

“Nothing Like This”

Introduction: I don't have to tell you that we live in a highly multi-cultural world. Which means, among other things that we are surrounded by people who look, think, and live differently than us. And of course, there are many different beliefs stemming from the various different religions that we and our neighbors or co-workers follow. Sometimes, in order to try and help us all get along and reduce that which divides us, it is suggested that all religions are basically the same. They are not completing claims but simply different voicings of the same truth.

However, upon reflection, I suggest that such a suggestion is about as logical as saying you can be in two places at one time! Take, for instance, the central truth claim of Christianity – that Jesus was physically raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14). The other two great monotheistic faiths in the world make very different claims. Muslims believe that Jesus did not die but was taken up into heaven, and Jews (along with atheists and agnostics) believed that Jesus died, and remained dead.

Which is it? Part of sorting out the truth is to give Jesus a good long listen and look, which we've been doing in the opening chapters of Matthew's gospel. Particularly in these last two chapters, 8-9, we've seen Jesus do and say some very remarkable things, things that only one who is God could do, such as commanding the wind, exorcising the demons, forgiving the sinful, and raising the dead. This morning we come to the final remarkable thing that Matthew includes in this section: Jesus giving sight to a couple of blind men and voice to a fellow who has been mute.

“This is amazing,” says one group of people, “nothing like this has ever been seen.” “This is blasphemy,” says another group, “this man must be in league with and fueled by the demonic.” These are not two different voicings of the same truth. So, let's hear the text and then see what we can sort out.

I. Two Blind Men

A. Upon leaving the house of a 12-year-old girl who he had just raised from the dead, Jesus discovers he is being followed by two blind men. Maybe he turns around, or perhaps just slows down, and the men take the opportunity to cry out: “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” A couple of things here.

1. First, notice how mercy is used. It is not an emotional cry of sorrow but a practical cry for help. We hear it called for a couple of other times in Matthew's gospel: a mother crying out that her daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly (15:22); and father crying out on behalf of his son, who is suffering from seizures (17:15). Each time a significant, practical need is raised. “Lord have mercy!” In other words, don't just feel sorry for us; do something!

2. Second, the cry for mercy is linked with identifying Jesus as Son of David. This was significant as it was a title that referred to the promise of a messianic deliverer – one who would come to rescue God's people and put the world to rights – to come from the lineage of the great King David, whose kingdom, it was prophesied, would have no end. This age of the Messiah, God's prophets promised, would, among other things, be a time when the blind would receive sight (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7). The latter passage is especially instructive as it refers to a figure – the servant of the Lord – who, among many other things, and endowed with God's Spirit, would open eyes that are blind:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. . . I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

B. Worth noting is that when John the Baptist was questioning whether Jesus was really the one who was to come and put the world to rights, given that John at that time had just been thrown into prison and the evil Herod was still on the throne, Jesus sent him a message that listed of all the signs that had been happening that were indicative of the Messianic age. “The blind receive sight” is the first sign Jesus mentioned. So, somehow, these men, by their pursuit of Jesus and their cry for mercy, were acknowledging that in Jesus, the kingdom of God had dawned, that heaven had begun to break into earth, and that Jesus was capable of providing them with the mercy – the practical help they needed.

C. This is the essence of faith that we have seen before: trusting in Jesus’ ability to act – “In you, LORD my God, I put my trust” (Ps. 25:1)—even though we might not know how or when or even if he will do so. It’s the same essence of faith that Paul says characterized Abraham, the great father of our faith. As Paul describes it, light of God’s promise, Abraham’s age, and his lack of an heir:

¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” ¹⁹ And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb.

²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. ²² And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. ²³ And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God. [Romans 4:18-25, NLT]

And so Jesus asks the blind men: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” Like we saw with the synagogue ruler and the hemorrhaging woman, their faith might not have been perfectly formed, but it was perfectly directed at Jesus, at the only one able to help.

II. One Mute Man

A. As they ran off to spread the news that their sight had been restored, even though Jesus instructed them to be quiet about it (most likely because he didn’t want the crowds to get stirred up, clamoring for more miracles, thinking of Jesus as only a wonder-worker), another need was presented to Jesus. We don’t know who brought the mute man, probably, like the paralytic, his friends, He was not in a good way. He could not talk, it turns out, because he was demon-possessed. Not to be deterred, and without a whole lot of fanfare, Jesus quietly drove the demon out and the man’s speech was restored.

B. The crowd was amazed. The ability to control the wind and the waves, exorcise demons, forgive sins, raise the dead, and now open the eyes of the blind and the mouths of the mute...they had never seen anything like it! And neither had the religious authorities. A bit later, Jesus would look into

the eyes of a bereaved friend and declare, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn. 11:25-26). What’s more, his actions and words would lead him to sum up, after his own resurrection, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. . .” (Ma. 28:18). This was way more than a good man that Matthew is revealing to us.

C. But instead of being able to see the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Jesus that all of this revealed, instead of concluding that no one could do these kinds of things but God alone, and so Jesus must somehow be God himself come in the flesh—compassionate and gracious, merciful and mighty—the authorities concluded that to do what he was doing and say what he was saying and claim what he was claiming meant that Jesus was in league with the devil, that he was somehow being fueled, not by the Spirit of the living God (Isa. 42:1), but by the “prince of demons.”

So, back to the desire to find that all religions are basically the same, even the Pharisees recognized that Jesus was making profound declarations regarding his divine identity. They, and we, may choose to not to believe him. But he cannot simply be one truth among many. He has not left us that option.