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Pursuing the Kingdom: "Do You Believe I Am Able?"

Matthew 9:27-34

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Every day, whether we realize it or not, we exercise faith. We trust the brakes on our car to stop when we press the break pedal. We trust a chair to hold us up when we sit down. We trust a pilot we've never met to safely fly us to our destination. And in each of those situations, our confidence is placed in something, or rather someone, outside of ourselves.

And the same principle is true spiritually. The most important question we can ask is not whether we have faith because, again, everyone places their faith in something. The real question is where have you placed your faith? Or better yet, who have you placed your faith in?

And as we continue our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew continues to answer that very question. And every miracle we have seen over the last few chapters has been pointing us toward the same conclusion. Jesus is the promised Messiah and King that Israel had been longing for.

Yet as Matthew describes these miracles, he also reveals something else. The response to Jesus becomes increasingly divided. Some people fall at His feet in worship. Others question Him. Some leave everything to follow Him while others harden their hearts. You see, the miracles themselves are never the issue. The real issue is what people do with Jesus.

We live in an age with more access to the Bible than any generation before us. We have sermons, books, podcasts, Bible studies and countless resources at our fingertips. Yet information alone has never transformed a single human heart. The question Jesus asks in our passage today is the same question that has been asked throughout every generation, "Do you believe that I am able?"

And that question reaches far beyond physical healing. It confronts every area of our lives. Do we believe that He is able to forgive? That He is able to restore? That He is able to save? That He is able to carry us through our trials? And that He is able to keep His promises?

You see, the issue is not whether Jesus is able, for His power has already been displayed throughout Matthew's Gospel. The issue is whether we believe and trust Him. And that's precisely what we're going to look at today. If you are able, please stand in honor of God's Word as I read from the Gospel of Matthew 9:27-34. [Read Passage]

As soon as Jesus leaves the house where He raised Jairus' daughter, Matthew tells us, in vs. 27, that "two blind men followed Him, crying aloud, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David.'" Now, Matthew points out something here that's even more remarkable than their blindness. These men may be physically blind, but spiritually they could see better than many of those around them. For they recognized Jesus for who He truly was.

Notice the title they use for Jesus here, "Son of David." This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that someone publicly addresses Jesus by this Messianic title. To us, it

may sound like just another name for Jesus, but to a first-century Jewish audience it carried major significance.

You see, God had promised King David, back in the OT in 2 Sam. 7, that one of his descendants would establish an everlasting kingdom, the Kingdom of God. And the prophets repeatedly pointed to a coming King from David's line who would reign forever, rescue His people and bring God's kingdom to the earth. By crying out, "Son of David," these blind men were making a remarkable confession of faith. They were declaring that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the promised King of Israel.

Isn't it interesting that those who could not see with their eyes often saw most clearly with their hearts? Throughout the Gospels, the people who were considered weak, broken and overlooked frequently recognized Jesus for who He truly was long before the religious leaders ever did. You see, the religious leaders knew the Scriptures, yet, when the Messiah stood before them, many failed to recognize Him. Meanwhile, two blind beggars, sitting on the side of the road, understood what the religious leaders had completely missed.

Now, notice something else about these men. Matthew says they "followed" Jesus while crying out for mercy. We are not told how long they followed Him, but the picture is one of persistence. For, notice, Jesus does not stop immediately. In fact, we're told, He continues walking until He enters a house and the blind men continue after Him. They refuse to give up.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus sometimes delays in responding to your prayers? Undoubtedly, He heard these men the first time they cried out, and surely, He knew exactly what they needed. Yet He continued walking.

Perhaps the delay was not because Jesus was indifferent towards them but because He was drawing out their faith. Throughout Scripture, God often allows His people to persevere in prayer, not because He is unwilling to answer, but because He desires to deepen their dependence upon Him. We need to recognize that sometimes what feels like silence is actually an invitation to trust Him more fully.

But that's hard for us because we live in a culture of instant gratification. We expect immediate answers and immediate results to all of our pursuits. When God does not answer according to our timetable, we can become discouraged or, worse, we become angry at God and even begin to question His goodness toward us. But delayed answers do not mean the absence of His love or that He doesn't care. The truth is, God is always working even when we cannot immediately see what He is doing.

The blind men could have become discouraged. They could have come to their own conclusion that Jesus did not care and they could have stopped calling out and stopped pursuing Him. But instead, they continued following because they believed He could help them.

Now, there is another detail we should not overlook. Their request is very simple, "Have mercy on us." They do not come demanding their rights. They don't bargain with Jesus or try to explain why they deserve His help. They simply ask for His mercy on them. And that is always the posture of genuine faith.

Mercy is receiving what we do not deserve, which was the compassion and kindness of Jesus. These men understood that they didn't deserve anything from Jesus and were only

appealing to His character and who He was. In many ways, their request is the same as the cry of every sinner who comes to Jesus. None of us approach Him because we have earned His favor. We come because we desperately need His mercy and His grace.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the 20th Century Welsh pastor, once wrote in his book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, "The man who truly knows himself is the man who prays for mercy." And that is exactly what these blind men do.

And, perhaps, that is where some of us are today. We may not suffer from physical blindness, but we are deeply aware of our own needs. This passage reminds us that faith does not begin with having all the answers. Faith begins by bringing our need to Jesus and refusing to let go of Him.

And the encouraging news is that Jesus never ignores sincere faith. He may not always answer immediately and He may not always answer in the way we expect, but He always hears the cries of those who come to Him with a humble and sincere heart. And He delights in showing mercy to those who genuinely seek Him.

But recognizing Jesus as the promised King is only the beginning. Faith does more than acknowledge who Christ is. It confidently trusts in what Christ is able to do. And that is exactly where Jesus now turns the conversation, asking one of the most searching questions found anywhere in the Gospels, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

Matthew tells us that after entering the house, Jesus now turns His attention to the two blind men. And He asks them a question. And at first, it might seem like a strange question. After all, why else would these men have followed Him through the streets, crying out for mercy? But Jesus is doing far more than gathering information. He is drawing their faith out into the open. And that same question echoes through every generation because it is not limited to these two blind men. It is a question Jesus asks each of us, "Do you believe that I am able?"

Notice what He does not ask. He does not ask, "Do you deserve to be healed?" Or "Have you lived a good enough life in order for me to heal you?" The question centers entirely on the power and ability of Jesus and not on the worthiness of the two men. Brothers and sisters, the focus of our faith is never ourselves. It should always be on the character and power of Christ.

Now, the blind men answer His question without hesitation, "Yes, Lord." Notice that they not only acknowledge Jesus as the Son of David, but they also call Him "Lord". Their confidence is not in wishful thinking or positive optimism. It is rooted in the conviction that Jesus, as Lord, possesses both the authority and the power to do what no one else can do. They cannot heal themselves. And no physician has been able to restore their sight. But they believe that standing before them is the only One who can.

And so, Jesus reaches out and touches their eyes. And, once again, we see His remarkable compassion. For years these two men had lived in darkness, unable to see the faces of their loved ones or the beauty of God's creation. Then the very hands of the One who created everything, including their eyes, touched them.

And as He touches them, Jesus says in vs. 29, "According to your faith be it done to you." Now these words are sometimes misunderstood. Jesus is not teaching us that faith, itself, possesses miraculous power or that people can receive whatever they imagine if only they believe strongly enough.

Scripture never teaches that our faith can manipulate God in any way. Rather, Jesus is commending the object of their faith. Their healing corresponds to their confidence in Him. I've heard it said before that, "Faith is simply the open hand that receives what Christ graciously gives." It's about trusting that God's perfect will will be done and that He doesn't withhold what is good from His children.

Well, we're told that after healing them, Jesus warns them not to tell anyone. And at first, that command seems surprising to us. Why would Jesus ask anyone to remain silent? Wouldn't He want His message and the news of what He is doing spreading among the people?

Well, what's going on throughout Matthew's Gospel is that Jesus consistently avoids allowing the crowds to define His mission by His miracles. He did not come simply to become a popular miracle worker or a political Messiah. He came to preach the kingdom of God and ultimately to go to the cross. His mission would be fully understood only in light of His death and resurrection and not just through the miracles. As He says in other places in the Gospels, "My time has not come..." ultimate referring to the "time" of His death and resurrection.

And so, we're told that Jesus gives them this warning but the two men disobey Jesus and spread the news throughout the region. And we can understand their excitement. After years of darkness, it would have been difficult to remain silent. But, sometimes, sincere enthusiasm is not the same as faithful obedience. Their actions remind us that following Jesus involves more than celebrating His blessings. It also means submitting to His authority. You see, genuine faith trusts His wisdom even when we do not fully understand His instructions.

Now, this entire encounter challenges us to examine our own faith. When we face impossible circumstances, where do we turn first? Do we rely primarily upon our own understanding or do we confidently bring our needs to Christ? You see, the Christian life is lived by continually answering Jesus' question, "Do you believe that I am able?" And every day, we have another opportunity to say with these blind men, "Yes, Lord," we do.

Now, Matthew concludes this section with one final miracle, but the focus begins to shift. Instead of emphasizing the faith of those who come to Jesus, he highlights the very different responses of those who witness His power. The miracles have not changed but the hearts of the people reveal two completely different reactions. And in doing so, Matthew reminds us that every encounter with Jesus demands a response.

So, no sooner have the two men departed than another person in need is brought before Jesus. And Matthew writes in vs. 32, "As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him."

And once again, we see a beautiful picture of the compassion of Jesus. This man cannot even come to Jesus on his own. Others must bring him, just like the paralytic that was brought to Jesus and lowered through the roof. Because of the demonic oppression, this man is unable to speak. He cannot ask for help. He cannot cry out for mercy as the blind men did. He is completely dependent upon someone else to bring him into the presence of Jesus and to speak for him.

And isn't that a wonderful reminder of the importance of bringing people to Christ? Not everyone is able to come on their own. Some are blinded by unbelief. Some are

overwhelmed by pain. Some are trapped in addiction, burdened by shame or weighed down by years of disappointment. They may not know how to seek and pursue Jesus, but we have the privilege of bringing them to Him through our prayers, our compassion and our faithful sharing of the good news of the gospel.

And again, without hesitation, Jesus casts out the demon and immediately the man speaks. And the response of the crowd is exactly what we might expect. Matthew says, "The crowds marveled, saying, 'Never was anything like this seen in Israel.'" Generation after generation had waited for the coming of God's promised Messiah, and now they recognized that were seeing miracles unlike anything they had ever seen before.

But then Matthew records one of the saddest verses in all of scripture in vs. 34, "But the Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons.'" So, instead of worship, they respond with unbelief. Instead of allowing the evidence to lead them to faith, they come up with the only other explanation that allows them to reject Jesus while keeping their status as the "real" spiritual leaders in Israel. It was all about power for them.

It is remarkable, isn't it, how differently two groups can respond to the exact same miracle. The crowds see undeniable evidence of God's power and are filled with amazement. But the Pharisees witness the very same miracle and harden their hearts even further. Again, the miracle itself is not the issue. It's the condition of the heart.

And that reality has never changed. The gospel has always divided people. The same message that softens one heart may harden another. The same cross that becomes the only hope for the world is considered foolishness to those who don't believe as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Church in Corinth. The difference is not found in Christ. It is found in the response of the human heart.

C. S. Lewis captured this truth well when he wrote in his famous work *The Great Divorce*, "There are only two kinds of people in the end. Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'" The point is this, that every one of us eventually responds to Jesus in one way or another.

And that should serve as a warning for us. Like the Pharisees, it is entirely possible to become so familiar with the things of God while allowing our hearts to grow cold toward God Himself. We can know the right things, participate in all the church activities and go through all the motions while resisting what Christ desires to do within us.

You see, knowledge alone is never enough. The Pharisees had knowledge. What they lacked was humble faith. And this passage invites each of us to ask an important question, "How am I responding to Jesus?" And every one of us must ask that question of ourselves.

And so, as we pursue the kingdom of God, may we never lose our sense of wonder. May we never become so familiar with the gospel that it no longer amazes us. Every day we should be overwhelmed by the truth that the Son of David opened our blind eyes and unstopped our mouths, delivered us from the bondage of sin, welcomed us into His kingdom and made us His very own. You see, the greatest miracle is not simply that Jesus gave sight to the blind or speech to the mute. The greatest miracle is that Jesus continues to redeem spiritually blind sinners, transforming them into joyful citizens of His kingdom.

Now, Matthew intentionally ends this section with two responses because every one of us must decide how we will respond. Will we humble ourselves before Christ in faith or will we harden our hearts in unbelief? There is no middle ground. The King has revealed

Himself and now every heart must answer the question, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” For the One who opened blind eyes is still opening hearts today, and the One who demonstrated His power in the pages of scripture continues to reign over His kingdom now and for ever. Let’s pray and prepare our hearts for the Lord’s Supper.

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the promised Son of David and our compassionate King. Thank You that He is able to do what no one else can, to open blind eyes, to change hard hearts, to forgive sin and to give eternal life.

Lord, increase our faith. Help us to trust You when we cannot see the path ahead. Guard us from the pride and unbelief that hardened the hearts of the Pharisees and give us the persistent faith of the blind men who would not stop seeking You.

May we leave today with our eyes fixed on Jesus, confident that He is able to accomplish all that He has promised. Use our lives to point others to the hope of the gospel and help us to pursue Your kingdom with joy and unwavering faith until the day we see you face to face. We ask these things in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.