

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### MATTHEW 9:18-34

THIS is the last paragraph in that section of the Gospel which deals with the King's exhibition of the benefits of His Kingdom. Of course, that is not to say that there was no further manifestation of His power, for He continued to work wonders to the very end. This account is full of life, full of light, full of love, full of color. Here the King is seen dealing with specific cases as they made application to Him. All sorts and conditions of men mixed together in the multitudes that surrounded Him at this time:

- Publicans and sinners,
- Scribes and Pharisees,
- Beggars by the highway,
- Wealthy men who watched and listened with great interest,
- Country people who had crowded into the cities,
- Learned people who were deeply interested in His teaching.

And yet the people He brought into prominence, upon whom men have continued to look through the long centuries, were all of one class - they were needy people. In those days in which He passed from teaching to doing, He drew to Himself the people who were in trouble, in need, in difficulty.

Of those we are now to observe, some were wealthy and some were poor. Here a wealthy ruler, and there a woman beggared by her illness; and yet again two men who were begging by the highway-side, but who turned to Him because of a great sense of need, and finally a man demon-possessed. Such power was resident in Him that weakness felt its attraction, and out from the great curious, jostling, crowding multitudes, individuals conscious of their need came near to Him. As we look back at the pictures of this chapter we see the crowd generally and indefinitely; but the needy souls particularly and definitely.

The King rendered need conspicuous, that He might meet it and cancel it. The cases are drawn out of the crowd one by one, brought into living contact with Christ, and dealt with; and as we look at them, the impression made upon our minds, carrying complete conviction, is that our King is not a Teacher only, but a Worker also; that He does something more than propound a theory, He is ever communicating strength; that He not only holds up before men a great ideal, as He did in the Manifesto, but that He ever touches men in their paralysis, and makes them powerful in the very places of their need with perfect sufficiency.

*Let us first survey the cases, noticing their diversity.*

How different are the people with whom Christ deals in this section!

Matthew tells these stories very briefly. In Mark and Luke the details stand out far more conspicuously, but Matthew chronicled the facts simply, in order to reveal the power of the King. In the other Gospels other aspects of the work of Christ are revealed His perfect service, and His perfect Manhood with its human sympathy; and it may help us to borrow from Mark and Luke in order that we may see more clearly the need that came to the King.

The first picture is that of *a father, whose life was shadowed because at home his little daughter, twelve years of age, lay sick*. Twelve years of sunshine were threatened with eclipse; twelve years of playfulness were merging towards a tragedy in the heart and life of Jairus. This man came to Jesus, driven towards Him by his sense of awful sorrow.

Matthew says, “**Behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead**” - which of course does not mean that Jairus declared that his daughter was actually dead. The “**even now dead**” is an idiomatic phrase, signifying at the point of death, very nearly dead, or, as we sometimes say in the blind brutality of our overwhelming dread, as good as dead. So Jairus came to Christ, a man driven to the King by the need of his threatened sorrow.

The next picture is that of *the woman overwhelmed in weakness and sorrow*. Again Matthew tells us very little about her, but quite enough for us to understand her condition. He says, “**A woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him.**”

That descriptive phrase must be considered in the light of the age in which she lived, and not in the light of our age.

First, by reason of her trouble, she was excommunicated religiously. The Hebrew economy did not permit a woman so suffering to take any part or place in the worship of God. She was shut out from temple and synagogue worship. She was divorced from her husband by the same law. She was ostracized from society. We are not dealing with that law, certainly we have no right to criticize it; but we thank God that it has passed away forever, and that the spirit of the age is one which desires to take care of the helpless and suffering.

This woman had been spending her money perpetually for twelve years to find a remedy; and, as Luke says, could not be cured of any, or, as Mark says, was nothing bettered but rather the worse. Twelve years. Jairus' little girl twelve years of age; this woman, twelve years of suffering. Twelve years of sunshine, twelve years of shadow. A little child full of laughter going out towards death; and a woman who had been in the midst of a living death for twelve years; and they both came into contact with Him.

Then *two blind men*. They heard, but could not see; they felt, but could not perceive. Two blind men, but they fought their way to Him.

And finally *a demon-possessed man*, whom the demon held in the thrall of dumbness; for there was a close connection between the dumbness of the man and his possession.

- The sorrowing father, a wealthy man, a man of position, but his life overshadowed because his bairn was dying; he came to Jesus.
- The woman who had lost everything that was worth having, religious privilege, family care, social position, all her wealth; she came to Jesus.
- Two blind men who, perhaps, as one of the commentators says, did often talk about what other men saw, and perchance did often talk about the Healer Whose fame had gone through all the district, unable to see His face, unable to see their own, unable to see the faces of their loved ones; they found their way to Him.
- The demon-possessed man, who could not find his way to Jesus, was brought by others.

All kinds of need. Thus the King passed into the midst of the multitudes, and He drew to Himself, into the closest circle, the most needy people from among the crowds. And so it is to-day. It is the broken heart, the bereft, the discouraged, the unfit, that He will bring nearer to Himself than any others.

Now notice the method of their coming. Jairus came for his child, and he came asking that Jesus would come and lay His hand upon her. He said, “**She is even now dead**” - there is practically no hope; indeed, there is no hope apart from God, for that is the meaning of the confession “**but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live.**” He asked for the touch of the hand of Christ. That was one method.

The woman came quite differently. While Jairus came and publicly proffered his request, this woman tried to get to Him without anybody knowing. She did not ask Him to touch her; she touched Him. It was quite a different method.

Then came the blind men, crying out they were clamorous, noisy men “Have mercy on us, Thou Son of David.” In the other evangels we are told that the crowd tried to silence them, and they cried out the more, “**Thou Son of David, have mercy.**” They were not only clamorous, they were persistent. They got right into the house where Jesus had gone. It was the method of men determined to get to Him, persisting in spite of opposition.

And then the last case. This man did not come to Him at all; other people brought him; he was too far gone to come. Reason was dethroned.

The other people brought him, and there is no word in the story about his faith. There is no single word that indicates that he had anything to do with his own coming. He was past the possibility of realizing his need, so that there was not only diversity of need, there was diversity also in the method of approach. And yet there is a great unity in these illustrations.

- They all approached Him.
- They all appealed to Him for force.
- They all appealed to Him for exactly what they needed.

Jairus came to Him with quiet dignity, surcharged with the sorrow of his heart; but he came to Him for just what he needed.

The woman came to Him secretly, pressing her way through the crowd, not a surging crowd only, but a moving crowd on the way to Jairus' house.

Perhaps a little way in front of all the rest was Jairus himself, for if he could have hurried Christ that day he would. And then next to Jesus and round about Him were the apostles, the most dignified men in the whole company. Through that crowd of jostling and pressing strong men, with perchance here and there a mother, lifting up her little child to look into the face of the great Prophet as He paused, one woman, weak and wan and emaciated and thin, pressed near to Him.

In that woman's coming one sees the most wonderful combination of weakness and strength. She forced her way through that crowd until she touched Jesus. It was quite different from Jairus' coming, but it was a coming for what she needed, the claim for power. The blind men came to Him for the same thing, and the dumb demoniac, brought to Him by others, came for the same thing.

What was the issue in every case? The need was met; death vanquished, disease cured, sight granted, and, in the case of the man possessed, freedom from the demon, followed by speech.

- He vanquishes death for the broken heart of a father;
- He deals with all the necessity of the excommunicated, divorced, ostracized woman;
- He opens the eyes of the blind;
- He looses the silence of the tongue of the dumb as He exorcises the demon that has seized him.

*Let us now look at the King more closely. Notice first of all His readiness.*

When Jairus came it is written, He "**arose and followed.**" He needed no pressure save that of the man's broken heart. That is an argument He never can refuse. When the woman touched Him she was healed before He spoke, when she grasped the border of His garment.

Perhaps it was the fringe of the garment on which she took hold; that in which the Hebrews were commanded to wear a ribbon of blue that they might look upon it, and remember the words of the law to do them. While Jesus Christ was supremely disdainful of all merely Hebrew ritual, He observed the law of Moses to its last tittle. So, probably, He wore the ribbon of blue, and the woman grasped at it with her frail hand. He knew it, and swifter than the lightning's flash, quick as the heartbeat of God, His virtue healed her. There was no persuasion necessary beyond the persuasion of her agony; and the moment she took hold, healing came.

Then the blind men. You may say there is a good deal of persuasion necessary here. No; it is simply that wonderful method by which Jesus Christ did sometimes proceed, of letting people pour out their whole heart, and show their earnestness, before He answered. When they had persistently clamored for His help, following Him into the house, sight came.

In the healing of the dumb demoniac, which is almost brutal in its bluntness as Matthew tells the story, there is never a word of request, to say nothing of appreciation.

**“They brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a demon. And when the demon was cast out, the dumb spake.”**

That is all. It was the movement of a great readiness. So through all we see the King ready.

But look at the King again, and mark His method. How the method varies! It is a great picture, this of Jesus coming to the house of Jairus. We need the three Gospel stories to see it, it is so exquisite in its beauty. He came in where the child was lying dead, and He said, **“She is not dead, but sleepeth.”**

And they laughed Him to scorn. What did He do? He put them all out. Do not imagine that this King is only capable of tenderness; He can do very drastic things. He was justified in His action. When He came in they were wailing; before He had been there two minutes they were laughing; but there are some people who must be put out before Jesus can do anything.

**“He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”**

A critical, scolding, scoffing crowd must be put out before He can do anything. He Himself was affected by it. Criticism was sterilizing in its effect upon Him. Faith was fertilizing. Then there is a beautiful touch of tenderness in the Master’s method with the maiden.

Remember He was also healing the man’s heart. He put His hand on the child and said, **“Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise.”** Yet that does not interpret it, it hardly translates it. If you translate “Talitha cumi” literally, Jesus really said, Little lamb, I say unto thee, Arise.

Oh that sweet touch, that tenderness of tone! Then “He charged them much, that no man should know this; and He commanded that something should be given her to eat.”

Observe the sweet reasonableness of the Lord!

He ordered them to give her, not the catechism, but meat - physical food. Jairus, here is your bairn. Take care of her, give her meat. We talk about the Man Jesus, and blessed be His humanity; but this is God, and He robs death of its prey, and thinks about the meal of a little maiden; and springtime comes into the heart of the man, and summer follows it, and all life is different to him.

But on His way to the house of Jairus, in dealing with the woman, the King’s method was quite a different one. First, a question was asked, not because He wanted to know, but because it was necessary that this woman should go a good deal further than she had done. **“Who touched Me?”** said Jesus. You need not be angry with the question the disciples asked, **“Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?”** That is precisely what we should have said.

Tenderly and reverently, with a touch of amazement in our voice, we would have said, Dear Master, why do you ask that? Many have touched You in the last half-hour. He always knows the difference between the jostle of a curious mob and the touch of a soul in its agony. The soul that touches Him is the soul that will gain the virtue.

### **“Who touched ME?”**

He differentiates between the curious crowd and the soul in its need. But follow on a little, and see His method, for He has not finished. The woman seeing that everything was known, came in front of Him and told Him all the truth.

Then Matthew tells us the most beautiful thing. The King said, **“Daughter.”**

We cannot say these things as they ought to be said. Oh for the breath of the Spirit of God to make the music for us! All that came after, **“Be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole,”** was included when He said, **“Daughter.”**

- She is excommunicated; **“Daughter”** she is adopted.
- She is divorced; **“Daughter”** He takes her to His heart.
- She is ostracized; **“Daughter”** and He admits her to heaven’s society.

In one word He drove the clouds away and showed her the blue sky, with the golden sunshine all about her. By one word the shackles of her pain and impotence fell from her, and she stood in all the light and liberty of conscious relationship with God. But before He could say **“Daughter,”** He had to bring her from secret discipleship into the place of confessed discipleship.

She took hold of the border of His garment, and the power came.

Then He said in effect, I want you to have more than that. I do not want you to be satisfied with virtue communicated through My garments. Come, and look into My face. He looked down into her face. Behold those eyes! Oh the light and glory of them the quiet tenderness, the surpassing beauty of them!

Then came the blind men. Here was another method. **“Believe ye that I am able to do this?”** **“Yea, Lord.”** Then His hands were put upon their eyes. Have you ever thought it would have been worthwhile to be blind for fifty years to feel those hands touch the eyes, and know the breaking of the light?

In healing the dumb man we have no account of His method; we simply see His quiet majesty. All need appealed to His force. He appealed in every case to faith; and where faith responded, either personally or vicariously His power was made manifest over death, disease, blindness, demons - power that defies explanation, but arrests because of its abundance.

The thing which is supremely impressive is the ease of His might - there is no struggle, no long mysterious preparation.

The need comes; He speaks, He touches; the need is met. And all these are little things that He did not account worth talking about. He said to the men about Him, Do not go and talk about these things; do not go and publish this abroad. This is not the thing I want you to see: **“Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works’ sake.”**

The spiritual miracles, the moral remakings, are going on all around us to-day. God help us all to see the King, to touch the King as He passes. The arm of flesh need not be lifted; the sigh of faith is enough. Make it thine by submission, and all the glory of His reign will shine upon you, and the supernatural power resident within Him will be yours.

Oh matchless King! In this exhibition of benefits we have seen the supremacy and the power of the King in every realm. He has demonstrated His power to do as well as to teach. Do not be afraid to let Him tear away the veil behind which thou hast hidden some evil thing in thy life. Let Him reveal it, for He will heal it. This is the method and purpose of the King.

The final word in this section reveals the antagonism of His foe and ours.

It expressed itself through the religious leaders of the time. **“He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.”**

King so marvelous in teaching and power, yet to the prejudiced mind bringing no conviction; and there were men who dared to say that He moved to victory in the power of evil. Let us jealously inquire in what attitude we listen and study, for it is possible for prejudice and pride to blind us to the most solemn and sacred truths.

May God grant that instead of the blasphemy which attributes His victories to evil, we may be among the number of those who say, This is our King; we have waited for Him; upon His brow we put the crown, and by God’s help we will serve Him.

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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