Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Responding to Jesus' Power
Scripture: Matthew 9:33-35
Code: 2268

We're continuing our study this morning in Matthew, chapter 9. We come, really, to a very brief portion for our lesson and I'd like to read it to you, and then we'll move on to discuss what the Spirit of God would have us to learn from it. You'll remember that in our last study together, we stopped at verse 33 with the healing of the man who was deaf and dumb, and was deaf and dumb because of the presence of a demon. Matthew immediately follows that miracle with a statement of response; and so we begin in the middle of verse 33: "And the multitudes marveled, saying, 'It was never so seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'He casteth out demons through the prince of the demons.' And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." And so Matthew gives us the response to the miracles that Jesus had done. There was the marveling multitude and the rejecting religionists.

But before we get into that specifically, let me see if I can't set your thinking in line with what the text is saying to us. When our Lord was a small boy, just about 40 days old, just a baby, He was taken by His mother and by Joseph to the temple; because it was required that she offer an offering of purification after giving birth to a child. And while they were in the temple, they had occasion to meet a very interesting man by the name of Simeon. Simeon was an old man who had, all his life long, been waiting for the arrival of the Messiah; and now he had the privilege of seeing the Messiah. And in Luke 2:30, he says, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." He saw what he had been waiting for, and then he spoke to Mary and said this, "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Now Simeon said, "This Child will become the dividing line of destiny. He is set for the fall and the rising again of many." In substance, Simeon said to Mary, "This Child will become the dividing line to determine ultimate destiny for every individual. Some will reject Him and fall. Some will receive Him and rise again."

It's always been that way in God's economy. There are those who are planted like the tree by the river of waters that bring forth fruit, and there are those who are the chaff. There are the godly, and there are the ungodly. There are the righteous and the unrighteous, and only those two categories. My grandfather used to say, "There are only two kinds of people in the world, the saints and the *ain’ts* ." And that's it, "And this Child is set for the fall and the rising of many." This, frankly, was not new information to Mary, although it had never been said just this way regarding her Child. But back in the first chapter of Luke, as she was expressing praise to God when the announcement came to her that she would bear a Child who would be a mighty Child, she said this, speaking of God:

"And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shown strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away."

Now, Mary knew that it was characteristic of God to receive some and refuse others, to bless some and curse others, to show strength to some by gathering them, and to scatter others, to pull down the exalted, and to lift up the humble, to fill the hungry and to send away the full. In other words, there would always be this dividing line between those whom God blessed, and those whom God cursed. On the one hand, there are the arrogant, the rich, the mighty; on the other, the poor, the hungry, and the humble. So Mary knew this because she knew theology, she knew the Old Testament. And it was confirmed to her by Simeon that her Child would be the very crux of this. And when Jesus came, and when He spoke, He affirmed this, for later on in the same gospel of Luke, chapter 6, verse 20, it says of our Lord, that:

"He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, 'Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in Heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

“But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

There are the blessed and the cursed, and *woe* means *to curse*. So Jesus affirmed again a dividing line. Blessed and cursed. There are those, said our Lord in Matthew 7, who enter the narrow gate and are blessed; those who enter the broad gate and are damned. There are those who build their house upon the rock, and it stands in judgment. There are those who build their house on the sand, and it collapses. There are those who try to hold onto their life and lose it. There are those who lose their life and, in so losing it, they find it. All the way through the gospel record, which records for us the thrust of the preaching of Jesus, do we find that He offers Himself as a dividing line.

In Matthew, chapter 10, verse 32, He says, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father who is in Heaven." In other words, if you identify yourself with Jesus Christ, God will identify you as well, as His own; but if you deny Jesus Christ, then Christ will deny you before the Father. And so said He, "I came not to send peace [on the earth], but a sword.” Again, a dividing line: “to set a man at variance against his father, the daughter against her mother,

and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." It goes like that incessantly through the record of Matthew and the other gospels, as well. It says that a man had two sons; came to the first and said, “Go work in the vineyard.” The son said, “I will,” and didn't, and afterward repented, and did. He said to the second, “Go,” and he said, “I will,” and didn't go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, “The first one.” Jesus said unto them, “Verily, I say unto you that tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." In other words, the first son said, "I won't." In other words, he was irreligious. He lived a life of disobedience to his father, but he repented and went. The second son said, "I will." He was religious. He had the façade of religion. He pretended to obey, pretended to be submissive, but he didn't go. Son number one, who said no and repented, was the tax collector, and the publican, and the sinner. Son number two, who said, “I will,” but didn't, was the Pharisee, and the hypocrite, and the religionist. And Jesus said the tax collectors and the harlots would go into the kingdom before the religionists would. And again, there's a dividing line. It isn't the ones who are religious, and the ones who are irreligious. It is the ones who obey the will of the Father. And the will of the Father is expressed in this: "The Father spoke from Heaven and said, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear ye Him.'" Christ becomes the demarcation line.

The apostle Paul picks up this same concept that the entire human race is divided into believers and unbelievers, into heaven-bound souls and hell-bound souls, into the blessed and the cursed, the rewarded and the damned; and that the dividing line is their faith or lack of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll notice in 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul gives a little bit of a benediction and says, "Thanks be unto God, who causes us to triumph always in Christ, and He makes manifest the fragrance of His knowledge by us in every place." In other words, there's a certain fragrance that a Christian has, a certain savor, a certain flavor, if you will, a certain odor, a certain exuding representation of God. We touch the world, as it were, with the fragrance of God. "We are a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish." In other words, both the saved and the lost, and there are those two categories, the saved and the ones that perish, receive the fragrance from our lives. That is our living testimony and our verbalized testimony. "But to the one,” it says in verse 16, “we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life." In other words, what Paul is saying is that we who are Christians, who live and preach the gospel, are actually radiating that reality to the saved and the perishing. To the perishing, it is a fragrance of death unto death. In other words, they are already dead in their rejection; and the more they hear the gospel, the deeper their lostness becomes.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, "They tread under their feet the blood of the covenant, counting it an unholy thing." In other words, constant rejection of the gospel deepens the deadness; and so that we then, as we live and preach, become to the unbeliever a savor of death unto death, a compounding of their doom; and their hell is all the more terrible the more times they have rejected the truth. On the other hand, as we preach the gospel to those who are already alive in Christ, it is the savor of life unto life. It is the expanding, exploding, increasing, enriching understanding of the

fullness of life in Christ. Everyone, then, is either dead or alive, spiritually, and receiving the Word of God as a savor: a savor of death unto death, a deepening of the deadness of their sinfulness, increasing their responsibility before God, which means a more fearful eternal hell; or, on the other hand, of life unto life.

Now, Jesus is this dividing line, and Matthew makes that abundantly clear in chapters 8 and 9. So turn back now, in case you're not there anymore, to chapter 9, and what Matthew wants to do for us is to help us to understand that Christ is who He is and that a decision must be made. A British writer by the name of Haywood said, "The problem with humanity is this. Humanity stands at the crossroads and all of the signposts have fallen down." But not for Matthew; they haven't fallen down. He puts them up very clearly: and he calls upon us to make a right choice, to choose life, to choose righteousness, godliness, to choose to believe. That's what Matthew wants us to do. And in order to help us make the choice for Christ, he presents, in chapters 8 and 9, irrefutable evidence that Christ is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior. So Matthew lifts up the signpost: "This is the narrow way. Enter this way. This is the way of faith in Christ."

Now, in order to convince us that Christ is who He claims to be, Matthew records in chapters 8 and 9 nine miracles, wondrous miracles. Miracles beyond the capacity of any human being, not only to do, but even to fathom; and they are not the full scope of all of His miracles, but are only samples. And I think it's important for you to remember, for example, John, chapter 20, verse 30, which says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book." Then in 21:25 he says, "If they should be written..., I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." These are just sample miracles of the uncountable miracles that He did.

But you'll recall, and just quickly I'm going to run it by you, so stay with me on this thought. You'll recall that he gives nine miracles; and he divides them into sections of three each; and after each section of three, he has a response section. How did people respond to these miracles? First the miracles regarding His power over disease: He healed a leper. He healed a centurion's servant of paralysis, and then He healed Peter's mother-in-law of fever. Then in the area of disorder, He stilled the storm, calming the waves and the sea. That's physical disorder. Then with spiritual disorder, He dealt by casting out a legion of demons. Then with moral disorder, by healing the paralytic and forgiving his sins. And then He dealt with death, giving back dead speech, dead eyes, and actually raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. And each of these demonstrated Christ's power in another dimension and were representative of the myriads of miracles that He performed in all of those same categories. And following each set of miracles was a response section, and that is precisely what we see in verses 33 to 35.

And, actually, verse 35 is just sort of a, a little bracket that's stuck in there to match up with chapter 4, verse 23, and it kind of brackets the whole Galilean ministry in a very special way. If you look back,

for example, at Matthew 4:23, it might be good to just make a note of it. It says there, "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." Now go over to verse 35 of chapter 9: Says the same thing, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing every sickness and every disease among the people." That's just put in there as kind of a bracket to put a context around the Sermon on the Mount and all of these miracles that He had done. This was the essence of His Galilean ministry.

Now, I want us to start at verse 35, and then work back in these three short verses. So let's look, first of all, at the works of the Lord; and then we'll look at the response in verses 33 and 34. Note verse 35. It says that "Jesus went about..." and, by the way, the verb *went about* has the idea of a constant, incessant, continuous effort. He was constantly at it, constantly doing it; and you can see why as you look back, and it says, "He went about all the cities and villages." And chapter 4, verse 23 marks these cities and villages of, as those of Galilee: the northern part, the country, the fertile area, the area where the food was grown, so much of it. Now, Josephus tells us that, at the time of Jesus, there were probably 204 towns and villages. The difference, just as a note, between a city and a village was a wall. If you had a wall, you were a city. If you didn't have a wall, you were a village. Little villages didn't fortify themselves, but cities did. And so whether it was a city or a village, He was in all of them; and that would be about a seventy-by-forty-mile area including approximately 200, or 205 or four, towns. And He was moving through all of these rapidly. Josephus writes, "The cities are numerous, and the multitude of villages everywhere crowded with men owing to the fertility of the soil, so that the smallest of them contains above fifteen thousand inhabitants." Simple mathematics will tell you, then, that there were three million people that Jesus could've reached in just the area of Galilee as He mingled.

And so He "moved rapidly through all of these villages and towns, healing, preaching, and teaching." Now, these are the three things we want to focus on in verse 35: Teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. Now, beloved, I confess at this point that those three things or any given one of those could be enough to take us till the rapture, if we just discussed the teaching that Jesus taught, or the preaching that He preached, or the healing that He did. So we're not going to try to exhaust all of those. But let me see if I can't give you some insight. We'll just look at these three elements of the ministry of Jesus.

First, teaching in their synagogues. What does this involve? Wherever there were Jewish people, there was a synagogue, a gathering-together place. That was the center of Jewish community life. It was a church. It was a town hall. It was the local court. It was everything. It was where the Jewish people met together in the community. Now, the synagogue was a kind of a late addition to Judaism. It didn't come around until the Babylonian captivity. All of their worship had been focused on the temple. But when they were taken out of their country and the temple was destroyed, and they went

into Babylon for those seventy years, wherever there were little groups of Jewish people, they met together, and they assembled together, and they formed these little synagogues or assemblies. And since they've never rebuilt their temple, they have them to this day. Half a block down the street here is a Jewish quote unquote temple. They call it a temple, but it isn't a temple. There's only one place that temples can be. It is a synagogue; and they're all over the place. In our city and in all the cities of the world where Jewish people are, wherever you get ten men together, you can have a synagogue; and so they're all over.

And in the time of our Lord in Galilee, there were synagogues in all the little towns and villages. They were usually built on a hill or, if there wasn't a hill, they were built at least on the highest spot, or if there weren't any high spots, they'd build them by a river. Very often, they left the top open, as the temple had been, so they could see out, see God's creation and look up to Heaven, as was part of their worship. They identified their synagogue normally by a great, tall pole that shot right up into the air much like the steeple on a New England church marks each little town. So you could always tell where the synagogue was; and any Jew who was a stranger in town could just follow his way to the pole, and know he would be at the place.

Now, they, every Sabbath, would meet together for worship. They also had a special worship on the second and the fifth day of every week, and they met for every feast, every festival, and every high, holy day. Their service, frankly, was very simple; and it was not unlike the service of the church today. They began with what they called thanksgivings or blessings, much as we might begin by singing our praises. They would speak of blessing of the Lord and thankfulness for what He had done. That was followed by a prayer, and the prayer was concluded by a responding amen from the congregation. Then a prescribed reader would stand up and read the law of Moses, one of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch; and it would be read in Hebrew, the original language of its writing, and then translated by the translator into Aramaic, which was the common speech of the day. That would then be followed by the reading of a passage from one of the prophets, which also would be read in Hebrew and translated by the translator into Aramaic. Following the reading of the Pentateuch and the prophets, there would then be a sermon or an exhortation, followed by a benediction and a final amen from the people.

Now, the Jews always thought of the synagogue as a place of teaching, a place of instruction. They came together to learn. We have the remnants of that today. The Yiddish word for synagogue is *schul* , much like our word *school* and spelled S C H U L. So they saw the synagogue as a teaching place. They also saw it as a court of law. As they were in occupied countries from time to time in their history, of course, they would have to have jurisdiction granted to them by the occupying government; but when that was granted to them, they would exercise whatever authority they had in their synagogues. For example, our Lord said, the day would come “when they will scourge you in their synagogues." They would render the verdict and even carry out the punishment right in the synagogue. The synagogues became public schools for the training of boys in the Talmud. The

synagogues also became theological schools. Their affairs were administered by ten elders of the synagogue. Three of them were called the rulers of the synagogue. They also acted as the judges. A fourth was called the angel of the assembly, which is a leader of the others. One was the interpreter who translated the Hebrew into the Aramaic. One ran the theological school, and so forth. In other words, they had divisions of responsibility as elders.

Philo, the historian, I think has a very interesting note. He said, "Synagogues were mainly for the detailed reading and exposition of Scripture." That's an important note. They came together for the reading and the exposition of the Scripture, and we find this Scripture orientation illustrated to us in Acts 17. The apostle Paul found his way to the little town of Berea, and he says he went there into the synagogue of the Jews; and he said he gave them the Word, and they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so. In other words, that was what a synagogue was for, the searching of the Scriptures. Now, when the sermon was given on any given day, it could be given by any leading member of the congregation who was erudite or knowledgeable in the Scripture. He would stand up and give the sermon; but if, perchance, there happened to be a visiting dignitary or a visiting rabbi, it was proper and customary to let that rabbi preach and give the sermon. This was what was called the freedom of the synagogue; and, by the way, I think the Lord had something to do with setting this up, because He had a few itinerant preachers that were going to come through the Jewish culture; and He wanted to make sure they'd have the right platforms. The two that come to mind are Jesus and Paul; and because of what was known as the freedom of the synagogue, they always had access to preaching and teaching in the synagogue.

Now, the mode of teaching in a synagogue was exposition of Scripture. Read it and explain it and apply it. That is what they did, based on what Nehemiah says, when it says they read the Scripture and gave the sense of it. People say, "Well, why do you just teach the Bible and, and this is so different than we're used to," but this is really not anything new, folks. This is the way it's always been and always should be. Where you read the Scripture and you explain the Scripture; that is what they did in the synagogue. That is what they did as far back as Nehemiah when they read and gave the sense of it. Now, the Master of doing this was our Lord. Look at Luke 4, and I want to kind of hurry along, so we don't get cut short on the end of this; but I want to show you this illustration in Luke 4, verse 15. Now, Jesus taught in the synagogue. We saw that in Matthew 9:35. The verse is our text. But we come and we see the same thing in Luke 4:15. He taught in the synagogues.

Now, here we find a very good illustration of how He did that. Verse 16: "He came to Nazareth, where He'd been brought up: As His custom was, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and [since He was there as a visiting teacher] He stood up to read." And He read, not the Pentateuch, but he read the book of the prophet Isaiah. It was delivered to Him to read. He opened it, "found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,

and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'"

Every Jew in that synagogue knew that that passage referred to whom? Messiah; they knew that. And He had a very short sermon. He closed the book, gave it to the servant, and sat down. And they always sat down to teach. "And the eyes of all of them in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, 'This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.'" He said, "I am the living fulfillment of that passage. That is the proper interpretation of that text: Me." Well that's fairly shocking news, folks, for them. He went on to say some other things; and by the time He got done, verse 28 says, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, rose up, thrust Him out of the city, led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way."

So He taught in the synagogues. How? By expositing the Word of God; and, in His case, it was direct application; and they didn't like His interpretation at all and tried to kill Him for it; but this was only one incident. I don't know how many other times He had to escape with His life; but He went through all the villages, says Matthew 9:35, and cities, teaching in the synagogues. The reason I believe in expository preaching is because that's the kind Jesus did; and I believe that is still the thrust for God's people when they gather together. But there was a second element to His ministry. Look back at verse 35 again. He also was preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Now, what does it mean that He was preaching? Well, that's a different word: *kerusso*, *to herald*, to make a public announcement, to make a proclamation. And it wasn't just that He was teaching in the synagogues, expositorily; but He was also out on the street corners, and on the hillsides, and by the sea, and in the houses, and along the roadway, and in the fields, and everywhere; and He was preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

And here was the more evangelistic, here was the, the great thrust to those who were outside the religious environment. And His message was always the same: Good news. That's what *gospel* means. We'll see that tonight as we study Romans. Good news, and good news about what? About the kingdom. Oh, the Jews had waited so long for the kingdom, so long, and now the good news, the kingdom. But this was not the exposition of the Old Testament, as He was doing in the synagogue. This was the proclamation of the New Testament. This was the unfolding of the mysteries which had been hidden from people, and time, in the past. This was the new covenant, the new revelation, the proclamation; and always the kingdom, always the kingdom. "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom....Seek ye first the kingdom....When you pray, pray, 'Thy kingdom come.'" And that's not just a future kingdom. When He was preaching the kingdom, He was calling people to believe in Himself; and the moment anyone believes in Christ, he enters the kingdom. "He's translated [says Paul] from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His dear Son." It's an instant transaction. You're in the kingdom if you're a Christian. So am I. Christ is the King. He rules my life. I'm His subject. He feeds me with the resources of His unlimited riches.

So the kingdom can be entered now. That's why He talked about a narrow gate. It refers to the rule of Christ and the reign of Christ, here and now, as well as then and there. And so He was preaching the kingdom; that it was available to all who would believe and receive; and that, provided in that kingdom were numerous blessings. And so there is our Lord in a two-fold ministry: teaching the exposition of the Old Testament, giving it its proper place, speaking of its fulfillment; and on top of that, proclaiming the new, the new covenant, the mysteries, the unfolding of revelation that had never been known before, in His proclamation. It also points to us, doesn't it, the importance of those ministries together: that you must have the church, even today, which comes together for the exposition of the Word of God; and you must go out into the highways and byways and proclaim the message of the gospel of the kingdom.

Now, thirdly, both of these speaking ministries were verified by the miracles; and that comes third. Healing every sickness and every disease among the people, and that's right where it belongs, third, because that was not the main issue. That was only a way to affirm the validity of the first two. B. B. Warfield says, "When our Lord came to earth, He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry [His ministry] were but the trailing clouds of glory, which he brought from Heaven, which is His home." He dragged glory with Him, and He affirmed His message by His miracles. He proved that the kingdom was at hand. Why? Because all of those miracles He did were samples of what the Messiah was to do when the kingdom came, and there was no way to refute them. Do you know that the Pharisees never denied His miracles? They only denied the source of them, because they were undeniable. They were literally overwhelming.

So we see the work of the Lord. But let's close our thoughts by looking at the response of the people, and it doesn't take very long to see what it was. We've already seen some responses. We've already learned something about response. The first three miracles that Matthew gave us in chapter 8 had a response. There was a little section there, you remember, on three men who said, "We want to follow You, Lord." But because they loved personal comfort and personal riches and personal relationships, they turned their back and walked away. You remember that? They illustrate one response; a sort of a superficial interest that never comes to real flower, a sort of a momentary response, a fascination that really has no true root to it. And then in the second three miracles, there was a response, as well. The first response was the conversion of Matthew. The second response was the irritation of the Pharisees, and the third was the confusion of the disciples of John the Baptist. And so, again, Matthew is giving us categories of response. There are many people who are fascinated with Jesus. They start out wanting to follow; but because they love personal comfort, personal riches, things, or relationships in their lives they're not willing to give up, they back out. Then there are people like Matthew, who really believe, and who go out and bring all their tax collector, prostitute friends to believe, also. And then there are people like the Pharisees who just get irritated at what Jesus says, because He confronts their status quo. And then there are people like followers of John the Baptist, who all their life have been in one religious system and they're very confused about this new thing

that they're hearing.

And now we come to the third set of miracles and the third set of responses, and there are two. Verse 33: "The multitude marveled." Verse 34, the religionists rejected, and they said He did it by the power of Satan. They couldn't deny that He did it. They just denied the source was God. Two more kinds of responses. Now may I also hasten to add that in Matthew's selection of miracles, he has picked out, in chapter 9, some wonderful miracles where people not only were healed but also were redeemed. The paralytic in verse 2 obviously expressed faith enough to be saved. The publican Matthew in verse 9 was saved. The ruler in verse 18 was saved. The woman with the issue of blood in verse 21 was saved. The blind men in verse 28 were saved, and so we've seen some with the right response. Some have really believed along the line; and there will be those who believe and those who are fickle in fascination; and there will be those who are irritated; and those who are sort of confused. Matthew was calling all of us to make the right decision.

Let's look at the marveling of the mob for a minute in verse 33. It says, "The multitudes marveled, saying, 'It was never so seen in Israel.'" This is without question, they said, the greatest display of power ever in the history of Israel, “and we've seen some pretty hot stuff." They remembered Moses and the miracles of his time. They remembered Elijah and Elisha and the miracles of their time. They remember the tremendous things that God had done. They could go back to just the time of Moses and talk about the drowning of the Egyptian army. They could talk about incredible things like God writing the law on the stone on Mount Sinai. They could talk about so many things; the fall of Jericho. They had seen wondrous things in their past, but never in all their history had ever anything been seen like this. This was a display of divine power that was unequaled in Jewish history. And so you know what? They marveled. They marveled. And the word *marvel*, *thaumazo*, is a very full, comprehensive kind of word. It can mean they were amazed. They were astonished. They were, in fact, super-astonished. There's one occasion where Mark 12:17 uses the word *ekthaumazo*; they were really amazed and really astonished. And in Matthew 27:14, it used marvel; and it adds the little term *lion*, which means *exceedingly* marveled. They were amazed beyond amazement at what He did. It was breathtaking to see the things He was doing. It was incomprehensible to their human minds. They were shocked. They were in awe. The word includes terror, fear, and awe, such as the disciples in the boat who were more afraid when Jesus stopped the storm than they were when the storm was threatening to take their life; because they knew they were in a boat with God; and when you know you're in the same boat with God, and He can see everything in your heart, it's a little terrorizing. So the people were literally astounded.

In Luke 9:43, this might sum it up: "And they were all astonished at the mighty power of God...[and] they marveled every one at all things which Jesus did." It just literally was more than their minds could conceive. They marveled. They were fascinated. So much so that, eventually in Matthew chapter 21, they could make only one conclusion: "And the multitude," it says, the same multitude that marveled. That's a broad word. The multitude said, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in

the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.'" They threw palm branches at His feet. That's the marveling multitude: "Isn't He wonderful? Oh, He's the Messiah." The next thing you know, they got the word that He was going against the establishment; that He was preaching a message that they didn't want to hear; that He was a threat to their security, a threat to their life. But it says in Matthew 27 that the same multitude screamed at Him to be crucified, that Barabbas should be released, and Jesus should be executed. But that's how it is with fickle mobs, you see. Marveling multitudes eventually screamed for His death. The fickleness of that superficial fascination; it's like John 6. They followed Him for the free food, you know? They really weren't interested in what He said. They liked Him at a distance. They liked Him doing His miracles. They were fascinated. There was a certain awe. Even though there was a certain terror involved, if you could keep it at arm's length, it was okay. And there is that fascination.

I'm amazed at people today, you know. They, they may, they go see these movies that scare them to death; scare them out of their wits and just sit there and let themselves be scared into a frenzy, sweat. Some of them have to run out into the lobby at the scary times. Why would people line up for blocks to see *The Exorcist*? Well, you know, there's a certain funny fascination about that. As long as you're sitting in a soft seat shoving popcorn in your mouth and you can leave when it's over. See, you, you don't want to get in the situation. You just don't mind watching somebody else in it. There's a certain thing about that. And I believe there was something of this fascination in these people who were terrorized by Christ, but also astounded and amazed at the supernatural. But they wanted to make sure it was just at arm's length; and when it began to crowd their status quo, that was the end of it: They wanted Him dead.

Many people have been in awe of Jesus who didn't know Him. Pilate said He was a Man without fault. Pilate's in hell, as far as we know. Some other people who will spend eternity in hell said some good things about Jesus. Diderot said He was the unsurpassed. Napoleon said He was the emperor of love. Strauss said He was the highest model of religion. John Stewart Mill said He was the guide of humanity. Lecky said He was the highest pattern of virtue. Pekant said He's the Holy One before God. Martineau said He's the divine flower of humanity. Renan said He was the greatest among the sons of men. Theodore Parker said He was the youth with God in His heart. Francis Cobb said He was the regenerator of humanity. Robert Owens said He was the irreproachable, and somebody said He was a superstar. People have always thrown those kinds of epithets at Him, and even in His own day, they said, "What manner of Man is this? We don't have a category for Him. There are no slots for this Man." Today in the Jesus movement, in the Jesus fascination, the curiosity of the marveling mob comes to us again. They applaud Jesus. They like Jesus as long as He's sort of warm and fuzzy, you know; as long as it's not confrontive; as long as you preach love and sweetness.

I saw the other night that they were having some musical awards; and that they have a new category for Jesus pop: Big stuff, standing ovations for the winner of the Jesus pop category. As long as He's arm's length, you see, He's fascinating. Fascinating personality; people want to watch Him in wonder.

There's an awe about it, but they don't want to get too close. I mean, you can talk about Jesus all you want if you just don't confront people with the fact that He damns men who live in immorality, who cheat, who lie, who are homosexuals or adulterers or fornicators, who fail to live by God's law; and He sends those kinds of people to an eternal hell. If you say that to folks, they're not so thrilled about it all.

Recently, a pastor was telling me that some students were holding a meeting on campus at Long Beach State, and they felt that the big issue facing students today was morality; and so they were Christians holding meetings to affirm the Biblical standards of morality. And they said, you know, they had been received fairly well until that. And they had one session particularly, particularly on homosexuality; and the fellow who was speaking got up; and they were in one of these little theater-type classrooms; and he was speaking on the fact that God condemned that evil sin; and so for the, so on one of the leading faculty members, who's a homosexual, came marching right down the main aisle screaming filth and vile profanity out of his mouth all through the time the man was trying to speak. And, afterwards, some of the gay community at that school were spitting on the Christian students.

Well, Jesus is okay, you see, as long as you don't really confront sin; and as soon as the people got close enough to find out where He was really coming from, boy, it changed really fast. It's not safe to get that close. You can always deal with a holy person at an arm's length. You know, it is amazing to me that the Pharisees of Jesus' time were always, always honoring the prophets; but the people who lived when the prophets were alive killed them; and the only prophet that was alive in Jesus' time was John the Baptist; and they killed him; and then there was Jesus; and they killed Him. You can always deal with holiness centuries ago, because time makes heroes out of everybody if you don't really know the facts. People always want to keep holy people at an arm's distance. Crowd kept their distance in a strange fascination; but when they got shoved too close as things moved toward the end, then they joined the second category here, the rejecting religionists.

Look at them in verse 34, and we're not going to deal with this, because it's going to come in chapter 12, and we'll deal with it there. "But the Pharisees said [You can mark a little asterisk in your Bible, because here is where the hatred of Jesus really hit its peak.], 'He casts out demons through the prince of the demons.'" They saw that He had cast the demon out of this man who couldn't hear or speak, that word there meaning both. It's translated *dumb* in the Authorized, but it can be translated *dumb* or *deaf*. And they said, "He's done it; can't deny that." They never did try to deny it. It was impossible to deny it. They just said, "He does it by the prince of the demons," which is really stupid when you think about it. Later on in chapter 12, Jesus says to them, "That just shows you where you are that you think Satan goes around casting out Satan." That's so elementally illogical that it's nonsense. But they had no possible—because of the darkness of their heart—commitment to believe the truth; and so they came up with the most stupid response imaginable; willful ignorance. They were so committed to getting rid of Jesus that, even when they saw the miracles, they said, "They're

done by Satan's power." No wonder Jesus said, "If they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't believe that somebody's come back from the dead." And so they moved to a tragic step in their rejection. They said, "He's doing this by the power of the devil." And so they concluded the very opposite.

Now, mark this, people, would you please? Both these kinds of responses are wrong. Both end up in hell forever. You say, "You mean these hating, rejecting people that blasphemed and said He was of Satan, and then the multitude that marveled and were fascinated and followed and were amazed and astonished and said, "Hosanna?" Yes, because that's not the proper response. Proper response is to believe and to receive Christ, not just to be fascinated by Him. That's inadequate.

So Matthew has given us a good picture of responses to Christ. For one, there are people who say, "I want to be Your disciple. I'm going to follow, but I, I've got this personal comfort. I've got this personal riches. I've got these personal relationships, and I don't think I better come now." And then there are those like Matthew who come immediately. And then there are those tax collectors and publicans who, overburdened with their sins, come rushing to Christ. And then there are those angry, irritated religionists who start out being irritated and then become blasphemers and, ultimately, become murderers. Then there are the confused like the disciples of John the Baptist, who just can't figure out how come they didn't know about this and why is this different than what they've known. Maybe they've been raised in another religion, and they're trying to figure it out. And then there's that great mass of humanity who don't fit into any of those categories. They're just what I call the marveling multitude. They say, "Oh, yes, Jesus is so nice; Christmas and Easter, wonderful; Jesus pop music, hey, whatever." And they're just happy to stand at arm's length and watch the supernatural Jesus do His thing. And, ultimately, they stand with the crucifiers, screaming for His blood. So mark carefully, beloved, where you make your choice, for Jesus is set for the rise and the fall of many. Let's pray.

Father, thank You that, as one British writer put it, we have the right mast to which to attach our colors. We thank You that we know the Truth and we can come to the Truth, who is none other than Jesus Christ. We know, Lord, that this message this morning will be for some, a savor of death unto death. Because they reject, it'll push them deeper into lostness, make them more responsible to God. To others, a savor of life unto life, because they already live. This will make their life richer. We pray, Father, that Your Spirit would work in all our hearts. For those of us who have life, may it be a more abundant life. May we commit ourselves to greater obedience. For those who know only death, may this be the day they enter into life. And we'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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