

The Power of Faith

Good morning everybody. If you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to Matthew 9. Funny story: I was actually not planning on teaching this morning. Eric, our pastor in training was. But in the 9:00, he got up, said a few words and then said he didn't feel great, and walked off stage, and then I came up and did my best on his notes. So that was an exciting start to the morning. But since I've now had at least thirty minutes to prepare, I'm basically a professional at this teaching. So nothing to fear.

But in all seriousness, that whole situation made me very thankful for how we go about our teaching here on Sundays. You may or may not already know this, but our teachings put together through something called a Teaching *Team*. So each Wednesday, a group of people from our church—staff and volunteer, men and women—get together and talk through, contribute to, and edit each week's teaching to try and make it as solid and as helpful as it can be. And there are a lot of benefits to doing it that way, but one *specific* advantage is that if any of us ever have to run off the stage sick on a Sunday morning, there are any number of other people who are already somewhat familiar with that week's teaching. So today is one of those times.

That said, if you're here for the first time or if you need a refresher, we are currently studying straight through the book of Matthew together. We're spending some time working through the whole book from start to finish over the course of a couple years. Right now, we're in a section of Matthew that focuses in on Jesus' interactions with various types of people he comes across.

And in today's passage, the focus is on one particular *thing* that Jesus sees in each person he interacts with: faith. ~~Faith, coincidentally, is also what you have to have when you're preaching a sermon for the first time off of someone else's notes. Funny how God did that.~~ Now, faith is definitely one of those words that a lot of people use, but don't necessarily fully understand. There are a lot of words like that. For instance, we all say we *love* stuff when in reality we probably just slightly prefer it to other things. Or here's another one that people don't understand: the word *irregardless*. Because it's a made up word. It literally means the same thing as "regardless," we just added letters to it for no reason at all. Just a little pet peeve of mine. Don't worry about it.

But all that to say, *faith* is also one of those words. So we're gonna spend some time before we're done today trying our best to define it in a helpful way. But first, let's take a look at these stories that all highlight *faith*. Start with me in chapter 9, verses 18-26:

[18] While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." [19] And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. [20] And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, [21] for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." [22] Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. [23] And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, [24] he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. [25] But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. [26] And the report of this went through all that district.

There's a couple things going on here, but the first person we see in this account is a ruler, or some translations say a synagogue leader. So this religious leader comes and kneels before Jesus and asks him to come bring his daughter back from the dead. I feel like sometimes we read stuff like this and think, "yeah, Jesus healed people back then and brought people back from the dead and all kinds of things, so it makes sense that someone would ask him that." But just to clarify, people who died generally stayed that way back then just like today, so this was still a really big deal.

But there was **something in this man that prompted** this approach to Jesus. He wasn't sitting in his house thinking, "gosh I really hope that Jesus guy shows up some time soon." Or "if I just hope hard enough, he'll sense it and walk in!" He knew where Jesus was, he knew what Jesus could do, and he went and found him. He was moved to action. So Matthew says Jesus followed the man back to his house.

But on the way to this guy's house, we meet another person in verse 20. This is a woman who is suffering from perpetual bleeding for twelve years. Now something that I find interesting is just how different the first two people we see in this story are. The first person was considered an elite in the religious community. A man of standing, of authority, someone who was most likely in the public eye. The next was a "woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years."

Now, there are several different cultural and historical factors going on here. According to some scholars, this woman would have been in a pretty desperate position both medically and socially. Based on some laws at the time, a woman would have been considered unclean if this was happening and would most likely have stayed unmarried or would have been divorced as a result. So she could have thought to herself, "I wonder if he will see me, and if he sees me, will he know what's going on? And if he knows

what's going on would he even do anything about it?" But that's not what she does. We read, "she said to herself, if I only touch his garment, I will be made well." So in this extreme act of desperation, she reaches out to touch the teacher, knowing full well that under the law it would make him unclean because she was considered unclean.

~~There's something incredibly interesting here that I want to point out, and it's a little bit down the bible nerd rabbit hole, but I promise it's worth mentioning. So Matthew clarifies the woman specifically touches "the fringe of his garment." Now the fringe for those who don't know is the very edge of his cloak, basically the outermost point of him she could have touched. There are actually several times throughout the Old Testament when the edge or corner of someone's clothes were called "the wings" of their garment. Specifically, look with me at Malachi 4:2, we'll put it on the screen so you don't have to turn there. It says:~~

~~*[2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.*~~

~~So Matthew just wants us to **see what she's doing** as unknowingly **fulfilling** this verse. But either way, this is a recognition from the woman that she thinks Jesus is who he says he is. And despite her own social standing, she decides to take a huge risk and active step regardless of the consequences.~~

So, Jesus, being God incarnate with all the power and ability could have let this happen, let this woman be healed discreetly, and gone about his day without acknowledging anything. He could have done that. But instead, Jesus turns to her and acknowledges her. Despite her social standing or any social stigma against her, he *acknowledges* her. He *dignifies* her. He doesn't shame her, and he certainly doesn't let anyone from the crowd who might have seen this culturally unclean woman touch the teacher speak out against her. He acknowledges her and the action she took. And he tells her, "take heart, daughter; your *faith* has made you well." **What does Jesus say made her well? Her faith. Not "I have made you well, but your faith has made you well."** That's significant. We'll come back to that concept, but let's keep going for now.

But Jesus heals this woman and **keeps going to the other man's house**. When he gets there, we read that he sees people mourning and going through the funeral traditions of the time. Just to clarify, this is not immediately after this man's daughter has passed away. They've already gathered people together and started the whole funeral process. Which explains why Matthew says the people at the house "laughed at him" when Jesus told them all she was only asleep. But we see Jesus arrive at the house at the *request* of the ruler and touch his daughter and she is raised from the dead. This guy went out of

his way, seeking Jesus in the midst of what he was doing, and knelt before him asking him to come to his house. He seems pretty sure that there's some value to asking Jesus for help. And what does Jesus do? He brings the man's daughter back from the dead. So we've got a lot going on already, but we're going to keep powering through and I promise we'll tie it all back together. Let's keep moving forward and take a look together at what happens next in verses 27-31:

[27] And as Jesus passed on from there, (casually as one does after raising someone from the dead) two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." [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." [29] Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." [30] And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it." [31] But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

Next in Matthew's account we find two blind men following Jesus. Now these guys are particularly interesting in my opinion. We read that they're blind, which by definition means they've never actually *seen* Jesus do anything. They've never *witnessed* his actions. They could only have been told about what he's doing, but look at how they address him: "Son of David." If you were in Jewish culture at this time, you would have known that title was reserved for whomever they thought the Messiah was, or the coming savior who was prophesied about in scripture.

Note: in v. 34, the Pharisees attribute Jesus' healing to Satan. Matthew is poetically demonstrating to us that sometimes, in the kingdom of God, seeing men are blind, and blind men see. A pair of blind men who have never seen Jesus do anything, can perceive precisely who he is. But men who are steeped in the Scriptures about the coming messiah completely miss who he is. Today: there is a way to grow up in church, know all kinds of things about Jesus, and still be completely blind to who he is and what life with him looks like...

But these blind men, having never *seen* anything Jesus has done, never *seeing* Jesus at all, heard what he was doing and heard where he was and they went and found him, asking for his help. They were so confident that he could heal them that when they found out where he was, they did everything in their power to get there. And just like I mentioned earlier, at this point in history, blind people tended to stay blind just as much as dead people tended to stay dead. But like the synagogue leader, they were confident in who Jesus was to the point that they sought him out and asked him to heal them. Once again we see people going out of their way and taking deliberate, intentional

actions based on what they confidently believe to be true. They did something that only makes sense if Jesus was who he said he was. And once again we see Jesus circle back to the same theme, he says according to your *what?* According to your *faith*. You are healed “according to your faith.”

Let’s keep reading the last account in this section of verses; look with me at verse 32:

[32] As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. [33] 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.”

Now, this story is different in that Jesus doesn't specifically use the word “faith” to describe what happens. But we know that the story still has to do with faith. We know that because earlier in the same chapter, a group of people bring a paralytic man to Jesus so Jesus can heal him. And it says that Jesus healed the man because of *their faith*. And it would seem that the same thing is happening here. A group of people bring a demon-possessed man to Jesus, and Jesus heals him because of *their* faith. So while this account doesn’t give quite as much detail, We know based on other passages, that evidently Jesus saw *faith* in the people bringing this demon-possessed man to him. We see multiple times Jesus saying it is people’s *faith* that has brought them healing. So **even though faith isn't specifically mentioned in this passage, we know from the context that it is still very much a story about faith.**

So in all three of these sections of Matthew and all four of these interactions, we see a common thread woven throughout. In all of these different situations, we see *faith* as a central piece of the story. In several of the situations, Jesus literally tells people things happen *because of* their faith. He explicitly says those words. Apparently, when relating to Jesus for healing and any number of other things, possessing **faith** is incredibly important.

So we should probably spend some time figuring out what faith is, exactly. **I think if you were to ask, a lot of people would describe “faith” as some kind of indistinct, “spiritual part of me.” This almost mystical element without a clear definition. Maybe you’ve heard or even said things like, “you just need to have more faith.” Or, “my faith is important to me.” Maybe it’s “I’m struggling with my faith right now.” Or, “I want to grow in my faith.”** Now, I’m not going to say outright that every time we refer to faith as something intangible it’s *incorrect*, but if that’s all it is then I might say based on scripture it’s *incomplete*.

Jesus' interactions with all these people in this passage tell us that he sees their faith by their *actions*. Not one time in this passage do we see Jesus do some kind of preliminary interview with these people to dig deeper into the intangible spiritual component of their lives. So how could he say he sees their faith? He sees it, he *sees their faith* by their actions. He sees their faith based on the fact that they went out of their way to do something that would only make sense to do if Jesus really was who he said he was. A religious leader wouldn't come kneel before a random person walking down the street asking them to raise his daughter from the dead. That wouldn't make sense. A woman with a discharge of blood for 12 years isn't going up and touching every person in the street just hoping that she'll suddenly get better. Blind men aren't shouting on the street corner at every passerby asking to be healed of their blindness. You don't take a demon-oppressed person who can't speak to some random fast food place and say "I'll take a burger, some fries, and, uh, do you think you could do something about this?" They'll just look at you like, "sir, this a Wendy's." None of that makes any sense, no one would do those things. All the people in this passage went out of their way to do something, something pretty drastic in some cases, that would only make sense if they truly believed that Jesus was capable of doing something about it. So to give a definition, I would say **faith = doing things that only make sense if Jesus is who he says he is.**

Obviously faith has an intangible element to it, there's a spiritual element for sure. But based on Jesus' interaction and what we see in scripture, it can't *just* be that. According to these stories, faith is something that is tangibly displayed through your actions. Faith is something that a person can see through the things you do. We see this laid out clearly in other parts of scripture, probably most clearly in the book of James. I'll put it on the screen so you don't have to turn there. Take a look at James 2:18:

[18] But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." (In other words, some will try to act like their faith and their works are separate things. Like faith is the spiritual component of their lives and their works are the physical, tangible parts of their lives. But he continues... Show me **your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**

Look at those last few words. How does the author say they will show their faith? *By* their works. Those are pretty strong words, but I also feel like they're pretty direct. They're saying *faith* is something that is shown or displayed through *action*. So we see in the book of James and in Jesus' interactions with people in these stories that faith isn't just an internal thing. Faith is not the immeasurable, intangible, spiritual component of your life. Faith is a belief that Jesus is who he says he is, and that works itself out in actions that only make sense if he is who he says he is. According to scripture, faith is much more than a spiritual idea, and it also is much more powerful than we sometimes think.

I've seen several examples of this in my own life, some that I've participated in and some that I've witnessed others do. One big one is the entire story of the beginnings of City Church. 25 people who lived in Columbia, South Carolina felt like the Lord was calling them to be a part of starting a church because of what Jesus had done in their own lives through the actions of other people. So what happened? We shifted our lives and changed jobs and sold houses and packed everything up and left families all because of the work of Jesus we had experienced and the future work we knew he could do through us. So people took action and did things that only made sense if Jesus was who he said he was. Most of us ended up farther from our families and a lot of friendships we really valued, because we wanted to see more people come to know Jesus here in Knoxville. And I've seen plenty of examples of this happening during my time growing up overseas. There was one time I was in India with my Dad staying with some friends when we got a call that my mom had to be medically evacuated from Nepal to Thailand for a surgery. My dad needed to go right away and he looked for tickets online and was calling travel agents and the only information he could find was that everything was booked solid and sold out. But our friend James who we were staying with said "no, we're going to pray that the Lord would make a way and we're going to the airport." Which doesn't make sense from any logical stance, the flights were are full, we knew that, but he had faith and *took us with him* and despite what the websites and travel agents said, when we got there, there was a seat available for my dad to Thailand the same day. There was no reason to take that step, but James knew that the Lord could provide and work and he took action.

Now most of us probably look at things like that and go "yeah of course that's faith." But faith can also be shown in quite a few everyday sort of ways that don't have to do with uprooting your life for a church plant or the Holy Spirit magically booking plane flights for you. For example, faith could look like being a single woman who is presented with the opportunity to date an incredibly attractive guy who isn't a follower of Jesus and decides not to because you believe God's way is better. Faith could look like being in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend or fiance, and having the option to have sex whenever you want without anybody really judging you for it, and choosing to wait because you trust God's design for sex. Faith is *choosing* and *planning* to give away significant portions of your income that you could spend on yourself instead of waiting until the end of the month to see what's *left* to give away. Faith is choosing to spend time reading and meditating on an ancient book of literature every day, because you believe the Holy Spirit will speak directly to you through it. . Faith is having the boldness to talk about Jesus with a coworker or a neighbor, knowing full well that it might make things a little awkward as a result of doing that.

Do you see this? We could go on with examples, but this is what faith is: it's doing things that only make sense if Jesus is who he says he is. That's what all these people in the story with faith are doing. We see all these people that Jesus interacts with in this passage *showing* their faith by taking action. I know I personally find myself thinking about faith as a concept or an idea a lot of the time and I need to be reminded that it doesn't stop there. Faith can't just be a feeling we muster up, because that makes it all about ourselves. And that's not what faith is. Faith is defined by the decisions that we make regardless of how we feel.

So I think we need to stop thinking about faith as some intangible feeling that we do our best to muster up. That makes it all about us and our strength. Instead, what if we approached it more by asking the question, "if I really believed that Jesus is who he says he is, what types of things would I approach differently in my life?" And then **doing** those things, because he **is** who he says he is.

Put another way, faith is simply **trust**. When we were little, chances are there were situations where we were scared or nervous to do something, and a parent or someone said "trust me." And maybe that went well or maybe it didn't, but I want you to see that that's what faith is. It's not mustering up a feeling within us. In fact, I think a lot of the time it's walking into uncertainty and fear and doubt, but to do it anyway knowing that Jesus will be enough, because he is who he says he is. Our faith is not based on any ability in us to trust, it's not based on how we can manage to **feel** about something. It's simply based on Jesus' **trustworthiness**. It's based on his trustworthiness that he proved on the cross. His trustworthiness in the fact that he gave himself up as a sacrifice to make a way for us to be reconciled with him. His trustworthiness that he will give us all things we need.

Our faith motivates us to action. It's not just a personal feeling or personal motivation. Because it isn't based on us. It isn't based on our ability or our strength or any of that. Faith motivates action because our faith is grounded in the person and work and ability of Jesus Christ. Not our ability. His ability. And my hope is that we as a church are able to put that faith on display through the things we do to make Jesus known throughout our city.