

Matthew 9:18-34

This morning I got up early as I usually do, especially on a Sunday morning.

I get up early partly because there is a lot to do, partly because I love the peace of the early morning, but most of all because that peace brings perspective. Daily life is turbulent isn't it - conversations, arguments, chores, deadlines, worries, confusions, decisions, emotions, events – we feel like piece of flotsam in a churning river.

Many times in my life it has been nature that has given me perspective. I remember 25 years ago cycling frantically to an exam, and suddenly realising that the avenue of chestnut trees I was passing through was in full bloom. Their timeless beauty stood in stark contrast to my frantic anxiety. I cycled just a little slower to my exam.

I was reminded of that last night as watched Robert Redford's film, *A River Runs Through It*. It is a beautifully evocative film about a father and his two sons in Montana. Their lives find their deepest connection with each other, and more profoundly with reality, when they go fly fishing on the wild Blackfoot River. Somehow the turbulent river which has run forever becomes a metaphor for life.

But there is something downplayed in the film which is more prominent in Norman MacLean's book. The boys' father is a Presbyterian minister. Neither son has any faith, but Maclean describes their father on one occasion, sitting by the river while his son fishes. The son returns and sees that his father has his Greek New Testament open at the beginning of John's Gospel, and he reads

En arche ein ho logos
"In the beginning was the Word"

The father sees something beyond the river, which the son cannot see. A foundation deeper and more permanently than the slowly eroding rocks. He sees Jesus – the Word of God, made flesh.

I get up early in the morning, not to admire the trees, or sit by a river, but to open my bible and gain perspective.

In chapters 8 & 9 of his gospel Matthew has been giving his readers perspective. When he wrote his gospel the Christians were a growing group, but increasingly marginalised. The Jews, amongst whom Christianity had been born were increasingly hostile. The Romans, who ruled the world, either ignored Christians or in a casually barbarous manner persecuted them. What's going on?

Matthew will explain that Jesus expected to be rejected. He expected to be despised. He expected to be crucified. He warned his disciples that they must expect the same.

But in chapters 8 & 9 he affirms something far more fundamental. Jesus is in control. Jesus is inexorably working out his good purposes. Jesus is unstoppable. Matthew 8 & 9 is a collection of stories – gathered together by Matthew – every one of which affirms Jesus' authority. They anticipate his final great statement when he was risen from the dead

All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me...

And now that we are nearing the end of Matthew 9 we can see what Jesus is doing. If you are a Christian here, what Jesus is doing in your life. What Jesus is doing in his world.

What is Jesus doing?

Sets of three miracle stories

Mat 8:1-17 – reversals

Unclean became clean

A gentile had faith

And most important reversal of all - Jesus would bear the punishment for our sins – 8:17

Mat 8:23-9:7 – power

Power over wind and waves

Power over spiritual forces of evil – demon possessed men

Power to forgive – “so that you may that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – 9:6

What is he calling us to do?

Interactions between the miracle stories

Mat 8:18-22 - Absolutely nothing must get in the way of following him

Mat 9:9-17 – but not be wild-eyed fanatics - new

New people - Grace – Matthew and his party for prostitutes, because it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.

New habits - Celebration – they don't fast while Jesus, the bridegroom is with them

New structures – new wineskins – the gospel is not containable in old structures – it will always be bursting out.

- If you have not been moved by this – what's wrong?

1. What Jesus is doing – 9:18-34

Healing and raising the dead – vv18-26

Two miracles intertwined

A dead ruler's daughter

A woman subject to bleeding

The woman

touches his cloak – v20

And she is healed – v22b

The daughter

Jesus arrives when the funeral is in full flow – v23

But he revives her – v24

Opening the eyes of the blind – vv27-31

He heals them – vv29-30a

Opening the mouths of the mute – vv32-34

There is a spiritual dimension to this muteness – v32

Remember: just because we don't witness "demon possession" in our culture shouldn't divert us from an awareness that spiritual forces of evil are real.

Jesus enables him to speak – v33a

2. The significance

A fulfilment of Old Testament hopes

Isaiah 35:5-6

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy... (Isaiah 35:5-6)

Isaiah 26 – resurrection

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. (Isaiah 26:19)

A promise of the future

Raised immortal

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

"Then we will see him"

They will see his face... (Revelation 22:4)

They never stopped praising

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13)

A promise for today

Brought from death to life

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1-5)

Our eyes opened

And we, who with unveiled faces all behold the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)
For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Speak

....and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

To declare the praises of him

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** (1 Peter 2:9)

- This is what he is doing in the world... amongst us
 - Giving life
 - Opening blinds eyes
 - Enabling us to speak – to praise him, to speak to others.

3. The lessons

The inevitability of the spreading message

V26 "news of this spread"

Vv30-31 – "but they went out and spread the news"

- Jesus is unstoppable – the message is unstoppable

The centrality of faith in Christ

The woman with bleeding "take heart daughter your faith has healed you" – v22

- Nietzsche spoke of faith as a sickness – here faith makes people well!
 - Faith in Jesus heals -

The blind men – even more prominent

"followed him" – v27

Called him "Son of David" – v27

"do you believe" – v28

"according to your faith it will be done" – v29

- People speak about "blind faith" – here faith enables people to see.
- Not yet followers – "do you believe?"
- To believers – Jesus has given you - life, sight, speech
 - Enjoy them – use them.
- Jesus is unstoppable