Meaning in the Miracles: Rejected by Jesus
Matthew 8:16-22
January 21,2018
Dan Hoffman

Go ahead and grab your Bible. Open it up to Matthew chapter 8. We've been in a series looking at the miracles of Jesus now for three weeks. And we've said throughout the series His miracles were His divine credentials; they were the proof that His big words had weight. So Jesus said:

> I and the Father are one…. 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 10:30-38)

This was Jesus' way of saying "I don't expect blind faith from you. I know I'm talking big. The fact that I've asked for worship from you should be troubling – only God can ask that. But do that math. I'm not just talking, I'm also doing things only God can do."
…
And so Jesus touches a leper and his skin grows back. He heals a centurion's paralyzed servant. And he touches a woman restoring her to strength.

And in each instance Jesus is really doing two things, He is giving weight to the incredible words He has spoken, and He is fleshing out who the kingdom of God is for. It is for broken people who have been pushed to the margins. It's for people who know they need help. And ultimately, it's for people God is already drawing to Himself.

This last point was particularly visible with the leper and the centurion who both acted in line with the kingdom, they resembled God, even before they had come to Jesus.
…
So most hurt people are wrapped up in their own pain – it engulfs them and reduces their ability to think about others. But this leper comes to Jesus with faith and a divine humility all over him. And this humility enables him to bow in worship without making any demands. He says "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean." The implication being, "Lord, if you aren't willing, that's okay, I'm still going to worship."

The centurion likewise comes in incredible faith and humility – he calls Jesus Lord, and then when Jesus offers to come to his house he resists saying he isn't worthy for this but knows that won't matter – Jesus can just speak a word. Faith and humility.
…
And in both instances Jesus realizes God is working and partners with Him to increase His glory. Jesus loved to preach and participate in the expanse of the kingdom.
…
Our text today starts in Matthew 8 verse 16, if you've got that open please follow along.

[Read Matthew 8:16-17]

We said last week that the three miracles we've already looked at happened on the day Jesus gave His Sermon on the Mount, and what we get here is the end of that day. It is evening, the sun has set, but the day isn't over! All of a sudden there are crowds of sick people coming to Jesus.

Why are they coming now? Well, many scholars think it was a Sabbath – Jesus had been teaching on the Sabbath – that makes sense – and then did His first few miracles on the Sabbath. But now that the sun has gone down Sabbath is over. And that's significant because Jews never broke the Sabbath. And that means they wouldn't even come looking for healing on the Sabbath – that could wait. But now that the sun was down, Sabbath was over, and they all came, and Jesus healed them.

And it didn't matter what they were suffering from, if it was demonic Jesus cast out the demon. If it was physical sickness Jesus healed that. Jesus healed them all. And He did this as evidence that He had the authority to say the things He was saying, and also as a way of demonstrating what the kingdom of God is about.

Jesus is giving a preview of eternity. So ultimately life with God will be no more sickness and death. There will be no more sorrow or pain. And Jesus' earthly life was a preview of that eternal kingdom. He was pulling back the blinds, and letting the fullness of abundant life with God shine through – this is what it's going to be like.
…
Now here is the other side of this, our job is to present this same preview. We are supposed to use the abilities and resources we've been given to shine the light of Jesus into our community. We are supposed to look like Jesus to the people beside us. This is why the church exists. Jesus hasn't given us grace and salvation for ourselves, everything He has given to us is for us to give away.

Now this doesn't mean Jesus expects you to walk into the intensive care unit at the hospital and cure everyone. Jesus had that gift – He had every gift – but He expects us to use the gifts He's given us. So if you've got the ability to talk, and you've been placed in a neighbourhood or retirement complex, then He expects you to use your voice to speak His goodness into the lives of the people beside you.

If you've got the ability to bake cookies, then use them to open conversations with your neighbours. And if you are a nurse or a mechanic go to work knowing it's not an accident you are there. Your first job is to look like Jesus. After this then change bed pans and spin wrenches to the best of your ability.

Paul writes:

> Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom He gives….. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:16-17 NLT)

This is what a disciple does. They use every ability and gift and resource they have to point those around them to Christ. We are how our neighbours see Jesus' kingdom.

…
But then Matthew gives us another reason why Jesus did these miracles, and that was to fulfill prophecy. So in verse 17 he quotes Isaiah 53, which is a prophecy of how the Messiah would suffer written some 600 years before Jesus was born.

Isaiah penned the words:

> Surely He took up our pain
> and bore our suffering, [this is the part that Matthew quotes]
> yet we considered Him punished by God,
> stricken by Him, and afflicted.
> But He was pierced for our transgressions,
> He was crushed for our iniquities;
> the punishment that brought us peace was on Him,
> and by His wounds we are healed.
> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
> each of us has turned to our own way;
> and the LORD has laid on Him
> the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

And Isaiah 53 goes on to describe Jesus' refusal to defend Himself. And then, in spite of the fact He had done nothing wrong He would be killed as a criminal, and buried in a rich man's tomb. But then, after He would be cut off from the land of the living He would see the light of life again – He would be resurrected. And through His death and resurrection He would bear our sin and make intercession for our transgressions.[1]

It's an incredible passage. The parallels to Jesus, and what He would do for us, are so strong there is no way it could have been written without the hand of God. And the part that Matthew quotes states that Jesus will take up our infirmities and bear our disease.

So Jesus' kingdom isn't just about spiritual realities, it's for our physical lives as well. People who encounter Christ have their whole realities transformed.

But there is an already and a not yet component to this. So yes, Jesus was pierced for our transgressions; Jesus' sacrifice on the cross bore the punishment of our sin so that we don't have to; He dealt with our sin. And so yes, we are no longer slaves to sin, but at the same time the reality is we haven't gotten over sin yet. Nobody gets past sin this side of eternity. Already and not yet.

And yes, Jesus has defeated death. With His resurrection He overcame the ultimate consequence of sin, and so we too have the promise of eternal life. But until He returns that reality isn't realized in completion. People still die. Already and not yet.

---

[1] Isaiah 53:1-12

And likewise, here the kingdom of God promises healing from sickness. And with Jesus we get an incredible picture of this, but there is an already and not yet component to this as well. While Jesus healed all sickness, there is no promise that all your sickness is going to be removed this side of eternity. In fact, all of us are still going to experience sickness and suffering as long as we live under the consequences of a broken world. Even the people Jesus healed eventually got sick again and died.

And so, while we should pray for healing, and we should use our abilities to heal the brokenness around us, the call of the disciple is to come to Jesus like the leper, saying regardless of whether You change my circumstances or not I'm going to worship You.
…
Then the text moves on. And we come across a break in the midst of a bunch of miracles. So Matthew lays out nine miracles in chapters 8 and 9. We've looked at three of these so far were Jesus proved His authority over sickness. And next we are going to look at three more where Jesus proves His authority over chaos. And after that we will look at three more where Jesus proves His authority over death and the demonic. But between these three sections we get two intermissions. And we are looking at the first of those intermissions today.

And what we get is some more incredibly big words – words Jesus can say because of what He has done. And what we come across are two guys who come to Jesus asking to follow Him; they have heard Him speak, and seen Him act, but they don't come like the leper or centurion, and Jesus rejects them.

Now getting rejected is never fun. So, in grade 12, long before I met the most beautiful girl in the world, who would become my wife, there was this nice girl in my class.

I had liked her for a couple years, but she always seemed to have a boyfriend, and so I was out of luck. But as fate would have it she dumped her good for nothing boyfriend one spring morning and was single. And I figured this was my chance. And so after giving her a couple days to get over the last guy I decided that I would ask her out.

But I was chicken, and so I figured doing this in person would be way too hard, and the phone was a better option. Guys, take a hint, this is a bad idea.

So I called her up after school one day and attempted some small talk for a while – let's imagine there was 3 minutes of that, I don't remember. But knowing how good I am at small talk it couldn't have been more. And then boom, out of nowhere, I asked her if she wanted to go out with me.

Now, there was no thoughtful pause to contemplate the gravity of my words. This nice girl simply burst out laughing. It wasn't a malicious laugh. It was the kind of full bellied laugh you let out when you've just heard the funniest joke. Only I wasn't laughing.

She realized this after a second and abruptly stopped. And then very sympathetically asked: "Oh Dan, are you serious?"

…
Now arguably this would have been a good time to stretch the truth. But my brain wasn't going in that direction and the only word that came out of my mouth was "yup."

Needless to say the conversation didn't last much longer, and I wasn't all that excited to go to school the next day. Rejection isn't any fun. But why do people get rejected?

Don't we usually reject people because they aren't good enough for us? Don't employers and sports captains choose only the strongest and smartest to join their ranks?
…
In the next couple verses we get a picture of Jesus that doesn't often make it into Sunday school curriculum. In Sunday school Jesus is warm and forgiving and offers His grace to everyone. And that is true. But it isn't the full truth. And so here Jesus is going to reject two people who came asking to be disciples. But Jesus rejects for very different reasons than we usually do.

So let's look at the first guy in Matthew's gospel to be rejected by Jesus. Verse 18:

[Read Matthew 8:18-20]

Now this is amazing. What this guy offers sounds good. He says "Teacher, I will follow You wherever you go." He's excited and willing to commit. And he's well educated and intelligent. He's a teacher of the law, or a scribe.

It would be like some young, guitar playing, Bible study leading, wealthy doctor asking if he could join the church. Everyone would say "great, we can use a person like that."

But Jesus isn't impressed, He outright rejects him. And His response is blunt and maybe even rude. I mean Jesus doesn't give him a chance to explain himself. He doesn't take him in softly and then work to fix some of his mistaken ideas over time. Jesus just has no time for this scribe. He sends him packing by talking about foxes, birds and being homeless. What's going on here?
…
Well let me give you a little picture of what we know about first century scribes. They were the educated elite of Israel. They hung out with the Pharisees – in fact many of the scribes were Pharisees – and so they were the religious teachers. They would be pastors, or Bible school professors, today.

And to be fair, most of the scribes didn't want anything to do with Jesus. Usually when we read of them they were working to bring Him down.[2] But this one is different. He's heard Jesus teach and he is impressed. No doubt he has never heard a better teacher. And not only this, but he has seen Jesus' miracles and believes they are of God. And so he comes to Jesus with his offer of service.

---

[2] Matt 12:38 for example

And what this scribe is doing is not surprising. So the way many scribes made their living was by following rabbis around, recording their words, and spreading their influence. So a scribe could really make a good teacher great. And in return a good teacher would give a scribe a stable and comfortable job. It was a symbiotic relationship.

But Jesus isn't interested in symbiotic relationships between Him and us. Jesus won't be helped. He doesn't need our service. He is going to be the Saviour and we are going to be the saved. That's the only people who get a relationship with Jesus. And second, Jesus won't be used to help us achieve our desired life. You can't follow Jesus to health and wealth. While having money isn't wrong, following Jesus doesn't lead to personal affluence and comfort. Following Jesus leads away from this.

And so Jesus sends this great guy packing. He rejects his request of discipleship because he comes offering Jesus his assistance and hoping for personal gain.
…
Let me bring this home for a second: When you think of your own relationship with Jesus, do you think He is lucky to have you following Him? Do you think He's impressed with what you've brought to the table? Or are you the only beneficiary. Jesus has taken you on, a broken and messed up sinner, and now, out of gratitude, you just want to live your life to His glory?... The latter is the only way to come to Jesus and not be rejected.
…
And Jesus' response to this scribe make this clear. So Jesus is called lots of things throughout the Gospels, but "the Son of Man" – that we see in verse 20 – was His favorite way of speaking about Himself. It is a phrase He uses 80 times. And it's the other side of the "Son of God" coin.

So sometimes Jesus is called the Son of God, and this emphasised His kingly divinity. It is a tie both to God and King David being His father. But Son of Man emphasises His humble humanity. And Jesus loved to emphasize His humanity. And so here Jesus is saying in my humiliation I don't even have what foxes have.

There were foxes all over Rome in the first century. At night they would come out and eat garbage and whatever else was available, and then by day they would hide out in little rock caves which were all over the place. But Jesus says in my humiliation I don't even have the basic comforts of life, and so if you are going to follow Me you are going to end up where I am.

But this scribe wasn't signing up for that. His goal was to help Jesus ride to the top of the rabbi charts. The result was going to be comfort and security.

But Jesus says, you don't really want to follow Me. I'm not going to your kind of top. My climb to the top will be at Golgotha, and My glory is the cross not a crown. And no disciple is above their master. If you were really going to follow Me then this would be your climb too. Get out of here.

…
Isn't Jesus strange? We love smart, gifted people who have something to offer. And we try to get them in by downplaying the sacrifice and emphasize the reward. And there is reward, following Jesus means living the life we were created to live. But we only arrive there after resigning as god of our own life, and enthroning Jesus.

This is why Jesus said:

> If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

Friends, following Jesus isn't for the weak or the double minded, it's for people willing to risk trading everything they've got for a promised greater treasure. And this scribe wasn't willing to do that and so Jesus drove him away. And he disappears somewhere in the white space between verse 20 and 21. And it's here that we come across a second, would-be disciple.

[Read Matthew 8:21-22]

Jesus rejected the first guy because he came offering Jesus help and seeking personal gain. This second man wants to add Jesus to his already busy and good life.

Notice this guy is already following Jesus, he's a disciple. So he's heard Jesus' teaching, and seen His miracles. He's tasted life in the kingdom. But when it comes to following Jesus he has other good priorities he wants to bring along for the journey.

And so he raises the best excuse imaginable in first century Israel. He says, "I'm all in Jesus, I just need to go bury my father."

Now we aren't sure, but it's likely that this guy's dad wasn't dead yet. Speaking of burying a father in the first century was a colloquial way oldest sons spoke about their commitment to family. Their job was to take care of their parents right up to making sure they had a good burial. Only then would they become the master of the family estate. And so this guy is saying "I love you Jesus. But I've got other important responsibilities to take care of before I can give myself to following You." But Jesus isn't interested in being the second good thing you give yourself to.

In another place Jesus says:

> If you want to be My disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison--your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26 NLT)

So here is a guy who is busy doing great things, too busy to put Jesus first. And Jesus catches him and calls his lie. The fact is there is no such thing as too busy, there is only I don't want to. It is always a matter of priority. And so while this guy speaks of following Jesus, he doesn't mean it.

And Jesus' response is again brutal and direct. "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Jesus says leave even the best worldly concerns to themselves. Let the secular world take care of its own issues. Commit yourself to the kingdom.

Now this doesn't mean Jesus followers can't do good things like take care of parents or give to charities, or play sports, but just that these things must be done second.

You see our Saviour is the Lord who asks much. On one hand He freely dispenses grace. And He extends it to the most fragmented and least deserving people. There is no limit to His grace, but there is another side to the coin. Jesus gives and demands in equal measure. His unconditional offer of abundant life requires our total allegiance. Jesus demands that we dethrone ourselves and enthrone Him as Lord in our lives.
…
And like the first, this second would be disciple is never heard from again. Somewhere between verse 22 and 23 he disappears. Even though he has heard Jesus teach and seen Him work, he deems Jesus' call too costly, and walks away.
…
Brothers and sisters, the challenge is great this morning. Jesus loves you, and wants you. And He has incredible abundant life for you. He designed us to live life with Him – and when we live that way we find joy, even in the face of suffering. But Jesus' demands on us are same as they were on these two men. And so the only people He accepts are those who come ready to lay down their priorities and comfort and responsibilities to take up their cross. So, will you follow Jesus?