

RESPONDING TO CHRIST JESUS (MATTHEW 8)

Matthew 8 gives us an interesting contrast in how different people responded to the kingdom of God being upon them, in other words, their responses to their encounters with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We have 5 totally different stories, situations and persons, and remarkably just as many different reactions to Christ Jesus. Just as we are witnesses today, there are many varying responses to the Holy Spirit, aka the Spirit of Christ (**Romans 8:9**). For this chapter though, we don't have the religious or political leaders, that is, the Pharisees, the Saduccees, the scribes, the priests, or the Herodians, challenging Jesus based on His Words or His deeds. Yet we have a variety of different folks with different problems. One could assume what would be the overwhelming response to Jesus, that they would be in awe and having complete reverence for Him, and to then to obey Him as He is the Word of God. Unfortunately, the reactions are quite startling, even perplexing, some in a good way, and others not so much. First we have the story of how:

Jesus Cleanses a Leper (Matthew 8:1-4)

When He [Jesus] had come down from the mountain [after giving His "Sermon on the Mount", which is in **Matthew 5-7** that we went over earlier this summer] great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and **worshipped Him**, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "**I am willing; be cleansed.**" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "**See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**"

On the surface, that is a beautiful and touching story. A leper came up to Jesus and was worshipping Him and it sounds like the leper was speaking to Jesus with humble respect, as he says, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then, with compassion, as Mark tells us in his account of this story, Jesus replied, "**I am willing; be cleansed.**" Last week, in looking at **Mark 7**, the last story in that chapter panned out, or ended, very similarly to this one. A group of people brought a man, who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, to Jesus. "And He [Jesus] took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, **He sighed**, and said to him, "**Ephphatha**," that is, "Be opened." Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly." (**Mark 7:33-35**) The narration given to us by Mark (John Mark), doesn't explain to us why Jesus sighed. But it does say that practically the same thing that took place after the leper was cleansed happened with the once deaf man with the impediment. Regarding the leper for our story in **Matthew 8**, "Jesus said to him, "**See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that**

Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." " The story ends there in the **Matthew 8** account, but in what looks to be the same story in **Mark 1**, it ends by saying, "However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction." (**Mark 1:45**) In the **Mark 7** account with the deaf man and the impediment, after Jesus had completely healed Him, it says, "Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." So it was, with both of those people, they had grieved Jesus and had made it about impossible for Him to enter into Jerusalem and Jesus was even more hard-pressed to move around in the Sea of Galilee region.

One could ask the question though, "what does it matter, Jesus still accomplished His mission right?" The answer likely falls upon the sigh of Jesus <sigh>. Another story we looked at last week, Jesus had said to a non-Israelite woman, seeking deliverance of a demon for her daughter, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (**Mark 7:27**). Jesus explained further, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (**Matthew 15:24**) [That was His mission according to the will of God.] And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs." Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." (**Mark 7:28-29**) How marvelous and great in the compassion of Christ Jesus! Yet at times, Jesus sighed <sigh>.

That was then, yet after Jesus had risen from the dead, conquering death, sin, and evil, so that we can have eternal life through Him, that is to all who have believed on Jesus as being the Christ and then received Him, and His Righteousness, He gave the disciples the "Great Commission". "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (**Matthew 28:18-20**) As Jesus had also told His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—" (**John 14:15-16**) Similarly, Jesus also said this, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (**John 14:23**) Everything changes when we believe on Christ Jesus and receive Him into our hearts. Not only do we become a new creation, are born-again as Jesus put it, we have that same commandment, mission, and mindset, to be kingdom of

God-minded as God is presently building His eternal kingdom from one person to the next and so on. It is founded on and established on and built on the love of God through Christ Jesus. It is not having a mindset to just be healed, just to be saved, or just to be delivered, although Jesus can and does do all of that. We are being called into the family of God, to be children of God, and to live the rest of our lives in and according to the love of God in Christ!

To sum up the teachings or doctrine of Christ Jesus, Jesus was asked what is the great commandment of God's. Jesus didn't refer to works or sacrifices, He said this, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, [as He was speaking to Israel and quoting from Deuteronomy) the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Jesus expounded on that in His "Sermon on the Mount", saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;" (Matthew 5:43-45) From all that, we get the phrasing that what we are ultimately being called to, by God through Christ Jesus, is to share and show the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus. That all hinges on our response to the love of God through Christ Jesus, "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) The Apostle Paul gives clarification in Ephesians 2:8-10, as to how we are saved, who is doing the saving, and then what happens after one is saved, which then bears the evidence of being saved, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." From there we have the works of the Holy Spirit, working in us, the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23) Now for a more positive response to Jesus:

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Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (Matthew 8:5-13)

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' & he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who

followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; & as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

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In the Luke account of this story, it says that the servants of the centurion told Jesus that the centurion loved the nation of Israel and had built a synagogue for them. With this story I was reminded of **Hebrews 11:6** which says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." By the sound of the narration of this story of the centurion, he knew already what the outcome would be. He already showed signs of loving God and loving others and so then with his encounter with Jesus, even though he had authority and power on this earth, he knew who he was having an encounter with, the One who had the ultimate power and authority in heaven and on earth. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "For this reason I also suffer these things[the trials, tribulations, sorrow, grief, suffering]; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am **persuaded** that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." (**2 Timothy 1:12**) We may never see, in this lifetime, the fulfilling of all we hope and pray for, yet as it says at the end of the faith chapter in **Hebrews 11**, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that **they should not be made perfect apart from us.**" (**Hebrews 11:39**) What that is saying, is that all things are according to God's time and His will and that one glorious day we will all be perfected together in Christ Jesus! "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but **we** know that when He is revealed, **we** shall be like Him, for **we** shall see Him as He is." (**1 John 3:2**) Now for a seemingly random and unexpected encounter with Jesus:

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Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed (Matthew 8:14-17)

Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. **And she arose and served them.** When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

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I love this story because it speaks of Jesus healing on His time, as all three accounts of this story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, speak of Jesus just coming to the house and then being told of the condition

of Peter's mother. Then, what about the response of Peter's mother-in-law after she was healed? It reminded me of how Jesus knew of Lazarus being ill yet He waited until Lazarus died so that He could raise him from the dead, which was a foreshadowing of Jesus being able to raise Himself from the dead. With this story, at just the right time, Jesus came to her house, healed her, and then her response was: she began to serve! Let's continue with more encounters with Jesus:

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The Cost of Discipleship (Matthew 8:18-22)

And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

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"Follow Me". It doesn't matter what He said after that. The point I believe that Jesus was making is what He said two chapters later in Matthew saying, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

(Matthew 10:38-40) A lot of people wanted to follow Jesus, some for the right reasons and some not. As Jesus also said, "For many are called, but few chosen." (Matthew 20:16) That really is our decision to make. Will we follow Jesus even if we say as Paul did, "for this reason I suffer these things", or we don't receive in this lifetime all the promises until we see Jesus? After all, He will fulfill His promises, guaranteed!

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Wind and Wave Obey Jesus (Matthew 8:23-27)

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

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The Apostle John finally got it later by saying, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18) Even the disciples who walked, slept, and ate with Jesus for 3 to 3-1/2 years had to go through that process of putting their trust in Jesus, which is the believing in His great love for us. "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17) "If God is for us,

who can be against us?" (**Romans 8:31**) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the **love of God** which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (**Romans 8:35-39**) Do you believe that?

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Two Demon-Possessed Men Healed (Matthew 8:28-34)

When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, **including what had happened to the demon-possessed men**. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.

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I don't want to end this message on a negative note but wow, what a reaction from the whole city that came out to Jesus after He sent the demons into the herd of swine. They were not kingdom of God-minded but kingdom of this world-minded. They were more concerned about the losing a herd of swine than in the miracle of delivering the two men from demons. They weren't prepared to go up and serve Jesus as Peter's mother was. They weren't believing on Christ Jesus as the centurion was. They were operating in fear similar to the disciples, when they were afraid of the storm at sea. The difference was the disciples knew of whom they believed in and of whom was the Christ the Son of the Living God, who they could turn to in their time of need. It is now upon us to respond to the love of God. Will we obey Him according to His Word or will we just decide what we want to do based upon our own desires. God's will vs. our own will. The kingdom of God vs. the kingdom of this world. Righteousness in Christ Jesus which leads to life or sin in the flesh which leads to death. Losing our lives for Christ Jesus as He is building His eternal kingdom presently or hold onto our lives which leads Him to <sigh> In the words of Joshua, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (**Joshua 24:15**)