenness. So the leper and Jairus ran and knelt before Jesus with their requests; the centurion came asking help for his paralyzed servant; the bleeding woman pushed through the crowd to grab Jesus' shirt, and these two blind men cry out. The common denominator all these people have is that their brokenness was unmanageable. They were so desperate that the thought Jesus might heal enabled them to overcome the social stigma and get in Jesus' face. There are lots of these stories, but they are special because the vast majority who bumped into Jesus didn't experience anything themselves.

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Let me just stop here for a second. All of us have some kind of brokenness in our lives. So maybe you've got a string of wrecked relationships that haunts your past. And you wonder if anyone can love you. Or maybe you have some moral brokenness that is hiding just under the surface - you've got a habit of lying or looking at porn or talking people down behind their backs. Maybe this brokenness is obvious to people, or maybe it's hidden. But you know it is there. You know you aren't living the way you should, but you are trapped. You just can't get out.

Or perhaps you've got some form of physical brokenness that keeps you from doing the things we want to do. And maybe your physical thing sets you up for rejection. Or maybe you have a learning disability, or a mental disability. Maybe you suffer from depression and haven't seen a blue-sky day in years.

Or maybe you're swimming around in financial mismanagement. You've got credit card bills that you can't pay. And less money saved up for your future than you know you are going to need. But every time something stressful happens you wake up at the mall with a bag of new stuff.

Whatever brokenness you've got, the question this text asks is are you managing it? Are you doing just fine? Or are you desperate? You see Jesus was constantly surrounded by crowds of broken people, but most of them were doing just well enough at managing their brokenness that it wasn't necessary to grab Jesus' shirt. And they felt good about that. I mean who wants to be that needy anyway? Right?

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Imagine with me for a second that you lived 2000 years ago and got a cameo in one of Jesus' stories? Like Jesus Himself put His hand into your life and transformed it. Wouldn't that be amazing? Wouldn't that be the highlight of your life?

Imagine decades later that you were a grandparent and approaching death yourself. Wouldn't you be telling the story of when Jesus healed the sickness you had been suffering from for 12 years. Or the time He raised your daughter from the dead. Wouldn't you be more excited about talking about that than about what's new on TV. In fact, wouldn't you be prone to say something like "I'm so glad my bleeding didn't stop at 11 years - I never would have met Jesus." Or "Could you imagine if my daughter hadn't died that day - I'm so glad she did! Because if she hadn't Jesus wouldn't have been at our house. It turned out to be such a blessing."

Friends, desperate brokenness is often the very thing that leads us to Jesus.

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Well these blind guys needed Jesus. They would have been beggars. They would have been ignored and shunned. And more than that they would have been looked down on, despised, as though they somehow poked their own eyes out. Really?

Yes! Have you ever looked down on someone for a problem they were facing as though they brought it on themselves? Well... sure. We all know people who have brought stuff on themselves. So those drug addicts, they did this to themselves right?

And those people with credit card bills they can't pay; they spent that money. And those people having a kid outside of marriage did sleep around. People like this deserve to be looked down on because they did do these things to themselves... right?

Friends, everyone is broken. Everyone is a sinner. The only difference is that, unfairly, some sins have different consequences than others. Some sins, like throwing shade or gossip, can be done at church or in small group under the guise of caring. These kinds of sins can be managed in a way that allows us not to be too troubled by them. While others sins like giving yourself to addiction or financial mismanagement or promiscuity cause ramifications people look down their noses at. But all sin is equal. All sin is brokenness that separates us from God. But we don't think this way. We think the bigger the consequence the worse the sin must have been.

And this was the same in the first century. Remember that story of the man born blind, and how the disciples asked Jesus: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?"¹ This was the belief. If something bad happened to you it was because you were being punished by God. But Jesus didn't think this way. So these two blind men weren't just blind, they were viewed as sinful. So they were in a desperate place. And so they cry out "Have mercy on us, Son of David."

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Now there is a ton of significance in these words. First they say something no religious person would say – have mercy on us. Good religious people say things like "God I don't deserve this. I've been following You. I've been living a good life. And now I get this! This isn't fair!"

But These guys don't talk like that. They own their brokenness. They accept responsibility, and ask for mercy. To ask for mercy is to ask for what you don't deserve.

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Two weeks ago I was driving home from Vancouver and I was speeding and all of a sudden there was a cop – he just appeared out of nowhere. And as I drove past him his siren sounded, but then he kept driving the other way. I deserved a ticket, I didn't get one. That's mercy. And that's what these blind men ask for.

And then they call Jesus Son of David. Now this is a Messianic title. So they were recognizing that Jesus was God's tool of deliverance. The Messiah is who the Jews had been waiting for ever since God spoke to David through the prophet Samuel:

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

¹ John 9:2

Now at first everyone thought this was Solomon – who was David’s physical son. And Solomon started well but he finished poorly. He chose foolishness over wisdom at every turn. And so the Jews began to look to the future for when God would send another king who would have God as Father and be a true son. This passage became the foundation of a prophecy that God’s Messiah would be the Son of David.

And the blind men reference this. “Jesus You’re God’s Messiah.” And they are way more correct than they could have imagined. Let’s keep reading. Verse 28:

[Read Matthew 9:28-30a]

Here’s the second thing these miracle stories share. Persistence. The blind guys chase Jesus inside. They don’t give up. They keep pressing on. Their brokenness drives them. And Jesus talks to them for the first time. And He asks “Do you believe that I’m able to do this?”

Now these guys have pushed through the crowd. They’ve chased Him inside. They’ve called Him Son of David. I don’t think Jesus is wondering whether they really believe. But rather, I think He is asking them for a verbal declaration of faith.

I think what Jesus is getting at is the same thing Paul gets at when He says:

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

Faith is a heart thing. It happens inside us and isn’t visible to anyone but God. Yet, while this is true, throughout scripture when faith is pictured it *is* visible to those around us. There is no such thing as secret faith. Instead it always gets acted out. So James says “faith without works is dead” – if you aren’t doing something with your faith you don’t have it. And Paul says “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’... you will be saved.” If you won’t declare this, if you won’t tell the people around you that Jesus is your Lord, then He isn’t.

And so Jesus asks “Do you believe?” And they respond “Yes.” And so Jesus touched them – Jesus is always getting His hands dirty touching people’s brokenness. But they don’t get dirty. Instead other people get clean - “Their sight was restored.”

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And right after this Jesus heals a mute man. Look at verse 31.

[Read Matthew 9:31-33a]

Just like the blind guys, this mute man encounters Jesus and his life is transformed. In this case there is a demon involved. But the cause of brokenness is irrelevant. Physical brokenness is just as easy as supernatural brokenness to heal for Jesus. So whatever brokenness you have let it drive you to Jesus. He can restore you.

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So the miracles stories of Jesus are about desperately broken people; and they are about people whose brokenness leads them to pursue Jesus. There are two more things I want to draw out.

A third similarity in the miracles of Jesus is that the power of God does not lead everyone to the same response. Look at verse 33.

[Read Matthew 9:33-34]

It's Rorschach again. Your perspective changes what you see, and that's true even when the power of God is involved. And there are three different perspectives we see in these stories. Maybe you recognize yourself in one of them.

So, the crowds of onlookers were amazed by what they saw and interestingly this is the same way they responded to Jesus' words. So just after Jesus finished His Sermon on the Mount – the most compact section of powerful teaching He ever gave – we read:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching (Matthew 7:28)

But amazement isn't faith. It is just jealous interest. They were intrigued, they were encouraged, but not enough to reach out for Jesus themselves. Friends, the crowds are amazed but never saved in the Gospels!

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The second perspective is the one the Pharisees have here. They look at the awesome authority Jesus has over all of life and somehow see the devil instead of God. But this isn't so unusual. Our world does this all the time.

So our world hears Jesus' call to live a life of holiness; to run from sin and pursue God. But the world hears these words as the words of the devil, not a God who loves us and wants the best for us.

So for example, when Jesus makes the exclusive claim that He alone is the path to truth – He is the only way to the Father – our world hears bigoted intolerance. And it would be, unless it's true. If Jesus' words are true then His words are as bigoted and intolerant as someone yelling at a crowd of people enjoying a show on a sinking cruise ship to get into the life boat. Yes, Jesus' words are incredibly bold, but would it not be wise to listen to someone who raises the dead and restores blind eyes? Are these the actions of a bigot?

And the world hears Jesus' definition of sin – and again hears the devil. So the world hates the Bible's view that sexuality should be reserved for the marriage relationship between one man and one woman. It hears this as old fashioned and insensitive.

But imagine you had the same view about the warning label on your hair dryer. The manufacturer says don't use this while you are taking a bath. And they say this, not because they don't want you to blow dry your hair while enjoying the warmth of the bath. They don't want you to fry yourself!

And in the same way, Jesus, who is our manufacturer isn't about restricting our fun. He wants the best life for us. And since He made us, He knows how we work best. And He says, in the long run sexuality that happens between a man and a woman committed to each other in marriage is going to be the best sex. And Jesus wants that for you.

So some people look on Jesus with amazement but are untouched themselves. Others miss that Jesus loves us and wants the best for us and see the devil in His good action.

The third perspective is owned by the one who gets saved. And these are the characters who get cameos in Jesus' story. It's the bleeding woman; it's Jairus. It's the blind men and the leper. And all of these people leave their encounter with Jesus realizing that their brokenness was actually a blessing. It drew them to Jesus.

So the last two weeks have been interesting for me. We've had two floods resulting in two insurance claims in our duplex – on our tenants' side. And our roof failed and started leaking in multiple places. And Nikki's grandfather died suddenly. All in a week and a half.

My first response as all this happened was to scream. And I did a bit of that. But then as Nikki and I have been praying about this we began to see Jesus at work.

Nikki's grandfather, a passionate Jesus lover, had just turned 96, and his family was all together with him. And two days before he died his wife of 74 years told him "If you are waiting around for me I give you permission to go." The next day he tripped and fell and ended up in a comma that lasted a day. Essentially a painless way to go.

The two plumbing leaks were both inevitable and both in the same room. The first one was a pin hole leak in a copper elbow that went undetected for two days. The second was the result of a mistake a plumber made this last summer. But these two unrelated incidents happened within 5 days of each other in this order. If it had happened in the opposite order or with any more days in between this would have been disaster. Two insurance claims in a week is bad news. But here's how it is playing out:

The first claim got canceled because the second one is way bigger and involves the same space. But it looks now like the second one is going to be covered by my plumber's insurance instead of mine. So I might not have any claims at all.

And here's the best part. It turns out I've been praying for my roof to leak for months. Every Saturday I've been pinning the name of my neighbour on the cross and asking Jesus to give me the opportunity to bump into him. You see we are both busy and we hardly ever see each other. Well he just happens to own a roofing company.

So now he and his family have been over for dinner, and we've been talking on the phone and texting and figuring all this out. I haven't had this much contact with him in months. And then he says to me "I'm going to provide all the material for your roof at cost." I got two quotes for the roof. His quote is half as expensive as the other one. He's not going to make any money on me. Why would he do that?

Well he doesn't know yet, but the reason is because Jesus is at work in him already. Jesus is drawing him and his family in towards real life. And I've been praying that God would let me be part of the expanse of His kingdom in my neighbour's life. And so now, over the next week or two I'm looking for the opportunity to have that conversation. To say "Hey, I see God at work in you. People don't just give roofs away. But you did. And this kind of stuff happens to me all the time. And when I see it I know that God is at work. And I think He is at work in you drawing you to Himself. Who knows what's going to happen! But it's awesome! I'm so glad my roof started leaking!... Perspective.

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This leads me to the conclusion today and the final similarity Jesus' miracle stories share.

You may have noticed I skipped some weird words at the end of verse 30 earlier. Jesus tells the blind men "See that no one knows about this." And Jesus is always saying this to people. He said the same thing to the leper in chapter 8 verse 4 "See that you don't tell anyone." And it's the same thing when the demons try to tell people who He was. Luke says:

Demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah. (Luke 4:41)

And even when He was transfigured before His disciples, and they heard God speak, He told them:

Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. (Matthew 17:9)

This is a theme throughout the Gospels. And there are a couple theories on this but here's my take. Jesus wasn't interested in people bearing witness to Him who didn't have His Spirit inside them. Jesus doesn't want people to tell the truth about Him without looking like Him. Because word and deed have to match up.

But He knew a time was coming, after He would come back from the dead, when all this would change. And after this happened then Jesus changed His tune. We read:

On one occasion, while [Jesus] was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about.... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit....

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:4-8)

After rising from the dead, just before ascending back to heaven Jesus said: "The Spirit is coming. And when He gets inside you, you are going to be My witnesses. You are going to be the light of the world that I place in your neighbourhood and family and city. You are going to tell people about Me."

And friends, this is our reality. If you are a Jesus follower today you have His Spirit in you. And He wants you to be His witnesses. So look for opportunities where He is working. Look particularly into the lives of the people you are praying for. And when you see something that looks like Jesus, shine His light in word and deed.