

JESUS

There's no one like Him

Jesus is not a myth or legend. Jesus is not an ethereal religious figure. Jesus walked the earth at a specific time and place. There's never been another like Him. As we follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel of Matthew, we find our faith in Jesus rooted in the life of Jesus. Meet Jesus. Knowing this man will change your life.

JESUS • Matthew 9:1–13 • Tim McConnell • March 22, 2020

The ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was not only teaching, it was also action. It was filled with events. Last week we talked about what Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God, but this week we want to look at what He did. We are looking at the life of Jesus through the historian's eye. If you were a reporter on the scene, what would you write down? We live in a skeptical age, and it's hard to easily accept information that comes our way. Have you found that? I have. Who knows for sure what the real deal is with this coronavirus? Are we supposed to wear a mask, not wear a mask, wash our hands, clean out our ears, gargle with bleach, lick railings at the mall? We get a lot of conflicting advice! Please make sure you are getting the right advice from the right experts (not me!).

Many people are skeptical about the reality of Jesus. But here's the thing: we have more historical evidence about the life of Jesus than any other founder of a world religion. Even without the New Testament or other Christian writings, on the basis of non-Christian historians and writers alone—like Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny and others—we know a lot about Jesus of Nazareth. Take all the Christian writings out, and we still know He existed. He taught. Many believed He performed wonders. Some thought He was the Messiah. He was rejected by Jewish leaders and crucified by Roman leaders, Pontius Pilate in particular. After His public death, there were so many people who believed He was still alive, they spread all the way to Rome by 64 A.D. and gathered in every Roman province to worship Jesus as God. Even an outsider can see something special in the life of Jesus.

Abigail and I were once invited to eat with friends from South Korea. We were living in Oxford and apartments were small—it was so expensive there—so we ate in the kitchen. They had a hard time speaking English to each other, so they spoke Korean. The apartment was filled with Korean things, the music was Korean, the food was authentic Korean food. We had kimchi. Ever had kimchi? The real stuff? It's cabbage pickled with hot peppers. It doesn't look spicy. But it lights you up! I have never felt more transferred to a foreign environment without actually going. We were not in Seoul, but we felt like we were in Seoul. That's how it is when Jesus enacts the Kingdom of God. When you see a little of it; when you taste a little of it, you believe it is actually there. I mean, I might have believed in the existence of South Korea without eating kimchi, but somehow I knew for sure it was real as I sat there with my mouth on fire fighting back tears! Can the Kingdom be seen,

or is it just something that can be taught only? Is it an idea or a reality? That's the question. If it's just an idea, just a thought, that's one thing. But if it is real, show me. Jesus enacted the Kingdom of God. By His actions He made the invisible visible. Jesus has a way of making His Kingdom present to us, wherever we are. Even when we are holed up in isolation, we can feel it.

Today's events happened in Capernaum, a city that has been remarkably maintained as ruins since the time of Jesus. Jesus crossed over from foreign land on the far side, where He had the run-in with a herd of pigs. Coming back to Capernaum was coming back to home base, but that didn't mean things were going back to normal. Two healings happen. Two equally remarkable miracles. One is physical; a man gets carried by his community to Jesus, rises up from paralysis and carries his mat home. One is relational; a man gets up from his profession and walks away from a tax-collector's booth, out of social isolation and into a celebration of friendship and community. Both have something to say about community. Healing happens in community. We feel deprived of community right now, but we are not. We are still one church, one people. We are going to get through this together. As you self-isolate, don't isolate yourself! Stay in touch. Do all you can to be in community. More importantly, both healings bear witness that the other way of life, the antagonistic, alternative Kingdom Jesus was talking about, is actually there on the ground, and things are changing.

"Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven'" (Matthew 9:1-2). As the events unfolded, some were grumbling on the sidelines. Jesus turned directly toward them. "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralyzed man, 'Get up, take your mat and go home'" (Matthew 9:4-6). Remarkably, he did. A little bit later, Jesus walked out of Capernaum, and on the road just outside of town was a tax-collector at his booth. His name was Matthew, also called Levi. Jesus said to him just two words, "Follow me." Remarkably, he did. Now the report you are getting is from the man himself. This Matthew is the gospel writer Matthew. His training and education as a tax-collector, and possibly a Levite, made him a good choice to write a careful account of things. At least,

that's how Jesus saw it. If you were making this story up, a tax-collector is the last person you would choose. That's what happened. If you were a reporter on the scene, that's the story you would have to tell.

Show me the Kingdom. Don't just talk about it. Show me. Jesus did. Imagine what it felt like to be the man carried in on a mat, to be the helpless one, the one captured and bound by paralysis, the one in need. Jesus told him to stand up, carry his mat--do your part, carry your load, contribute--and go home. Remarkably, he did. The Kingdom of God is a place where weakness and paralysis do not have power to capture us. The Kingdom of God is a place where we experience wholeness and strength. The illness that threatens to shorten your life, the weakness in your body that debilitates you and causes you to miss out, the virus that can get everywhere at once, it can't get into the Kingdom of God. Coronavirus does not stop the Kingdom of God. But Jesus wasn't the only person in history to heal others.

Show me the Kingdom. Jesus confronted a tax collector. How did it feel to sit behind that booth, day by day, captured by that system? Sure, you profited from it. Sure, it gave you your paycheck. But it took a piece of your own soul every day. You saw how people looked at you. Your own friends from school. Your own family. You saw the looks in their eyes. But how to escape? There's no hope of change. No other way to go. How did it feel when Jesus walked up to Matthew? Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow me." Remarkably, he did. Luke would tell you Matthew boldly stood up and left everything. But Matthew isn't going to brag. It wasn't about what he did; it was about what Jesus did. In the Kingdom of God, we are not limited and bound by outside forces. Life can open up. Things can change. The handcuffs, even the golden handcuffs, fall off. You can follow Christ into the life you have always wanted, the person you have always wanted to be. It's found in Jesus. But Jesus wasn't the only person in history to open up somebody's future and possibilities.

Show me the Kingdom. The most critical thing about the Kingdom of God is not the healing or the freedom or the justice, but the forgiveness. What did it feel like to be the man carried in on the mat? Now what did it feel like to hear Jesus say, "Son, your sins are forgiven"? What was it like to be freed from the tax-collector's booth? But more, what about when Jesus came with you to meet your friends and celebrate, and when He was charged for hanging out with them, when He was social-shamed for being there, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and

learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13). Others may heal. Others may redirect careers. Jesus said he was there to forgive sins.

For all the miracles of Jesus, for all the wonders that He performed, for all the influence He had to change others and alter lives, the most radical claim He makes to divinity is right here. Did Jesus claim that he was God? We are looking historically at a figure called Jesus. Did He claim to be God or did others color him divine after His death? Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." Only God can forgive sins. Only God can forgive what has been done to insult God. Only God can say that. Only God can do that. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25). God forgives sin against God. This isn't just a theological truth. It's common sense. Only the one who was wronged can forgive the wrong. Wives, if you did something to insult your husband ... go ahead. Friends, say something to insult the friend you are with. Okay. That was easy. Now, what if I say from up here, "I forgive you." Does that help? No! It's between you and your husband; you and your friend. He has to forgive you. So, good luck with that. Because what you just did was really, very rude! Jesus steps forward and says, "Your sins are forgiven." I am the one who forgives. I, even I, blot out your transgressions. Jesus takes the place of the one true God, and he forgives sins. That's what enraged the religious. That's what got Him killed.

Now we understand why Jesus healed the man. Why he attended the party with Matthew's friends. Jesus was enacting the Kingdom. Which is easier? To tell a paralyzed man to get up or to tell him his sins are forgiven? The physical-minded think it's harder to heal a paralyzed man. The spiritual-minded knows that only God can forgive sins. Which is harder? The healing will take connection with the power of the Kingdom of God. The forgiveness is going to take a cross. Jesus knows what it costs to say "Your sins are forgiven." It costs Him taking our sins on Himself, carrying them to the cross, dying for them, and making forgiveness possible. Which is easier? Jesus knew the cost. And he says, "'But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralyzed man, 'Get up, take your mat and go home'" (Matthew 9:6). Not just words. Actions. Not just teaching the Kingdom, acting the Kingdom. It is actually a sentence fragment. It goes like this, "But so that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ..." It breaks off. The sentence is finished by the actions. He tells the man get

up. The word literally becomes action. The teaching literally moves to enactment. He doesn't just teach the Kingdom; he enacts the Kingdom. The word made flesh makes the word come to life.

So that you may know. The people did know. They were amazed. "When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man" (Matthew 9:8). "To man." Not exactly right. They still thought of Jesus as only a man. They were amazed that this Kingdom of God actually touches down, actually reaches their life where they are. They praised God. Matthew and his crowd too. Matthew's life is changed, he is healed and set free. What does he do? He throws a party! Who is the party for? It's for sinners who want to know forgiveness. It's for the sick who want to know healing. So that you may know. So that you may know healing is possible. So that you may know renewed life is possible. So that you may know, the forgiveness of sins is possible. Show me the Kingdom of God.

Our world is terrorized by a little bug called COVID-19. Terrorized. Show me the Kingdom of God. Put feet on your faith, as I heard the Vice President say the other day. Where can you and I not only speak of peace, but enact peace? Not only talk about Kingdom values but live Kingdom values. Not only teach Kingdom love, but act with Kingdom love? Where can our sentences get finished by actions? As a church, we will be reaching toward the sick (not irresponsibly, but resolutely). We will be reaching toward those in need. Maybe you can help. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. So that you may know ...

But first, to represent the Kingdom you need to be part of that Kingdom. Have you opened your heart? Jesus opened His arms on the cross to be able to say, "Your sins are forgiven." He knew what it cost. Have you opened your arms to Him? Have you bent the knee and made your solemn vow? "To you, O Lord, I offer my life. To you and to your will, all that I am, all that I have. From this day forward I am no longer my own. You have purchased my life by your blood, and now all my blood, all my life, all my powers I place in your service. Speak your Kingdom to me. Make your Kingdom in me. I am wholly and forever yours. My Lord. My King. My Savior, Jesus."

STUDY GUIDE

JESUS • "Enacting the Kingdom"

Matthew 9:1-13

UP: **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word**

Friends, humanity is being rocked right now by needing to physically distance ourselves from one another. For the Christian, we do this out of love for neighbor. Fight hard to distinguish these two realities: physically distancing and relationally separating.

Now is the time to become the greatest artist you have ever been. Create ways to stay relationally and spiritually tethered to your core circle. We need each other. We are gifts to one another! Make phone calls; text photographs; set up video gatherings. Together, we are the hands and feet of Christ to one another and this city!

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Matthew 9:1-13.

- 1) Compare and contrast the man laying on a mat and the man collecting taxes. What are these two men thinking and feeling as the story opens?
- 2) What claim does Jesus make in verse 6 (and what is the extent of this claim)?
- 3) What purpose does Jesus give in verse 13 for His ministry? How does this make you feel?
- 4) Going back to the two men from question one, how are their lives impacted by encountering Jesus?

OUT: **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

- 5) What needs do you see around you right now?
- 6) How might God "enact" His kingdom through you this week?

IN: **Connect with Each Other**

COVID-19: Spend time connecting with your core circle on how you are doing. Pray together.

What's hard right now? What has surprised you most this week? What do you need most right now? What are the greatest needs in your community and family that come to mind?