

# OpenTheo

## He Bore Our Diseases (Matthew 8)

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Jesus performs the first of a cycle of miracles, healings, and deliverances, demonstrating his authority and increasing the fame of his ministry. He touches a leper, heals a centurion's servant, heals Peter's mother-in-law, calms the storm, and casts out demons into pigs.

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## Transcript

Welcome back to this, the ninth in my series on the Gospel of Matthew. Today we're looking at chapter 8 of the Gospel, in which Jesus performs a series of miracles, deliverances, and healings. This is introduced by Jesus descending from the mountain.

He's been teaching on the top of the mount, and now he comes down and begins this cycle of events. The ascent upon the mountain, at the beginning of chapter 5, began the sermon, and this frames the end of it. It also begins a new section.

Now he's down from the mountain, he's beginning this new cycle of his ministry. He's delivered the introductory manifesto, as it were, and now he's getting into the actual, picking up the steam of this actual mission that he's on. It has a cycle of ten events, or

maybe nine, according to some numbering, because the seventh and the eighth, the raising the dead girl of the ruler, and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood are told within a single event.

So you have the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the centurion's servant, the healing of the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, the calming of the storm, the casting out of two demons, of the demons from the two demoniacs in the Gadarene area, the healing of the paralytic, the raising of the dead girl of the ruler, the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, giving two blind men sight, and casting out the demon from the dumb man. So there are ten there, or if we numbered it differently we could get nine if we included the raising the dead girl and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood in a single episode. Lighthouse suggests that there is a rhythm to the stories, with three sections each containing explanations of Jesus' ministry, and these are punctuated by reflections on, or calls to discipleship.

So you have one in 8 verses 18 to 22, another in 9 verses 9 to 13, and then a final one that begins in 9 verse 35 and takes up the whole of chapter 10. So there's a movement also towards greater opposition. At the beginning these things are mostly done in secret, there's not much of discussion of these things, but after the healing of the demoniacs and following on from that there's increasing opposition.

First of all removing him from the land, and then a climactic statement at the very end saying that he casts out demons by the prince of the demons in verse 34 of chapter 9. So there's a movement here. Also these are signs of the new life of the kingdom. Jesus is showing the power of the kingdom as it's breaking into history at that point.

He's raising the dead, he's healing the blind, giving the blind their sight, he's enabling those who are paralysed to move, and he's giving the dumb an open mouth. In all of these ways he's taking a body that has been trapped and broken down by sin and satan and he's giving it new life. We can see the way that unbelief is described in terms of a closing down of the body.

The stiff neck, the hard heart, the closed eyes, the inability to hear. All of these things are characteristic of unbelief. And the kingdom brings this opening up of the faculties, this activation of life that has been held dormant when people have been suffering illness or oppression or something else.

Now God is, through Jesus Christ, bringing these things to life. He's bringing a people that have been oppressed by satan and the demonic activity is important to note here. He's bringing these people back to life, he's healing those who are sick and he's delivering people from captivity.

So there's a significance in the signs in that respect. There's also a significance in the recipients of many of these signs. These are people who are often marginalised or

excluded.

Lepers, Gentiles, demon possessed people, women, the woman with the issue of blood. And Jesus is overcoming death and disease, he's overcoming alienation and marginalisation and he's restoring faculties to those who have lost them or who lack them. Jesus is gradually delivering, these are signs of deliverance of Israel from its captivity, from its bondage, from its oppression by satan.

And in each of these events there is some glimmer of what the kingdom involves, the greater deliverance that is involved and the greater deliverance from all of our sins, diseases, illnesses that will eventually be enjoyed within the consummation of the kingdom. The cycle is important. So there are three cycles of three signs.

And the first one is the healing of the leper. It's a significant act by which Jesus heals the leper because it's a touch. When we think about the leper, the leper is characterised by marginalisation, by distance and uncleanness.

And by coming in contact with the leper you would usually contract defilement. You would have to be purified, you'd have to remain outside for a period of time before you could enter in again. And Jesus seems to have the opposite effect.

Rather than him contracting defilement by touching the leper, the leper contracts cleanness. He is delivered from his disease. Now we need to think about leprosy here.

It includes a host of different skin diseases. It's not necessarily Hansen's disease which we would associate leprosy with but it could be a far more mild dermatological ailment. When we think about the description of leprosy within the book of Leviticus, its description is something that does not necessarily imply Hansen's disease.

It actually would not seem to suggest that. It's a far more mild ailment in all likelihood. But yet it leads to isolation, it leads to having to be cut off from the people and having to remain outside of the normal dynamics of life in certain respects.

So you would not have access to certain forms of social activity and you would be differentiated from others by means of that illness. Jesus, by touching him, recognises the character of that ailment as something that is alienating him from human touch and contact. And by a touch brings him back in.

So there's a contraction of cleanliness through the touch of Christ which we'll see again later on. Jesus performs this as a secret sign. It's like the turning of the water into wine.

The event occurs and it's confirmed by the priest but no one is actually told beyond that. Although word seems to get out in the Gospel of Mark when it tells this event. He goes and tells it everywhere even though he's told not to.

So here we're not told about that and that may be significant. We don't hear about the responses of people to the signs in the first three so much. We're told about their faith and then we're told about other things like that.

But the importance is that there's something more secret taking place here. There's a gradual movement into prominence over the series of the signs as we work through them. The second miracle or sign is that of the healing of the centurion's servant.

He enters Capernaum. Capernaum is his base of operations at this moment in time as we've seen in chapter 4. And a centurion comes towards him and appeals to him. The centurion is probably the top ranking military officer within that town.

And he performs a certain type of healing here. It's worth paying attention to the conversation because the conversation is very important. What is happening in this sign is not merely a sign of Jesus' power but something that manifests a deeper truth about the Kingdom of God.

So he declares the problem. Lord my servant is lying paralysed at home suffering terribly. And Jesus responds in this translation I will come and heal him.

But it might be better translated as France suggests. You want me to come and heal him? As a question emphasising the me. Do you really want me, a Jew, to come into your house? Do you expect me, someone who is ceremonially pure or whatever, who is an observant Jew, to come into your Gentile house? And it seems to be quite a challenge.

And as we go through it I think it helps to make more sense of the conversation that follows. In the conversation that follows he highlights the fact that he does not feel worthy for Christ to come under his roof. Jesus is clearly a great prophet.

That's presumably what he thinks he is. He's a man of great holiness. A godly man.

And he's a Gentile outsider. Why should he expect this Jewish teacher to come under his roof? He says Lord I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But only say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to one go and he goes. And to another come and he comes.

And to my servant do this and he does it. And this is a statement first of all that responds to that challenging question. Do you want me to come and heal him? This question of do you expect me, a Jew, an observant Jew, to come into your house, a Gentile? And he responds with this great statement of faith.

A statement of his unworthiness but yet his trust that Christ's word is sufficient to accomplish the task. His word alone. And in this respect the action performed towards

the man is a sign of the blessing of the kingdom extending beyond the immediate quarters of the Jews.

Now that framing of verse 7 I think helps us to understand why the issue of Jews and Gentiles becomes prominent within the conversation that follows. Jesus sees the centurion as exhibiting a faith that is far in excess of much of the faith that he's seen in Israel. He hasn't encountered faith like that in Israel.

And what he says then is a challenging statement concerning Israel's status. You're going to have the patriarchs, these great fathers of Israel, eating and drinking in the kingdom, this messianic banquet. And it's going to be alongside them, reclining at table, Gentiles coming from the east and the west.

And the sons of the kingdom, those who would seem to be the heirs, the Jewish people who have rejected Christ, they will find themselves outside. Whereas those who have accepted Christ, though they may be centurions from far off, or though they may be people from different countries in the present day, these people will be sitting at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And that turning of the tables, that surprising statement concerning the sons of the kingdom and those who come from the east and the west, the outsiders, I think is important.

It suggests at the very outset of Jesus' ministry we're seeing a number of signs of the importance of the ministry to the Gentiles. We've seen this in chapter 1. We've seen it again in chapter 2 with the visiting of the Magi. And the fact that it's the court of Herod and the chief priests and scribes and others within his court that's presented as like the court of Pharaoh.

Whereas the Magi are the ones that follow the star. They're the ones that follow the heavenly light through the wilderness. And they're more like the children of Israel.

And here I think we have more of that. Again we saw it in chapter 4. These things taking place in Galilee of the Gentiles. Jesus is performing a miracle here that indicates something of the destination of the kingdom.

The kingdom is going to go out to the Gentiles and will be widely rejected by his own people. The practical faith of the centurion is what we see at the outset. His faith that Christ can heal his servant just with a word.

And that statement of the authority of Christ is important. Christ is one who is under authority. That's an interesting way of putting it.

We might think about Christ as being one who has authority. But yet being under authority is a way of speaking about someone who is authorised. If you're under authority you can be authorised.

And so to have authority is, even if you're under authority, is to be in a far more exalted position than someone who's not under authority. Who's just a maverick. Who does not have authorisation.

And that person who has authorisation can act in the name of the person they're authorised by. Now we'll see something more of the true character of Jesus' authority in the discussion that follows. That question of the authority of Christ is a key one throughout these two chapters.

We'll see it particularly in the healing of the paralytic and the forgiving of his sins at the beginning of chapter 9. So the question of authority and the nature of authority is brought to the foreground here. That Jesus is one who has the ability to say things and they happen. He's one who represents God himself.

And as that servant, the one acting in God's name, he has great authority to act because he is one under authority. Now when we think about the concept of servanthood within scripture, very often when we think about Christ as the servant, we're thinking about Christ as one who is taking menial tasks upon himself. Christ as one who's humble.

We don't pay enough attention to Christ as the one who's authorised. To the one who's under authority. Who's the one who bears the authority of his father and enacts it within different situations.

That is something that the Centurion statement brings out that we may miss. The concept of Jesus as the one who has come to serve is maybe one that we tend to diminish. We see Christ as subservient to his people, perhaps, in certain extreme cases.

But what we need to see is that Christ is the one who bears the authority of his father. He's the delegate. He's the one who's representing the father's authority on earth.

And as a result, as a man under authority, he is a man with great authority. This benefit that the Gentiles are going to enjoy as they're brought into the kingdom is not merely that of enjoying the crumbs. They're going to recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

They're going to enjoy this status. And it's seen as the practical faith of the Centurion. The faith that Christ can heal his servant, even from a distance, is seen in a more theological light.

That this is the sort of faith that represents the faith that responds to God properly. It is the true answer to God's work. And it's the true thing that marks you out as a member of the kingdom.

It is in faith that we see that the Centurion is a fitting member of the people of God. That faith marks him out as one who will be keeping company with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

That faith is not something, again, that he has accomplished for himself.

Rather, it's a sense of the authority of Christ's word. The efficacy of Christ's word. Lord, if you only say, he will be healed.

And you can do this from a distance. This is a very similar sign to the sign that we see in John chapter 4. With the healing of the nobleman's son. That event is the second sign in John's cycle.

And maybe there's a similarity with the first sign of John and the first sign in this cycle. Where again, there's a secret event being presented to others as testimony to that event. But they don't necessarily know that the event has occurred.

So the wine presented to the master of the feast. The healed leper presented to the priest. In both of those cases, there's a presentation of the miracle to someone who can attest to its truth.

But does not know that a miracle has been performed. Here we have a miracle performed from a distance. And the miracle occurs in the very hour of the very moment that Jesus' word is given.

The third sign is the healing of the mother-in-law of Peter. Peter's house seems to be the base of operations for Jesus and his disciples. It would seem to be reasonable to assume that.

It's in Capernaum and Jesus and his disciples go there. And they're staying with presumably other family members. I presume Andrew's living in close proximity and there are other family members within the area.

Peter's wife's mother is present with them as well. Peter has a wife. We see that in 1 Corinthians 9. Verse 5. So Peter seems to have a wife.

And also a wife that is a participant in his ministry too. So his wife goes with him as he ministers in various places. And it would seem most likely that she ministers to women in their spaces.

She would have access to their spaces in ways that Peter would not. Whereas Peter is, when Peter goes to the Gentiles and to other parts of Israel, presumably his wife accompanies him on many of those trips. Jesus teaches concerning his ministry.

Not just performing signs but teaching concerning the significance of signs in various of these places. Or at least here it's Matthew teaching. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. So as Jesus heals these people that are brought to the house, then that is fulfilled, the statement of Isaiah the prophet. We go

back to Isaiah chapter 53.

It's found in the Great Servant Song. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us our peace.

And with his wounds we are healed. Now we tend to think about that merely in terms of the cross. But Matthew suggests there's a broader reference here.

That Christ takes these things upon himself. Not just in the cross but also in his larger ministry. And Peter Lighthouse suggests that we should see what Christ is doing here.

Not merely as removing these ailments from people but taking them upon himself. That he is the one who bears the burden of them. And ultimately bears them to the cross.

All the burden of the death that afflicts humanity. The death that man will be liberated from in the new heavens and the new earth. Christ is bearing that death.

From bodies that are afflicted by demons. From bodies that are afflicted by various ailments and diseases and illnesses. And from all these different aspects of reality.

He's dealing with the death and bearing it upon himself down into the grave itself. And so there seems to be something more of the fulfilment theme in Matthew coming to the forefront here. It's not something we encounter so much within the central section of Matthew.

It comes more prominent towards the end around the crucifixion and the run up to the crucifixion. And then at the very beginning surrounding the events of Jesus' nativity. But Christ and Matthew are teaching concerning his ministry at this point.

And then there's a message concerning discipleship. There are these interludes between these three cycles of three. And here is the first one.

It's concerning discipleship. And there are two people that come up to Christ. A balanced pair in many respects.

The first one comes and says, And Jesus said to him, This expression of Jesus not finding a home. Some have suggested that that finds some allusion to the account of wisdom within intertestamental literature such as Sirach. I'm not so sure about that.

I think it's a fairly weak allusion if it is there. What we do see is the first occurrence, however, of the expression, son of man. This is not something that we find previous to this point.

Jesus tends to use this expression of himself. Particularly when speaking to people outside of his immediate discipleship group. If we go back to the book of Daniel, it's referenced there.



The son of man in Daniel is an eschatological figure. He's going to come on the clouds to the ancient of days. He's going to be given the kingdoms of the earth.

And Christ, when he speaks about his own ministry, speaks about his ministry as the son of man. In terms of this eschatological figure. But he also references it in terms of his suffering.

That he is the suffering son of man. And as the suffering son of man, the one who's deprived of home and security, the one who's deprived of comfort. That's the expression that we see here.

The son of man has nowhere to lay his head. And so the heavenly authority and the eschatological reference is an important background for this. There's the reality of who Christ is.

Juxtaposed with his current position of servanthood. The fact that he's coming in a position where he is not honoured. And that contrast is a jarring one.

I think we can also see the expression son of man used on numerous occasions within the book of the prophet Ezekiel. And I suspect there are other references there. That Jesus and Ezekiel have certain parallels.

Ezekiel moves towards the destruction of the temple. Christ moves towards the destruction of the temple. And many of the ways in which their stories are paralleled are explored within places like Luke's Gospel.

Where Luke parallels Christ with Ezekiel at the very outset of his baptism and temptation accounts. So I think there's some aspect of Jesus' heavenly authority. His eschatological significance as this prophesied figure that's coming to the forefront here.

He is this son of man. The one who stands for humanity as well. I think that reference is an eschatological man.

A man that represents humanity in this significant way. It's an enigmatic term. And France suggests that it offers a challenge to people.

So that they don't just slot Jesus into an existing slot. An existing pigeon hole that is completely characterised already. Rather there is this vaguer category.

And Jesus can fill it out in various ways as he teaches in his ministry. The second statement. Well that statement refers to foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests.

Foxes in the ground. Birds of the air between heaven and earth in the trees. What's being referred to here? I mean is it just these animals in the world? I'm not sure.

I wonder whether there is some reference to the contrast between the state of the son of man. Who will have rule over all the nations. And the enjoyment of the kings and rulers of the nations.

Where the birds of the air are people who are gentile rulers and figures. They have nests even in the land. And they're the ones that have nested on the branches.

And ultimately they'll pick apart the carcass of Israel as Jerusalem is destroyed in AD 70. The foxes. We have one reference to a fox in Luke chapter 13 verse 32.

And that's to Herod. Tell that fox. Jesus talks to him in that respect.

Now in the Old Testament we don't see many references to foxes. We see the foxes playing in the vineyards in the book of Song of Songs. We also have the foxes that have their tails tied together in plowing groups.

And are sent throughout the fields of the Philistines by Samson. And there it would seem that they represent the 30 lords of the Philistines. And that sending them out in 150 plowing pairs.

It seems to be some connection with the 30 lords of the Philistines. Five times them. They plowed with his heifer.

Now he's going to plow their fields with foxes. There's a sort of poetic justice. And within that poetic justice I wonder whether the foxes are representative of oppressive forces within the land.

Of the scavenging parties. Whether that's the Philistines or the Idumean king Herod. So Herod and his people and other people like that have their holes.

They have their dens within the land. And the birds of the air, the Gentiles, the Gentiles who occupy the land in various ways. They have their nests within the land.

But now the son of man who is the ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. The one who will inherit all nations. He has come to the land and he does not find a place to lay his head.

I wonder whether that's part of the symbolism. But that's just speculation. And I've not seen anyone bring this out.

That's my suspicion of what might be going on there. The second statement is another statement that may be even more jarring. Jesus challenges this person who comes and says let me first bury my father.

Presumably his father hasn't died yet. The point is that he wants to work with his father, show filial devotion until his father dies. Once his father dies and is buried he will then

follow Christ on his mission.

Now Christ challenges him in a very stark way. In a way that challenges the very basis of what we might think of the demands of the 5th commandment. That filial devotion that's owed to our parents.

Honour your father and mother. It's an unsettling statement. Let the dead bury their own dead.

Come follow me. That statement also refers to people who have not responded to Jesus' call. As they are already dead.

As we're looking through this series of signs Jesus is dealing with death in various forms. He's dealing with people who are outsiders. People like the leper, people like the one with the issue of blood.

As a result of their impurity they're cut off from Israel. He's dealing with Gentiles, people who are outsiders in a different sense. They're not part of the nation.

He's dealing with people who are dead. The daughter of the rich man in the next chapter. He's dealing with people who are blind, whose faculties are cut off.

He's dealing with people who are oppressed by demons. And in that respect they're cut off from the life and liberty of the people of God. And even in the case of the demoniacs in the Gadarene region they're dwelling among the tombs.

So he's dealing with death in concentrated form. And Jesus' statement here to the person who wants to delay his following is maybe testifying to that fact. That he is healing people from death, delivering people from the bondage of death.

And spending the time of your life in devotion to people who are still in that bondage. Rather than following Christ on his mission and delivering people from that bondage. Which is contrary to the way of the kingdom.

You can think also that there's a contrast between the dead bearing their own dead. This is continuing deathly cycles. The dead bearing the dead.

And this is a moribund pattern. That if you get trapped within that you're just repeating the whole pattern. Whereas Jesus is giving life.

Jesus is setting a new pattern in motion. He's not just repeating the old patterns. Nor is he in a position of just returning people to the dust.

That constant return to the dust. Generation after generation. That we are like dead people walking as the sons of Adam.

Rather Christ is the one who brings life. A new Adam and a new life brought to people who have been walking around in the shadow of death. People whose entire lives are defined by that shadow hanging over them.

So much so that even before they have died they can be described as the dead. That is a very sharply challenging statement to people within that culture. Particularly as it challenges that filial devotion.

But as we understand it well I think we can see Jesus does talk about the danger of the practice of the Pharisees. And the way that they undermine the duty to parents. So I don't think he's just rejecting the fifth commandment.

What I think he's doing here is a bit more subtle. And I think seeing it as cycles of life and death is important to get towards an understanding of that. There's already here a distinction between the following crowds and the committed disciples.

So there are people who are within the broader orbit. People who are part of these crowds that come out and see Christ. And then there is already this more committed group around Jesus.

People like Peter and people like we'll see Matthew in the next chapter. These are people who have been brought into the more immediate group. And then there are people who want to move from that wider group into the closer group perhaps.

Then I would imagine that there are people around that. So you have various levels of connection. You have the core three disciples Peter, James and John.

You have the broader group of the twelve disciples. You have a broader group around them of people like Peter's wife presumably. And others who are associated with the movement, particularly the women.

And then you'll have... and they'll follow Jesus around. And then there will be this larger group of the multitudes that are accompanying them. And then certain followers that would follow more to distance.

So we've already seen this movement starting to take shape. Jesus is going to be going throughout Israel. He's going to be going throughout Israel and teaching and forming this movement.

So that when he dies and rises again, there's already the ground that has been sown. The ground has been prepared for the mission of the church. And this is part of what's taking place here.

That Jesus is preparing the ground for what will happen later. As the first shoot of new life breaks the surface of the earth in the resurrection of Christ. So that seed will start to

germinate in other parts of the land.

As the disciples go throughout the land and teach and work with what Christ has started. The fourth sign, or the fourth miracle, is the calming of the storm. Jesus is followed by his disciples into the boat and out into the sea.

Already commented to some degree upon the significance of the sea as a prominent feature within the gospels. The sea is connected with the Gentiles. It's connected with the lands outside Israel.

You have a movement from stories of the land and shepherds to stories of the sea and Gentiles. And within the sea there's also this exposure to these more hostile forces of the natural order. That entrance into the sea is also the bringing of the order of the land out into the sea.

The boat is a good image of the church. It is part of the land brought out upon the sea. And it's part of the land that is a realm of safety against all this chaos that surrounds.

In Peter's reflection upon the story of Noah and the flood. The ark can be connected with baptism and I think through baptism with the church. That the ark is something that we are part of that boat.

We become part of that boat as we're preserved in the waters that would engulf. And overwhelm us otherwise. And so going out on the boat I think is maybe an image that helps us think a bit more about some other things lying behind this.

That there's something symbolic taking place here. We might also see some Jonah references perhaps. That there is a storm.

There's a significant person sleeping on the boat. And he's woken up and people are scared and trying to deal with the situation. And then he does something and the situation is calmed.

But here he is not thrown overboard. Rather he calls for the storm to be calmed. Seems that there's some sort of chiasmic structure here.

So it begins with getting into the boat. And the storm arises on the sea. And he's asleep.

And then you have they wake him and they speak to him. And then he speaks to them. And then you have he rises up and the storm sleeps.

So there's a reversal of that pattern. The sleeping Christ and the rising storm. The storm being stilled as Christ rises up.

There's other things going on here I think that might be instructive. We have three earthquakes referred to in the Gospel of Matthew. And there's an earthquake here.

It's not just the storm occurring. There is a description of the waters quaking. Now as we look through Matthew there's other two occasions.

Are found at the cross and at the resurrection. And here I think then we have an image of cross and resurrection. They are with Christ in this situation of tumult.

And Christ it seems is asleep. He's as it were as he is asleep in the grave. And yet as the storm arises and as he rises up the storm itself can be stilled.

And the whole situation changes. And they are safest in the boat with him. He is in control of the situation.

So as Christ rises up he delivers his people. Just as he will rise up from the sleep of death and surrounded by these chaotic elements in his crucifixion and resurrection and in his period in the grave. He will rise up and he will still all those elements.

The rulers of the forces of this world are going to be stilled and quelled. And there I think we might see maybe some sort of theme of exorcism within this story. That there is some sort of stilling of something that's akin to a demonic force.

I think this comes out more within Mark's account. But that rebuking of the winds and the sea may remind you of the way that he rebukes demons in other points. And then he challenges them with their lack of faith.

Why are they afraid? They're not to be afraid. Rather they should respond with faith. And here we think we see something of a new theme that's emerging within the second cycle of three.

So we've had the first cycle of three. We've had the healing of the leper. The healing of the centurion's servant.

And then the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. And each one of those is a more private sign. A sign that isn't witnessed by that many people.

And that isn't responded to within the text. Whereas in these next signs there are themes of response. And fear particularly.

So you have the response of fear by the disciples. And then you have the response of the fear of the city of the Gadarenes. And then you have the response of fear in those who see him healing and forgiving the paralytic at the beginning of chapter nine.

So the response to Jesus' signs is a matter of importance in this second cycle. The little faith of the disciples can be contrasted with the great faith of the centurion. Jesus is in total control of the situation.

And although this is often used as a demonstration of Christ's divinity, I wouldn't rush to

that straight away. We can maybe connect this first of all with the prophetic authority of someone like Elijah. Who as a result of his prayer can stop the rain for three and a half years.

And Christ's prayer here, or Christ's action here, still in the storm, may be seen as an extreme form of prophetic authority. But then there's something about that prophetic authority that points to the fact he's not just a great messenger of God. He is the messenger of God.

The angel of the covenant. The one who is the archetypal messenger. The one who is not just one of the servants, but the son.

The son who represents the father in a way far beyond any other emissary can. Now I think that might be a helpful route to go. Bringing together the themes of emissaries more generally and the authority that they can bear.

This authority, we've started to see it come to the forefront. And now we're already, within this next cycle, it becomes far more significant. So in the beginning cycle, you don't see it expressed that much.

You have it within the centurion's statements to Christ. It's first emerging there. And then in these next three signs, it's the authority of Christ that is a matter of great issue.

His authority of the storm. His authority to bind Satan, the strong man. And then his authority to forgive sins.

And those next three, or these three signs, miracles in cycle. They help us to think a bit more seriously about what it means that Jesus has authority. To move from the authority of merely a prophetic emissary to the authority of the son who has been sent.

And there I think connecting the figure of the son with other emissaries is helpful. It helps us to understand the route by which we can move from one to another. The fifth and the final sign within this chapter is the healing of the demoniacs.

Again, this occurs within a Gentile region, within the region of the Gadarenes. It's Galilee of the Gentiles. This is a region that has the lake and it borders both Jewish and Gentile regions.

And regions where Jews and Gentiles will come into interaction with each other. And we see a sort of trifecta of extreme impurity here. So there's the demonic possession.

There are the tombs. And there are the pigs. And in each of these we see some aspect of extreme impurity.

The extreme impurity of demons. The extreme impurity of tombs. And the extreme impurity of swine as forbidden food.

Why are there two demoniacs? Now that's a tough question to answer. Because in Mark we don't have two demoniacs. We have just one.

And this is not the only time that Matthew has two characters where Mark or Luke have only one. We see the same thing in chapter 9 verse 27. With two blind men following him, crying, have mercy on us son of David.

We see the same thing with Bartimaeus in the other gospels. A single character becomes two characters. Or would seem to become two characters in chapter 20.

And then in the triumphal entry we have one beast becoming two beasts. What's going on here? There are many different suggestions that have been put forward. None of them completely satisfactory.

I think we can pay attention to the way that the story is told. And how the different ways of telling the story might give some sort of clue to what's going on here. First of all Matthew pays a lot more attention to cardinal numbers.

So he'll talk about two sets of persons where the other gospels will name them. Or will speak about a particular character. And that the series of people who are two, this pair of persons, is maybe a matter of significance in itself.

So we have two brothers in chapter 4 and then another set of two brothers. We have two thieves. We have two blind men on two different occasions.

We have two demoniacs. We have the two thieves. All these different cases where there are two persons.

Maybe Matthew's doing something with that. The two persons that come together. The pairs being important within his theology.

Within the other gospels they have a bit more of a scenic immediacy. So within Mark's telling of this event and other events there is more of an emphasis upon the scenic details. And the way that that is emphasised in part through names.

In part through the emphasising of specific persons and their voices. Giving them more of a scenic presence within the narrative. Whereas within Matthew it's less scenic and there is more of an emphasis upon things like the numbers.

And the numerology. So that might be part of it. Some have suggested that there is numerological significance within this.

Where Matthew is assembling twelve persons that are healed. Or recipients of, beneficiaries of miracles. In these chapters leading up to the calling of the twelve.

Now it's not entirely clear to me how that number has arrived at. Maybe the storm is



counted as a beneficiary. I'm not sure.

But I count only eleven. But maybe the addition of two other characters. One extra demoniac and one extra blind man.

Is designed to make up those numbers. Some have suggested. I don't find that persuasive.

But I do find the question of how many people are healed is interesting. Because the number twelve is important. We see the number twelve referenced in the woman with the issue of blood.

And we also have it referenced later on with the calling of the twelve disciples. What other things can we think of? Well when you have ill people they will tend to gather together. So we have ten lepers in the Gospel of Luke.

Who are healed and only one returns. We have people who are blind would seem to go together. People who are leprous would seem to cluster together.

So finding more than one blind person in a single place would not be entirely surprising. The emphasis upon two. The question we must ask is.

Has Matthew added an extra person? Or has Mark and Luke removed a person and focused upon a particular character? Now focusing upon a particular character gives it a bit more of an emotional force perhaps. A bit more of a scenic immediacy. Whereas Matthew's account focuses more upon the act itself.

And what's taking place there. Maybe that's part of what's taking place here. That there is an emphasis less upon encounter.

And more upon action. And what Jesus is doing through his action. Maybe that's part of what's taking place.

The other thing is that there's no contradiction as such. There's just the oddity of why these details would be different. And so it would seem maybe one of the characters is the spokesperson for the two.

Maybe one of them is the more prominent healing of the two. Maybe one of them is a witness within the early church. Someone who is named because he is known as someone who is a recipient of a miracle.

Whereas the other did not bear witness to Christ. We don't know. But those are a few theories.

And I'm not sure what to make of them. We see some further things that are noteworthy here. He addresses, or the demons, the demoniacs, address Christ as the eschatological

judge.

The son of God who will condemn them to their ultimate fate. O son of God, have you come here to torment us before the time? We've seen already Christ being addressed, or at least challenged as the son of God by Satan in the wilderness. And now he's challenged by the demons.

And they both seem to have some sort of supernatural knowledge concerning who he is. That he is the one who has come from above. He is the one with authority to judge all.

He's the one, as we've seen at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, he is the one who is the eschatological judge. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, he is the one who has come from heaven to earth to perform a particular mission. And as we've seen in the Temptations, he is the one who is the true son of God.

The one that stands as God's representative on earth. And not just as God's representative, but as the one who is God, come in the flesh. And so these challenges to him are testified to the fact that he has a pre-existent status, presumably.

The begging of the demons is interesting. They beg him that they might be let to depart into the herd of pigs. Why the pigs? Well, it would seem to make sense.

The pigs are unclean beasts and they would want to depart into such beasts. We're not told here that they are legion, as there are many, as we are told within Mark's Gospel. But it would seem that there are many because they depart into a great herd of pigs.

There's a multitude of pigs that go down and are destroyed in the waters. There is a drowning event here. This is like Pharaoh's army being drowned within the waters of the Red Sea.

This herd of pigs running into the sea are described as legion within Mark's Gospel. Maybe there's some connection with Rome. But they are destroyed.

And the demoniacs are saved. And there seems to be something important going on here. Christ, first of all, is seen as the son of God who binds the strong man, who can overcome the strong man.

So you have Christ as the one who is the new Moses, who drowns the army of the Egyptians and delivers these people, perhaps. But then there's also something else going on in the story. You have scenes that suggest associations between characters.

So there are two characters who are begging. There are the demoniacs, or the demons, begging not to be cast out but wanting to be cast into the pigs. And then there are the people of the city.

The people of the city come out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they begged him

to leave their region. So there's themes of begging, themes of leaving or casting out.

The demon-possessed men have been cast out from the city. They're expelled. They're among the tombs.

They're scapegoats, perhaps, of the people. They're people who are removed from the larger body of the town. And now they're living at some distance, removed from the general life.

And Jesus heals them. But he heals them by casting out the demons into the multitude. Now that's not usually the way that scapegoating works.

Usually you have the outsider is the one who is the single person or the small group of people that are cast out from the great multitude. But here we have the great multitude being cast out and the couple being delivered. That would seem to be an inversion of the way that things usually work in terms of casting people out.

And I suspect that there are theological themes behind this. There's a reversal of the scapegoat motif. René Girard has talked about this on various occasions.

That within the Gospels we see the scapegoat motif playing out. That people to deal with the tensions within their society will cast out certain parties. Will channel all their antagonisms and tensions that they have among themselves upon certain parties.

Drive out those parties. And in projecting all of their antagonisms and their tensions upon those parties, they serve as a lightning rod for all their issues. And you see that playing out in families and societies too.

There can be scapegoats and those scapegoats will bear all the blame, all the tensions that people have between them. And as people mistreat those scapegoats, they get catharsis. They are relieved from the tensions and the antagonisms that they experience.

Now what happens when the scapegoat is removed? There's a social crisis because the means by which they dealt with the poison within their society. By which they allowed it to be vented. That's been removed.

There's no longer an escape valve for that poison. And now it is something they have to live with. It would seem that you have a great multitude of demons.

And you have a great multitude of the people of the town and the region. And you have this contrast or this association between the begging people and the begging demons. In both cases there's a multitude.

And in both cases there's a threat that Christ presents to them. And the first that they might be cast out of the people in whom they found their condensed presence. So

they've focused themselves upon these outcasts.

And as a result you have this great multitude within the whole town. Its impurity is represented and concentrated within these two figures. And then you have the town itself.

When the demons are removed from the men you no longer have that channel for them to deal with their demons. Now they are the multitude. Now they are like the pigs that are challenged by the presence of Christ.

Now they want Christ to depart from them. And there seems to be a play with the different characters within this story along this line. This is a less scenic account than the Markan account.

But in both cases Christ is the one who unsettles the social order. And Christ is also the one who is ultimately cast out himself. Christ is begged to depart.

And so Christ will depart. He casts out the demons. But what happens then? The demons are removed and worse demons come and take their place.

Christ is the one who ends up being cast out. He ends up occupying the place of death. He ends up being the one who takes all the demons of the situation upon himself.

And deals with them bringing them down to death itself. And so the themes of expulsion, the themes of exorcism and other things are I think important to see within this passage. There are reversals and inversions.

And there are connections between the characters that help us to see that the demons and the people of the town are connected together. And the deliverance of the demoniacs is something that points forward I think to the greater deliverance that Christ will accomplish. As he is cast out.

As he is the one who takes the demons pursuing him into the grave. Drowns them in the deep. While tearing open the deep so that we might cross through on dry ground.

And we might be delivered from the multitudes that pursue us. Within this we are seeing a movement from more private miracles to more dramatic demonstrations and signs of authority. The sign of authority that Jesus presents with the calming of the waters and the waves leads to fear.

The people are fearful before they see it. And then they are fearful after they see it and marvel at what type of man is this. And then this event of the exorcism of the demoniacs also leads to fear.

And then later on we have fear again in response to the healing of the paralytic and the forgiving of his sins. That response of fear is one that suggests something of Jesus'

power. The strong man is being overcome.

Satan is being robbed of his possessions. And a stronger man has come along. And when that stronger man has come along people feel afraid.

They realise that they are vulnerable. They realise that we are dealing with big forces here. And that coming of Christ on the scene causes people to realise that they are in danger if they want to go on as normal.

They have to change their way of life. And when Christ comes near it is danger time. You have to batten down the hatches perhaps.

If you are going to continue in sin, if you are going to have life as normal, Christ is a threat to that. Christ threatens the Gadarenes by remaining in their region. He is a power to be reckoned with.

And they want to return to life as normal. They want to return to normal where they can channel the demonic possession onto these people outside of their town. But now that has been removed and this new power is in town, they are in trouble.

And so their challenge for Jesus to remove, their begging for Jesus to remove, is one that represents their fear in the face of this stronger man that has come. There is also an emphasis upon reaction to the signs in this fourth and fifth and then leading into the sixth. How people respond.

And to miracles that gradually produce fame in the third cycle we will see that the fame of Christ is highlighted. That the news of this is spreading throughout entire regions. There is a movement then from commanded silence to speech.

A gradual movement into more and more vocal witness and Jesus being known throughout all the region. And there I think we have a sense of why Matthew has ordered things the way he has. Matthew is telling a sequence of signs and miracles in a way that help us to see something emerging.

The character of Christ's mission as the one who delivers Israel from death and from oppression. And Christ's mission as bringing a new authority that threatens the existing authorities. A new authority that provokes fear in people's response.

That people don't know what to make of this. That this is a greater power than they have ever heard of or encountered. And then gradually the news of that spreading throughout the people and the regions.

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