

## Believe It or Not

### Matthew 9:27-34

One of the recurring themes of Scripture is that what God does and how God works is often quite different than what people expect Him to do or how people expect Him to work—even people who claim to know Him well. To put it plainly, His methods all too often defy logic. And that doesn't always sit well with people who have thought a lot about God and His ways and who think they have Him and His ways pretty well figured out.

I'm talking about theologians and Bible scholars who have seriously studied the Scriptures and come up with reasonable and rational conclusions about what God is going to do and how He is going to do it. And then when God does it in a different way they are not merely disappointed, they are downright disbelieving. They actually reject God's method because it doesn't fit into their scheme of how He was “supposed” to do it.

That happened with Jesus when He lived on this earth. The spiritual elite in Judaism—the Pharisees and teachers of the law—looked at Jesus and shook their heads. He didn't look or act like what they thought Messiah was supposed to look and act like, from the company He kept to the disciples He chose; from the parties He attended to the way He observed the Sabbath; from the way He described the kingdom, to the way He pointed His finger at them and claimed they didn't qualify for admission. None of it corresponded to the theological system they devised which asserted that God was supposed to do this, this, and this, and He would do it in such and such a way.

And this is one of the things Matthew wants to clarify in his Gospel. He wrote to validate and authenticate that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah, the rightful heir to David's throne. But he also wrote to explain that how He came, what He said and did, and how He established His kingdom was incompatible with the prevailing notions and expectations of Judaism in the first century. He also tells us that because of this, many of the leaders in Judaism had an antagonistic relationship with Him, and that no matter how many astounding things Jesus did, they refused to change their minds about Him.

That's one of Matthew's purposes in the passage we are going to look at this morning. It begins in Matthew 9, **verse 27**. *27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”*

Jesus had just finished raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, after which, we are told, it was reported all throughout that district (9:26). This report obviously generated a lot of excitement. There was a miracle worker living in their midst, which meant that those who had afflictions just needed to find out where He was and then get there so He could heal them, too.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was walking back from Jairus' home when two blind men began to follow Him. Admittedly, it is difficult for us to imagine how blind people could manage to follow Jesus, so we must presume that they were following the noise of the *crowd* that was surrounding Jesus, a crowd that was undoubtedly causing quite a commotion.

These two blind men were calling out, *“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”* Obviously, they were calling out because they wanted to get Jesus' attention, but the way they addressed him is significant. The name “Son of David,” referenced in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, was understood by Jews to be the royal title of the anticipated Messiah. In other words, these two men, on the basis of what they had heard about Jesus, had determined that He must be the Messiah.

What makes this significant is that no one else, up to this point, had used this title with reference to Jesus, and the only ones in Matthew’s Gospel to use it are two other blind men in Jericho (20:30) and Gentiles (15:22). Ironically, Gentiles were considered by Jews to be *spiritually* blind. Yet “Son of David” is a profoundly insightful comment about the Person and Work of Jesus, because it reveals His messianic role. And it is likely, in my view, that it was God who revealed this to them.

Look at **verse 28**. *28 When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.”* It is reasonable to wonder why Jesus waited to address the blind men until they were in the house behind closed doors, since it was unusual for Jesus to ignore anyone who came to Him for help. Some have suggested that it was because they called Him “Son of David,” and that because that term had political connotations, Jesus wanted to avoid any unnecessary controversy (Leon Morris, PNTC).

Whatever the reason, we know that the blind men actually followed Him inside the house, most likely the house where Jesus was lodging. Whether Jesus or His disciples ushered them into the house, or whether they were so determined they just went in, we don’t know, but once inside Jesus initiates a conversation, suggesting that He had been paying attention to their cry for help all along, even though He had not addressed them in public. Notice, He does not ask them what they want; that can be taken for granted. Instead He asks whether they *believe*, whether they have faith.

We saw last week that faith was the central theme in the stories of Jairus’ daughter and the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus had been impressed with their faith and had healed them because of their faith. So it is not surprising that what is most important for these two men is whether they believe that Jesus can heal their blindness.

And they immediately and unanimously reply, *“Yes, Lord.”* Their faith is absolute, which is remarkable in that, being blind, they could not have seen any other miracle that Jesus had done. They had to rely on what people told them. But they believed those reports, and believed Jesus would do the same for them.

**Verses 29-30a**. *29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” 30 And their eyes were opened.*

It is important to know that even though there are no miracles of healing blindness in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied three times that one of the signs of Messiah’s coming was that the blind would be given sight (29:18; 35:5; 42:7). So it should come as no surprise that there are more miracles of healing blindness in Jesus’ ministry than any other, for it is a fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

The way Jesus healed these blind men is by touching their eyes and saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.” Jesus was not telling them that healing would occur proportionately to the amount of faith they had, as though the more faith, the better the result. Jesus said in another place that we can move mountains with faith the size of a mustard seed. Furthermore, it would go against everything God is and has ever done to give a gift on the basis of merit. Can you imagine one of these men being healed completely because he had a lot of faith, and the other being given blurry vision or sight in only one eye because he had less faith?

No, these words are better understood to mean, “As you have believed, so let it be,” or “You believe; you have it” (Morris), for in making this statement Jesus was emphasizing the importance of faith.

But after healing them we are told in the next part of **verse 30**, *And Jesus sternly*

*warned them, “See that no one knows about it.”* The word translated, *sternly warned*, is often used to describe an angry emotional outburst. The word literally means, “to be moved with anger,” but can also mean “to admonish sternly.” Suffice it to say that Jesus was adamant that these men keep this incident confidential. He had waited to even acknowledge them until He had brought them inside the house, and now He sternly admonishes them not to tell anybody what happened to them. Matthew does not tell us why, though this is *not* the only time in the Gospels that Jesus asked the ones He healed to keep it to themselves. So Matthew’s silence leads us only to conjecture.

When the hosts of the wedding in Cana ran out of wine, Jesus’ mother asked Him to do something about it. And He initially responded, “*What does this have to do with me, woman. My hour has not yet come*” (John 2:4). What is interesting about that statement is that Jesus used the term “hour” elsewhere in the Gospels to refer to His death on the cross. Perhaps He was letting his mother know that His life was ultimately not about gaining the approval of men, but dying for their sins.

I wonder if Jesus’ earnestness in exhorting these men not to tell anyone stemmed from his understanding of His ultimate purpose for coming to earth? He didn’t come to this earth primarily to heal physical bodies or to provide for physical needs. Yet that’s what most people want, it seems. They want to have an immediate fix that makes them feel better and makes life more bearable.

That’s why Jesus seemed somewhat annoyed after he fed the five thousand and the people just kept coming back and wanting to be fed more. He said to them, “You’d be content to have me supply you with loaves and fishes every day. You’re satisfied with food that sustains your physical bodies. But I’ve come to give you far more than that. *I’m the bread of life*. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will have eternal life.” And we are told that many ceased to follow Him after that.

I wonder if Jesus sternly warned these men not to say anything because He didn’t want people to accept Him for what He could do for their *physical* health and well-being. He wanted people to accept Him for what He could do for their spiritual health and well-being—namely, their sin problem.

However, in spite of Jesus’ stern warning, **verse 31**. *But they went away and spread his fame through all that district*.

Surely it was inevitable that some people would find out about their healing, for it is impossible for two blind men to receive their sight without those living near them knowing that something wonderful had happened. But it was not inevitable that the news should be made known far and wide. And Matthew intentionally calls attention to their direct disobedience of Jesus’ command. These two men had faith, and it was in response to their faith that they were given sight. And for that they were overjoyed...naturally. But they lacked obedience.

I like what New Testament scholar Leon Morris said: “They did not supplement their deep conviction that Jesus could give them sight with an equally deep resolve to do His will” (Morris, PNTC). For whatever reason, they actually did just the opposite of what Jesus had asked them to do. They didn’t just go back to their homes and tell their families and neighbors; they went throughout the region and, literally, “spread Him abroad” so that Jesus became famous for this healing.

You might be thinking to yourself, “What’s wrong with that? I mean, it’s not like these guys were doing anything evil or harmful. Jesus got a lot of good P.R. through their testimonies.”

Again, Jesus is not interested in being popular, or in having people promote Him and His ministry. He’s not interested in attracting a following of people who are wowed by miracles. He is interested in changing people’s hearts, which includes saving people from their sin. He is interested in the kingdom of God, which is first and foremost a kingdom of righteousness and truth. Besides, He knew what He had come to do, and He knew that no matter how popular He was at the present time, He was ultimately going to be rejected by these same people and nailed to a cross. And ultimately, by submitting to that fate, He was doing His Father’s will, for when the angel appeared to Joseph (Jesus’ earthly father) he said, “You will call him Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

**Verses 32-33.** *<sup>32</sup> As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. <sup>33</sup> 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.”*

Matthew does not say who brought the mute man to Jesus, but he makes it clear that the man did not come by himself. He also wants us to know that this disability was caused by demon possession. The Greek word translated “mute” (κωφός) is literally ‘blunt’ or ‘dull’ and is used of people whose capacity to communicate with others is severely compromised because they are either deaf or mute or both (Nolland).

By now you know that, especially compared to the other Gospel writers, Matthew has a penchant for brevity. Even in this story there is no mention of any conversation between Jesus and those who brought the man to Him, or what Jesus said or did to heal this man. Matthew assumes that His readers would understand that the man was brought to Him in order to be cured, and that Jesus responded to the need. So He simply goes on to describe what happened when *the demon* had been cast out. Look again at **verse 33.** *<sup>33</sup> 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.”*

Most often when there is a description of an exorcism of demons from a person, the word “cast out” is used. Inherent in the meaning of that word is the idea of force or exertion. That’s because demons do not readily leave those in whom they have taken up residence. They must be forcibly expelled. And when Jesus did that, and the crowds heard this man speaking clearly, they were astonished.

And it should be noted that their astonishment was not just because Jesus had healed this man’s deafness or muteness, but because it proved His authority over evil spirits. Remember, the event recorded in chapter 8 where Jesus exorcised the demons from the two men and sent them into the pigs took place on the other side of the lake in a remote area which was populated by Gentiles. The people in this story had yet to see Him directly confront the spiritual forces of evil. And when they saw those demons immediately submit to His authority, they marveled, because they had never seen anything like it.

But this was not the reaction of everyone. Look at **verse 34.** *<sup>34</sup> But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”*

The Pharisees, rather than being astonished, had a very matter-of-fact explanation for the exorcism of these demons. They didn’t deny that it really happened; after all, they had seen it with their own eyes. But they concluded that the demons were not cast out by divine authority, but by Satan’s authority. Which is another way of saying that Jesus works for the enemy. He’s not just a fake or a fraud; He’s evil—He’s satanic.

How could they come up with such a drastically different conclusion? It is evidence of their animosity toward Jesus and their hard hearts. We’ve seen in the last few chapters of Matthew a deepening enmity between the Pharisees and Jesus. They had been offended

with some of the things He told the crowds, which had put them in a bad light. For example, He said in the Sermon on the Mount that unless a person’s righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they would never enter the kingdom of heaven. And instead of looking inward and asking “what kind of righteousness does kingdom admission involve?” they interpreted it as a slap in the face.

Then, when just a few days earlier Jesus had said to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” they said to themselves, “Who does this guy think he is? If He thinks He has the authority to forgive sins, He’s claiming to be God!” And that didn’t fit into their theology at all. In their theology the Messiah wasn’t God; He was a human emissary sent by God.

And so certain were they of their theological opinions and interpretations that they developed a theological construct that Jesus, because He didn’t agree with them or fit into their mold, could not possibly be from God. And if He wasn’t from God, He had to be from Satan. And this, in spite of the fact that they had seen Him heal the sick, cure diseases, cast out demons, and raise the dead. In other words, the Pharisees were blind to the good Jesus did and ascribed it to the devil.

And that spiritual blindness is far more serious and far more consequential than the blindness Jesus had just healed. Later, in chapter 12 we are going to see that calling the good Jesus does evil is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is the unpardonable sin (12:28–32).

But what does this tell us? That it takes something more to believe in Jesus than seeing Him perform miracles. Sometimes we think that if only people could see miracles they would be convinced about Jesus and they would receive Him as their Savior and Lord. But that’s not necessarily true. A research report was recently done in the field of missiology listing the top ten factors that determine how people come to faith in Jesus. You would think witnessing miracles in the name of Jesus would be number one. It’s actually number ten.

Our son Lucas and his ministry partner have prayed for healing for two Turkish men with debilitating physical pain, and watched God unmistakably heal them in the name of Jesus. And those Turkish men were initially astonished...and overjoyed...and grateful. They even admitted that Jesus had done it. But neither one has yet to put his faith in Jesus.

But that’s ultimately what it’s all about. Jesus’ power to heal blindness and cast out demons certainly *validate* His identity as the Messiah, Son of the living God. But it doesn’t guarantee that everyone who witnesses that power will actually believe that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to God except through Him. And that’s why Jesus didn’t get too excited when people applauded Him and cheered Him and followed Him from place to place. Just because people are impressed with Him and amazed by Him and even healed by Him doesn’t mean they are willing to submit to Him as their Lord and Savior.

But salvation is what Jesus is all about. Salvation from sin and death and hell and judgment. And in order to even understand this we need God’s help. We need Him to heal us of spiritual blindness, so that we see Him for who He really is. We need Him to heal us of spiritual deafness, so we can actually hear His voice and understand His message. We need Him to open our hearts and minds so that we can receive Him and believe in Him and put all our confidence in Him.

**“Believe It or Not”**  
**Matthew 9:27-34**

**Main Idea:** Jesus’ miracles endeared some to him and compelled them to believe, and they alienated others from him and intensified their stubborn unbelief

**The Healing of Two Blind Men (27-31)**

**The blind men’s desperation (27)**

Their ability to follow Jesus

Their insightful declaration

**Behind closed doors (28-30)**

Jesus probes their faith

Jesus heals their blindness

Jesus warns them not to tell anyone

**Spread abroad (31)**

Defying Jesus’ strict orders

Jesus’ fame spreads

**The Exorcism of the Demonized Man (32-34)**

**Evidence of his deliverance (32-33a)**

**Reaction of the crowd (33b)**

**Reaction of the Pharisees (34)**

**The Consequence of Interpreting Jesus**

**A matter of life and death**

**Contemporary misinterpretations**