

January 15, 2017

“The Exceeding Love of Christ”

Matthew 9:18-26

FCF: Unprepared to follow Jesus

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The love of Jesus is exceeding.

(anchor) And we must let that shape our expectations.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

CPC gladly hosts a few local organizations here. Among them is a Cub Scouts Webelos chapter. The Scouts’ motto is “Be prepared.” Which speaks to my own time with the Webelos. I went to a few meetings and on one camping trip. They paired me with a bully from school, stuck us in a leaky tent, and there I endured one long rainy night. That’s not a knock on the Webelos as an organization or meant to cast doubt on our hosting. But I was not prepared. And I was done.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. But He would not have us to be unprepared. And so He gives us glimpses, records of ordinary people having extraordinary encounters with Him.

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 9:18-26

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

As a pastor, one of my duties and privileges is to do pre-marital counseling. I see my role as being like a travel advisor. That is, I’m trying to prepare the couple for places, customs, and practices they have yet to experience. They need to anticipate the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows, the crises and conflicts, the disappointments and discouragements that will surely come. Not that I want to temper their expectations but to shape them. And I want to help them to see that, if they stay with this, it will likely prove to be better than they expect - exceedingly so.

It’s worth knowing the context of our text. Matthew has decided to follow Jesus. Jesus and His disciples are dining at Matthew’s house along with some of Matthew’s friends. This attracts questions and criticism from some Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist. Another man arrives, interrupting this discussion with a desperate need. Which sets in motion another encounter with a local woman and her own desperate need. Through the course of these events, we discover and learn that Jesus simply defies our expectations. For His love is exceeding.

The love of Jesus is exceeding. And we must let that shape our expectations. But how is the love of Jesus exceeding? That’s worth knowing. In at least three ways. First, it is exceeding in power. Second, it is exceeding in kindness. And then, third, it is exceeding in mystery.

I. EXCEEDING IN POWER

First, the love of Jesus is exceeding in power. That’s probably the most obvious point.

A) The Wonder of What Happened

Stop and think with me about the absolute wonder of what happened that day.

1. The reality of the miraculous

Some try to explain away such accounts, saying these are coincidences or tricks and that ancient peoples were ignorant and backward. Which is a failure to read carefully and to think critically. (READ Matthew 9:26) Why? Because this wasn't any more normal for them than it is for us.

2. The lesson of these miracles

The fact is that these things happened. And the lesson of these miracles is that the creator and designer can repair and restore any and all He has made. It is no harder for Him to raise the dead than it is for us to rouse the sleeping. All of which is a foretaste of what is to come one day.

B) The Means by Which It Happened

So that's what happened. But how? What were the means by which this happened?

1. The separate cases

We have two separate cases. First, (READ Matthew 9:22). Then, (READ Matthew 9:23-25).

2. Bringing them together

So which is it? Do these things come about by faith or by Jesus' power? It's really both. Faith, in itself, does not heal. Faith is looking to, trusting in, relying on the One who does heal. In fact, sometimes Jesus acts even in the absence of faith. So, how much or how strong does our faith need to be? It's not the amount, maturity, perfection, or tenacity of our faith. It's the object.

It is faith in the One whose love is exceeding in its power. That is, faith in Jesus.

Application:

Let me say a couple of things on this. First, a lot of pain has been brought to people who were told, "X didn't happen because you didn't have enough faith." I can't say this strongly enough. That's a terrible misreading of the Bible. And it's a terrible thing to say to someone.

That's the first thing. The second is that we can afford to look to Jesus for great things. Look at the experiences, listen to the stories of these two. It shows us that, with Jesus, there is never a time to give up hope. It shows us that, with Jesus, there is never a time to despair.

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II. EXCEEDING IN KINDNESS

But the love of Jesus is also exceeding in kindness. And that is equally evident here.

A) Desperate Need

As different as these two people were, their needs were equally as desperate.

1. Jairus

(READ Matthew 9:18) The parallel accounts tell us that his name was Jairus. He is a synagogue ruler, a man of influence and standing. Which meant nothing in the face of disease and death.

2. The woman

(READ Matthew 9:19-21) This had been going on for so long and had left her anemic and weak. And, in that culture, ceremonially unclean. She was untouchable, isolated, and socially cut off.

B) Defective Faith

So they each have a desperate need. And also what proves to be a defective faith.

1. Jairus

Jairus kneels before Jesus, at least in an expression of honor. He pleads with Jesus and does so publicly. But he had to have been the one who notified the mourners. And he seems to think Jesus has to be present to act. So, yes, he has some degree of faith. But his expectations are low.

2. The woman

Looking at the woman, yes, she sought Jesus out and took hold of His garment. But you need to know that at that time, healers were thought to have power in their hair, their saliva, their clothes. To touch them was to tap into their power. So she seems to have some superstitious views.

The point being that these folks have no basis for appeal. They have no claims on Jesus. And, not only do they bring nothing to the table, they come with a deficit. Not only their desperate needs but their defective faith. Much like you and me. And Jesus received them still.

Illustration:

How many times have you heard someone say to you, “You can’t go there looking like that”? Mothers are known to tell their children, “You can’t go on a trip with underwear that looks like that. What if you were in an accident? What would the EMT’s think?” Well, I would hope that my skivvies would be the last thing on their mind as they’re piecing me back together.

Application:

We carry something of that sort of impulse in our approach to Jesus. We think, “I can’t go to Him like this. I’ve got to get right with Him first.” Oh, my friend. Going to Him “like this” is exactly and the only way to come. It’s the only way you’ll ever “get right” with Him.

Do you know the line in Joseph Hart’s beautiful old hymn? ([READ quote](#)):

Come ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and broken by the Fall;
If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all.

The love of Jesus is exceeding in kindness. And we must let that shape our expectations.

III. EXCEEDING IN MYSTERY

But there is one more thing. The love of Jesus is also exceeding in mystery. Meaning that what He gives is not always what we want. It is beyond that. And always far better.

A) An Intolerable Delay

Think with me of the intolerable delay that Jairus experiences, the agony he goes through.

1. Compression of details

Matthew’s account is short. Mark’s is 23 verses and his but 9, focusing on essentials. Matthew states what was true by the time Jesus arrived. The little girl was not just dying but dead.

2. Jairus’ anxiety

Either way, time was of the essence. Jairus can't afford to wait. Delay could be disastrous. But that's just what Jesus allows. And encourages. Which had to be intolerable to a desperate father.

B) An Embarrassing Response

Then, as we shift to the woman, we read of an embarrassing response by Jesus to her.

1. What she wanted

Think with me. All she wanted was to touch Him and be healed. To slip in and slip out without being noticed. She was accustomed to life as an outcast. She was not looking for anything else.

2. What Jesus gave

But Jesus speaks to her, engages her. In the best sense, He calls her out (**READ Matthew 9:22**). "It's not by magic but through your faith in me." He gives her so much more than she expected.

But, as was the case with Jairus, she has to go through so much more to receive it. Why? What's going on here? Again, the love of Jesus is exceeding. It is exceeding in its mystery.

Illustration:

Put another way, Jesus' sense of timing is not like ours. I went to go check out the new Mediterranean Grill over by APSU the other day. I've missed the food I experienced on a trip to Israel and have wanted some falafel and shawarma. So I asked for a menu. And figured I would grab a Turkish Coffee as well. "Could I have one to go?" I said to the girl behind the counter. The owner chimed in, "To go? Are you sure? You need to slow down, to sit and enjoy it."

She was right. Different cultures have different senses of timing. So too does Jesus.

Application:

Not everything can be rushed. And He will not be hurried. What He intends for us is always the best. And sometimes that takes time, a series of stages, to unfold. It takes time which then rules out giving us the relief we want. It takes time which then rules out our timetables.

We need to know that. If we don't, we can fall into the trap of thinking, "Well, things are not going according to my plan. So that must mean Jesus doesn't have this after all." We might not say that. But, by our actions, it's clear that's exactly the conclusion we have come to.

And it comes out. It comes out in our despair. It comes out in our sleepless nights, our panic, and complaining. It comes out in the compromises we start to make. Our willingness to cut corners in our ethics. Or our willingness to water down doctrine, to synthesize, to add and mix the lies with truth. We ought to know the track record there. It doesn't end well.

The love of Jesus is exceeding in mystery. And we must let that shape our expectations.

CONCLUSION:

But here's the rub. Sometimes the exceeding nature of Jesus' love is so foreign, so alien that we can wonder if it's actually real. We may not even be talking about unbelief at this point. It may simply be a matter of a faith that feels greatly burdened and deeply bruised. What then?

Let me tell you a story, a true story. Father Damien, at his own request, was assigned to a leper colony on Molokai Island, Hawaii, in 1873. The colony had no medical doctor or priest to care for them. Father Damien's motivation for going was simple. He couldn't imagine a person living out his or her last days in isolation with no one to care for them. So, with profound empathy, he did everything for the members of that colony. He bathed them and dressed their festering ulcers. He built coffins and dug graves. He counseled them, taught them, and led them in worship. And that was the way he doggedly served that colony for twelve years.

One Sunday, that all changed. Father Damien stood in front of his people and opened his robes to show the first signs of leprosy. He began his sermon with these words, "We lepers." Before that, the people of the colony could see his appreciation for their plight. But now his compassion went deeper. For this was a true suffering with, a love that knew and was present.

My friends, the exceeding love of Jesus is such that He did not keep His distance. He has fully entered into the colony, into this fallen world. He has proven what He has in store for this fallen world. And He has shown, in His life and death for us, that we can trust Him while we wait. He has shown that He is with us, knows us, and will surely bring the best to pass for us.

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