

MATTHEW 8–9

TEN MIRACLES, INSTRUCTIONS, AND A CALLING

Introduction

In chapters 8 and 9, Matthew focused on ten miracles that illustrate the wide range of Jesus’s wonders and the great variety of people involved in them. From Matthew’s view, Jesus had come as the “new Moses” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses had performed ten miracles in Egypt, and Jewish scholars counted ten miracles in the wilderness. It appears that Matthew clustered these ten events—and reported many others with less specific detail—to show that Jesus the Christ came with great power as the fulfiller of the law of Moses.

The Messiah was also expected to come as a healer, to “arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2), so that the converted could “be healed.”¹ As was revealed to King Benjamin, the Lord God Omnipotent would “go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men” (Mosiah 3:5–6).

Jesus performed these miracles in many ways, for many kinds of people, with various kinds of needs, and in a variety of places. There seems to have been nothing routine or predictable about Jesus’s performance of miracles. While some people found these miracles to be very unsettling (Matthew 8:34), faithful followers were struck with surprise, wonder, and awe (9:8).

Jesus healed by touch and by word—sometimes both. In some cases, he touched the afflicted part of the body. For example, in healing blindness, he might touch the eyes. Jesus even touched ritually unclean people, such as the leper (8:2–3) and the corpse of a little girl who had died (9:23–31). Jesus was not worried about the old impurity laws, for He had purifying powers that went beyond them.

Jesus did not, and still does not, keep His blessings from the faithful, whoever they are. Six of the ten healings in these two chapters involved Jewish individuals, one involved a Roman, one another Gentile, and one a ruler that was probably Hebrew (see Mark 5:22). A wide range of types of people are also represented, from a poor leper to a powerful centurion.

These healings occurred in several different places. Matthew made it clear that Jesus was not performing these miracles dishonestly by staging the events. People came to Him, often in very large numbers; He did not even know several of them. As one who regarded the judicial process highly, Matthew wanted to make sure these authenticating details were covered.

The loving-kindness that Jesus showed and His compassion for those who were suffering might have been part of His preparation for and symbolic of the Atonement. Presumably the healings, no matter how small or serious the ailments; the casting out of evil spirits; and the raising of the dead may all be viewed in that light.

Building upon points taught in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continued to teach about the nature of the work that He and His followers would be involved in. A few such lessons are interspersed among the healings in chapters 8 and 9. Some are involved with the miracles and others are not. Whereas they were given as instructions to individuals, they were given in public where all who heard could learn and benefit. All ten of these miracles are also reported, in various places and sometimes with slightly different wordings, in the early chapters in the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

Amidst the miracles and instructions in these two chapters, Matthew also uniquely inserted the story of his own calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ (9:9). It comes after instructions were given to two potential disciples who were not clear on the demands of discipleship (8:19–22). Jesus had previously called the four fishermen (4:18, 21). The calls of the other seven who would become Apostles are not mentioned, but they are named with the Twelve in 10:1–4. After Jesus’s Resurrection, the eleven remaining Apostles were called to go to “all the world” (28:16–20), for all who mourn or are heavy laden are invited to come to Jesus (11:28).

Matthew 8:1–4. Miracle 1: Healing and Cleansing a Leper

Here, Matthew demonstrates how miracles were triggered by faith and how Jesus had come to fulfill the law, not to cancel it. When a leper saw and worshiped Jesus and begged to be healed, Jesus healed the man by touch and word. The leper’s faith, desire, and request made healing possible.

It is noteworthy that Matthew recorded touching as part of this healing. Physical contact with people suffering from leprosy or other skin diseases would at the least transmit ritual impurity, if not disease. From other miracles, we know that Jesus did not need to touch or even be present to heal; so, both He and Matthew are making a point. While ritual impurity was generally seen as being easily spread, Jesus instead healed and cleansed this leper, both spiritually and physically.

8:4. *The law of Moses was not abandoned.* Matthew makes clear that Jesus expected all people to follow the law of Moses as far as it still applied. Jesus did not come to destroy but to fulfill. So, He asked the healed leper to show himself to a temple priest, which would qualify him as clean and able to take part in the sacrifices for ceremonial cleansing of lepers (see Leviticus 14).

The Torah directive in Leviticus 13:45 specified that lepers were to wear torn clothes, let their hair hang loose, and cry out “Unclean, unclean” when approached. They were likewise to live alone, outside the camp, or any normal settlement. Lepers often begged at the city gate during daytime hours (2 Kings 7:3–9), though they would have been put out of the city at night. The ritual cleansing procedure following a healing involved a complicated set of ceremonies and a clearance from the priest. Jesus honored those principles.

Jesus also asked the healed man to keep the miracle quiet. Jesus wanted people of faith to come to Him rather than having people looking for sensational miracles or signs that He knew would not be effective for those without faith. Most likely, Jesus was also trying to avoid unwanted attention at this early stage of His ministry.

Matthew 8:5–13. Miracle 2: Healing a Centurion’s Servant

In Capernaum, Jesus encountered a centurion, most likely a Roman soldier, pleading for healing for his servant or his son—the Greek can mean either, but the use of it in the Greek version of the Old Testament suggests a servant.

Jesus offered to go heal the young man, but the centurion, a Gentile, was concerned about his unworthiness as a Gentile, about problems presented by Jewish impurity laws, and about the distance Jesus would have to go. This centurion demonstrated enormous faith in Jesus’s authority and ability to heal the young man from afar. He saw Jesus’s authority as being similar to his authority as a centurion in that he could issue military orders and they would be fulfilled in a remote place, even though he was not present there.

Jesus commented that He had not found such great faith even among Israel (the covenant people) and added to the centurion, “And as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” He gave the word, and when the centurion arrived home, his servant had been healed. This is one example of five in this section in which Jesus healed by word alone. He did not hold back because the man was a Gentile, an outsider. He asked all to love others as He loves us (see John 15:12).

This healing teaches that faith was the root of the miracles. In this passage, Jesus taught specifically the importance of faith, trust, and faithfulness. The centurion trusted Jesus’s power and authority. Later, when Jesus ordained and sent His Twelve Apostles out, He gave them the same authority to heal the faithful. Seeing this miracle and seeing a centurion’s impelling faith boosted the Apostles’ confidence, just as it can strengthen the faith of all in Jesus’s power and authority to heal and to save.

Matthew 8:14–17. Miracle 3: Healing Peter’s Mother-in-Law and Others in Capernaum

8:14–15. Healing Peter’s mother-in-law. The private healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, a Jewish woman, led to a more public display of Jesus’s healing powers. As Jesus touched the woman’s hand, the fever left, and she was able to care for Jesus and His disciples. This is the only healing that was initiated by Jesus, probably because He knew her well. Perhaps He knew that she had enough faith but that she did not want to impose on Him. All other recipients sought Him out, and as in all cases, it is evident that there was no trickery.

8:16. Healing the sick or afflicted. That very evening, after the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, a multitude who were “sick or afflicted with evil spirits” were brought for blessings of healing, and the record says Jesus “cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.” Joseph Smith, in his inspired translation, changed several words in this verse: “*Now* when the *evening* was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the *evil* spirits with *the* word, and healed all that were sick.” By clarifying that these evil spirits were cast out by “*the* word,” Joseph may be indicating that Jesus called upon His high priesthood authority explicitly. These changes may be implied in the Greek text but are not literally stated.

8:17. Fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew pointed out that these events fulfilled the prophecies in Isaiah 53:4. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained, “Isaiah taught that the Messiah would bear our ‘griefs’ and our ‘sorrows’ (Isaiah 53:4). . . . Isaiah also taught of His strengthening us (Isaiah 41:10).”²

The Lord is still fulfilling these prophecies. In Doctrine and Covenants 1:18, He gave commandments “that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets.” In Doctrine and Covenants 66:2, we are told: “Blessed are you for receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life and be made partakers of the glories which are to be revealed in the last days, as it was written by the prophets and apostles in days of old.” Accepting the prophecies and receiving the everlasting covenant will lead to the promised eternal blessings.

Matthew 8:18–22. Instruction 1: Followers of Jesus Must Leave Home and Even Funerals

Two brief reports point out the necessity of wholeheartedly following Jesus. They teach valuable lessons about the priorities and demands of discipleship.

8:19–20. To a scribe: The scribe’s willingness to follow Jesus hid the man’s lack of understanding of what would be required of him. Jesus indicated that if the scribe was going to follow Him, he would have to move out of his comfortable library for a life on the road. There would be no nice room to sleep in. Jesus’s words suggested that the scribe would have to be interacting with people rather than being caught

up in words, textual studies, and legal documentation. This lesson, taught to one of the scribes, was applicable to all of Jesus's close followers, and the point behind this instruction is applicable to all still today.

James E. Talmage commented, "As Jesus had no fixed place of abode, but went wherever His duty called Him, so was it necessary that they who represented Him, men ordained or set apart to His service, be ready to deny themselves the enjoyment of their homes and the comfort of family if the duties of their calling so demanded."³

8:21–22. To a disciple: This teaching was triggered when one potential disciple responded to Jesus's invitation to follow Jesus by asking if the calling could be postponed until he had buried his father. Given the needs of that brief time, Jesus responded, "Let the dead bury the dead." This may sound harsh, but the importance and urgency of what the disciples were engaged in was enormous. Some Latter-day Saints in modern times have lived through similar crucial times, so Jesus's words are understandable. Origen, facing great challenges about two hundred years after Christ, explained Jesus's words as follows: "Waste no more time on dead things. You are to put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry."⁴

Jewish funerals in Jesus's day were elaborate and long; mourning took weeks. It is also possible that the man may have meant that he wanted to wait until his father was dead and buried and the lengthy weeks or months of mourning were over. Perhaps the open-ended nature of his desired deferral was the problem. In any event, Jesus's response makes it clear that the demands of discipleship can present a more pressing duty than some social customs or family traditions. Often today, missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ stay in the mission field when a relative, even a parent, dies. If, as Latter-day Saints believe, the spirits of the dead may well know what is going on, it is reasonable to believe that the deceased person may not want a loved one to interrupt missionary duties at that time.

We do not have the recorded response of the two prospective disciples, but certainly it must have been hard to answer Jesus's difficult directive. By omitting their answers, Matthew allows nothing to stand between Jesus's remarks and the reader. The focus is not on how those two men responded to Jesus but on how we answer the callings and demands of discipleship.

Matthew 8:23–27. Miracle 4: Calming a Storm on the Sea of Galilee

Following the instruction on discipleship and its costs in the previous passage, Matthew began the next story with, "And his disciples followed him." The Twelve had weighed their personal costs (Luke 14:28) and had chosen to follow Jesus, even in frightening circumstances.

As the group was sailing on the Sea of Galilee, a great storm arose and the disciples panicked and woke Jesus, who had fallen asleep. The language here is reminiscent of the time when the prophet Jonah slept during the storm as he fled from his missionary assignment. Unlike Jonah, Jesus simply said there was no need to be afraid, and added, "O ye of little faith!" which became a frequent comment. Was their faith

or trust an indication that they doubted the power of Jesus? Or had they just failed to call upon Him to perform a needed miracle? Jesus then rebuked not the disciples but the winds and the sea, and the storm was calmed by the creative power of His words alone.

This spectacular miracle, which only His disciples saw, demonstrated that He had power over the elements of the earth. The Greek word *seismos* refers in this instance to a tempest at sea, but it commonly meant any kind of “great upheaval”—including earthquakes or strong winds, all of which may have been a cause of this sudden tempest. Matthew’s choice to use this term invites readers to trust in the Savior’s power over whatever disturbances may attack us.

8:27. *Jesus’s compassion.* Jesus addressed the disciples’ fear and lack of faith only after He had dealt with the event that had brought on the fear and unbelief. This demonstrates two things: first, God is willing to provide His saving power even when our faith is small (Matthew 6:30), and second, our confidence in God should not be dependent on what is happening—our faith can be strong even during the big storms of life.

Most likely, Matthew selected these stories in order to demonstrate that Jesus came preaching the doctrine of the kingdom and that He worked with real power and authority. Consistent with Matthew’s testimony that Jesus was the Jehovah of the Old Testament, one finds parallels for God’s controlling the chaos behind the waters in Job as well as in the Psalms.⁵

Matthew 8:28–34. Miracle 5: Healing a Gadarene Man Possessed by Demons

In the country of the Gergesenes, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was met, according to Matthew, by two ferocious men living in the tombs who were “possessed with devils.” Joseph Smith corrected this to read: “There met him *a man* possessed with devils” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 8:28), which comes from the same event reported with additions in Mark 3:13–19 and in Luke 7:11–17.

These evil spirits immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 8:29), perhaps knowing Him from the premortal conflict between all followers of Jesus and Lucifer. These evil ones taunted Jesus, asking, “Have you here to torment us before the time?” The Greek is *pro kairou*, by which the evil ones imply that Jesus should not be able to command them *until His time* has come and He has succeeded. Once they see that they will be cast out, they beg Jesus to at least allow them to enter into a herd of pigs nearby. Mark 3:13 says there were about two thousand pigs in that herd. In this largely gentile region in Northern Israel, there was a good market for pork. Jesus commanded the spirits to “Go” (Matthew 8:32; the Greek is *hypagete*, “Depart!”). He did not get close to the devils to touch them; His command alone was enough.

Notable details here are Jesus’s being recognized by the evil spirits, the authority with which He commanded the evil spirits to leave, and the fact that the pig farmers were afraid of what else Jesus could do. While there is no description in Matthew of the torment of the possessed man, of the name of the devils,

or of the aftermath of this terrifying experience, Mark and Luke provide those additional details. Perhaps Matthew did not want to give the devils such prominence in his account. No doubt he was also less interested in the way the cured man then proclaimed the miraculous power of Jesus throughout the Greek cities in that region (see Mark 5:20; Luke 8:39).

Matthew simply ends by saying that when the whole population of the local city came out to see Jesus, they simply begged him to leave their neighborhood. Some may have been unhappy with the death of all these pigs; others feared the violent nature of this miracle. Soon, lawyers were sent from Jerusalem to investigate the situation. They suggested that Jesus Himself had a devil and that “by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils” (Mark 3:22). After all, He was either doing this by the power of God or by the power of Beelzebub (in which case He was violating the law). But Jesus persuasively answered, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” (Mark 3:23). Nevertheless, questions about the source of His power and authority would hound Jesus throughout His ministry (see Matthew 21:23).

8:31. A Joseph Smith Translation clarification. Joseph Smith deleted the word “away” in the King James Version’s “suffer us to go *away* into the herd of swine.” His deletion clarifies that the spirits did not just go away but that they wanted to enter a body. He famously taught that there is power in having a body. “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none.”⁶

Matthew 9:1–8. Miracle 6: Healing a Paralyzed Man

This episode of healing a paralyzed man demonstrated that Jesus had the power not only to heal but also to forgive sins.

Jesus was now in His “own city,” which in this case, probably was Capernaum (see Matthew 4:13). A group of friends brought a man with palsy for Jesus to heal. Palsy referred to many illnesses, including even a stroke or some type of paralysis. Jesus observed the faith of the group of friends and He healed their disabled friend. While faith itself is invisible, the friends’ faithfulness is shown in their act of bringing the man to Jesus for healing and then going the extra mile by famously lowering him down into the crowded room where Jesus stood (see Mark 2:4). Faith as faithfulness and confidence becomes tangible and visible only through action.

Rather than healing the man in the usual manner, Jesus first forgave him of his sins (Matthew 9:2). Some nearby scribes were thinking—but not saying—that by claiming to forgive sins Jesus had blasphemed. The scribes knew that only God had the power to forgive sins and that to imitate God was blasphemy. Jesus was now being accused of blasphemy (9:2–3), by offending or invading the unique domain of God and the sacrificial practices of the temple in Jerusalem.⁷

Jesus, knowing the scribes' thoughts, replied that it was just as easy for Him to forgive sins as it was to heal physical ailments. He explained that this was a demonstration that "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Then, turning to the sick man, He added, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (9:6). The man arose and walked home.

By forgiving the man, perceiving the unspoken thoughts of the scribes, and then healing the man, He showed His divine identity and authority, much to the dismay of the scribes. However, the crowd of observers "marveled and glorified God" (9:8).

This episode is a good example of the unplanned nature of Jesus's miracles. He was approached by people who were in need. Performing miracles wherever He was and whenever people approached Him demonstrated that He was not simply setting up shop and performing preplanned "miracles." Matthew enables us to identify the reality of Jesus's compassionate deeds.

Matthew 9:9. Calling 2: Jesus Calls Matthew the Levite

Jesus called His disciples to leave their ordinary work and to work with Him full time. Matthew immediately left his role as a successful tax collector to follow Jesus, unlike the potential disciple in 8:21–22.

9:9–10. Was Matthew a Levite? The Gospels of Luke (5:27–28) and Mark (2:14) record that the man "sitting at the receipt of custom" whom Jesus asked to be a full-time disciple was named Levi. It seems unlikely that a man would have been named Levi who was not a member of the tribe of Levi. The Levites took rotating turns to serve in the temple for two weeks a year plus festivals. They lived elsewhere, even in Judaea and Galilee, and worked at regular jobs or professions the rest of the year.⁸

As might be expected of a temple worker, Matthew knew the Old Testament very well and quoted it to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ was a continuation of the covenant in the Old Testament and to demonstrate that the coming of Jesus and this new era had been prophesied.

The name Levi does not appear in Luke or Mark again after the calling, but the name Matthew appears in the list of Apostles in Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:14–15.

9:9–10. Was Matthew a tax collector? In several places, including in Matthew's Gospel (10:3), the straightforward Greek term *telōnēs* (literally "tax collector") was translated as "a publican" (from a Latin term). The word *publican* has a distasteful ring to it because it was generally bundled with *sinner*s (see 18:17). But Matthew may not have been a publican in the negative sense of being a tax collector for the Romans or Herodians.

Assuming that Matthew was a Levite, one of his tasks may well have been collecting the temple tax. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Shekalim*, Mishnah 1 and 3, we learn that the temple tax collection process involved a procedure with specific dates and with tables for moneychangers being set up not only at the temple in Jerusalem but also in the outlying areas such as Galilee. It is possible that Matthew was that type of tax collector.

Support for seeing Matthew as a tax man is found in the fact that his Gospel contains parables and stories relating to finances that the Gospels do not. Financial episodes that are unique to the Gospel of Matthew include 17:24–27 (tribute money); 18:23–35 (the unmerciful servant); 20:1–16 (laborers in the vineyard); 25:15 (parable of the talents); 26:7 (the value of the oil of spikenard); 27:3–10 (thirty pieces of silver); and 28:12–15 (bribery of the soldiers).

9:10–13. Instructions to the Pharisees. Because Jesus was eating with people regarded as unclean—namely, publicans and sinners—the Pharisees asked His disciples why He would eat with sinners. Table purity, hand washing, and purity of association were important to the Pharisees. Jesus tried to explain His view in a way that they might understand: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matthew 9:12). Jesus, as the God of the Old Testament, had already taught, “I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26), anticipating His Atonement. He was not angry with the Pharisees at this point, which is significant. Instead, He quoted Hosea 6:6, saying, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Later, Jesus had some very stinging words to say to the Pharisees, but here, He respected their question and tried to teach them.

Matthew 9:14–17. Challenge 2: Why Do Jesus’s Disciples Not Fast When Others Do?

After the calling of Matthew and the meal with the publicans and sinners, some disciples of John the Baptist arrived and asked Jesus why some of His teachings differed from John’s, particularly in John’s great use of fasting. While John and his followers lived in the wilderness, Jesus and His disciples were interacting with people in cities and villages. Jesus answered by likening Himself to a bridegroom who was present at the reception where people celebrated and especially ate together.

The bridegroom was symbolic of a new master who would be introducing new changes in the household of God. Jesus explained that an old, worn-out garment (which would represent previous sectarian practices) cannot be repaired with strong, new fabric (representing the new revelations given by John and Jesus). Strong patches would, by their strength, tear the old cloth. While the innovations introduced by John the Baptist were important steps in preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus had come not simply to patch a few holes or reconnect some old seams but much more, to fulfill, reform, and transform all the several varieties of Judaism in His day. As Jesus opened a whole new dispensation in the Father’s eternal plan and just as each dispensation brings new glory, revelation, and rejoicing, Jesus and His disciples did not live as ascetics fasting out in the desert or worrying excessively about impurity laws. Instead, they put on Zion’s beautiful garments and enjoyed wedding feasts anticipating the fullness of the bridegroom’s final coming.

Matthew 9:18–19. Miracle 7: The Request of a Ruler on Behalf of His Daughter

The next miracle involved a ruler of unspecified nationality, at least in Matthew’s account. Mark defines him, assuming that this is the same incident, as “one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name,” a high-ranking leader of the local Jewish congregation (Mark 5:22).

This ruler came and worshiped Jesus, asking Him to lay His hand upon his deceased daughter to restore her to life. There is no indication that Jesus’s ability to raise the dead was public knowledge; in fact, this is the only story of raising the dead in the Gospel of Matthew, though the raising of the son of the widow in Nain (Luke 7:15) happened about this same time. For several reasons, the faith of this Jewish leader is remarkable. Jesus’s reputation was growing, and this ruler of the synagogue would have known well the scriptural accounts of children being raised from the dead in nearby areas by the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:32). See Matthew 9:23–31 below for the conclusion of this miracle.

The ruler’s request is a good example for Latter-day Saints of healing the sick through the laying on of hands, which is still part of the restored gospel. As early as 1831, William McLellin was specifically instructed by the Lord, “Lay your hands upon the sick, and they shall recover” (Doctrine and Covenants 66:9). One must demonstrate faith in the Savior through both words and actions. Bruce R. McConkie reminds the reader that restoring the dead to life is not the same as resurrection in the eternal sense, though it may carry some symbolism of the latter.⁹

Matthew 9:20–22. Miracle 8: Healing a Woman Who Touched the Fringe of Jesus’s Garment

As Jesus and His disciples were on the way to heal the ruler’s daughter, a Jewish woman who had suffered twelve years of a hemorrhage felt that if she exercised faith and touched the hem of Jesus’s garment, she would be healed. The “issue of blood” would have made her impure under Jewish law, probably leaving her very lonely and desperate, though she would not have suffered the same level of rejection as a leper. She came behind Jesus and touched His hem. She did this perhaps because she did not want to draw attention to her condition, but she trusted and understood His power. The hem (Greek *kraspedon*, Hebrew *tzitziyot*) refers to the fringes or tassels on the four corners of the outer garment worn by observant Jews to remind them always to keep all the commandments (see Numbers 15:38–9; Deuteronomy 22:12). Jesus conformed with this aspect of Jewish law.

The woman’s trust became active faith, and she was healed immediately. She reached forth, making the least possible contact, enough to ensure a cure but not enough to be noticed. Jesus, however, noticed and kindly turned to the woman, telling her that her faithfulness had made her whole. This was an instance when someone touched Jesus in faith based on knowledge and this understanding drove the miracle. Mark and Luke mention that Jesus felt power leaving Him, but Matthew does not include that detail.

Although some scholars have defined the woman's touching of the hem of the garment as a superstitious act, Bruce R. McConkie clarified that it is false to suppose that this woman was healed through a superstitious belief attached to the clothes worn by Jesus. Rather, she had faith to be healed, and such faith is based on truth and knowledge.¹⁰

Matthew 9:23–31. Miracle 7 (Continued): Raising of the Ruler's Daughter from Death

After the healing of the woman, Jesus continued to follow the ruler home; in this case, He did not "speak the word" remotely. Unlike the centurion, this ruler had no concerns about Jesus entering his house. The breadth of Jesus's compassion is evident in that He was willing to work with whoever came.

Jesus interrupted the ceremonial grieving that was taking place. It seems that Jesus was asking these professional mourners, who were common in the ancient world, to stop working. They laughed at Him. But when the crowd was dismissed, Jesus went in and took the twelve-year-old girl by the hand, with no concern on His part about possible corpse impurity. To everyone's joy and amazement, she arose. Even though (according to Mark and Luke) Jesus had told His disciples to keep awareness of this miracle private, there was no way to keep it quiet. The professional mourners and family members, of course, were fully aware of what had happened. News spread quickly throughout the region.

Matthew 9:27–31. Miracle 9: Healing Two Faithful Blind Men

As Jesus was leaving the house of the ruler, two men who were blind came to Jesus, pleading, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." These two men addressed Jesus as "Son of David," which implied that He was the heir to the throne and also the prophesied Messiah. Although they were blind, their powers of spiritual perception were clearly in tune. This label (Son of David) was also used by the pleading Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22. Healing the blind, literally and spiritually, is mentioned in the messianic Psalm 146:8: "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous."

Jesus took the somewhat unusual but important step of confirming the faith of these two blind men before He took action. He asked the men if they really believed that He could heal them, and when they answered yes, He touched their eyes while saying, "According to your faith, be it unto you," and they were healed, by words and touch, driven by their faith. In modern times, the Lord has likewise made it clear that faith is also needed to receive knowledge, revelation, and needed abilities, as Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, and Emma Smith were told.¹¹

Once again, Jesus asked these two healed men to tell no one, but as did many recipients of Jesus's miraculous power, they "spread abroad his fame in all that country."

Matthew 9:32–34. Miracle 10: Healing a Man Who Could Not Speak

As the two formerly blind men left, yet another man who was both unable to speak and possessed by an evil spirit was brought to Jesus to be healed. Jesus cast the evil spirit out, and the man regained his verbal abilities. The crowd marveled and exclaimed, “It was never so seen in Israel,” whereas the Pharisees, no doubt following Jesus around, persisted in claiming that He was unlawfully casting out devils “by the prince of the devils.”

With this tenth miracle, Matthew shifted the focus from explaining the act of the exorcism itself to the reaction of those present. This new, mixed reaction became more and more typical for Jesus as His ministry progressed and opposition built. Importantly, the Greek here expresses a continuous past, speaking of what the Pharisees *were saying* about Jesus rather than the King James Version’s translation “said,” which only expresses a simple, completed past.

Matthew 9:35. Summary of Jesus’s Miracles in Matthew 8–9

These two chapters report ten specific miracles in some detail, but many more were discussed generally. Matthew provided a useful one-verse summary of these additional cases: Jesus went to *all* the cities and villages, teaching in synagogues, preaching the “gospel of the kingdom,” and “healing *every* sickness and *every* disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35; emphasis added). This clearly illustrates the scope and range of Jesus’s work. These two chapters also demonstrate the extent of Jesus’s compassion. People from a wide range of socioeconomic classes and nationalities are shown in the ten detailed cases. Those included range from presumably unemployed madmen and people with palsy to the son or servant of a Roman centurion and the daughter of a Jewish ruler. In these explicitly described healings, six of the healed were men, two were women, one was a male child, and one was a female child. This broad range of Jesus’s work symbolizes the healing or restoring of all humankind, which is still a function of Christ’s work that is present today.

Matthew 9:35–38. Instruction 2: Pray That God Will Send More Laborers to Work in the Harvest

This chapter ends with a report of Jesus going around to all the cities and towns, preaching and healing. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin had prophesied that the Messiah “shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (Mosiah 3:5).

In Galilee, Jesus’s ministry was immediately popular, yet He was “moved with compassion” because there were so many that were needy of both spiritual and physical help. Jesus was filled with concern for these people because they were “like sheep having no shepherd.” They lacked good leaders. Luke records

the same words as Matthew in Luke 10:2, but Luke also reports that Jesus spoke of the people as “lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). There, the problem was that the people had become vulnerable to predators. In Matthew 9, Jesus’s words came immediately before He called the Twelve Apostles, whereas in Luke 10 this saying comes immediately after Jesus called the “other seventy.” At both points, what He needed was more missionaries.

9:37. *The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.* Jesus asked His disciples to pray that God would send more people to help others come unto Christ. He used the imagery of the Lord’s harvest, which appears many times in the scriptures. Here it conveys a sense of the urgent need for missionary work—a harvest cannot be accomplished at a leisurely pace. It was imperative that any harvest be performed in a timely and effective manner as directed by the overseer or lord of the field.

John, in a similar setting, recorded Jesus warning against procrastination in helping with the harvest: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35).

10:1. *He gave them authority over impure spirits to cast them out, and to heal every disease and sickness.* It is not a coincidence, then, that in the very next verse (Matthew 10:1) Jesus gave His twelve a commission to heal and cast out evil spirits. Ever afterwards, they would be called Apostles (agents and special witnesses of Christ). His ministry set the pattern for the missionary labors of all succeeding ages. We have been commanded in our day to “proclaim the gospel, the things of the kingdom” (Doctrine and Covenants 71:1), to heal, bless, minister, and teach. Today, too, there is an urgent need for missionaries to heal and teach people around the world.

Notes

1 Isaiah 6:10; see also Exodus 15:26; Psalm 30:2.

2 Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” October 2015 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

3 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 306.

4 Origen, *Fragment 161*; *Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Berlin, Germany: Akademie-Verlag, 1897–), 41.1:80; Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1–13*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 1a* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 167.

5 Job 38:8–11; Psalms 65:7; 89:9; 107:29.

6 Joseph Fielding Smith, sel., *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1993), 188.

7 John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in Light of the Temple* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 135.

- 8 Hilary Le Cornu and Joseph Shulam, *The Jewish Roots of Acts*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, Israel: Academon Press, 2003), 321.
- 9 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965–1990), 1:316.
- 10 McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:316.
- 11 Doctrine and Covenants 8:11; 11:17; 25:9.

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