

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 15:29 - 15:39



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 15:29-39, Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' healing of 4,000 men, as well as women and children, and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the signs of God's work. He notes that despite the doctrinal differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees, people recognized Jesus as a healer and continued to gather around him for three days despite the lack of food. Gregg stresses the significance of being aware of the signs of the end times and the importance of following Jesus' leadership.

### Transcript

We begin our study today in Matthew chapter 15 and verse 29. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men besides women and children.

And he sent away the multitude and got in a boat and came to the region of Magdala. Now, these stories really don't introduce anything new or unique in the ministry of Jesus. They're just, in a sense, they show more of the same kind of thing that he did before.

In the verses at the beginning of the section we read, we read of Jesus healing all kinds of people. Well, he's done that before. We've seen specific cases, and we've seen summary statements of him healing everyone in town.

In this case, we're told that those who were brought to him were of quite a variety of ailments. Lame, blind, mute, maimed, and the word maimed would mean crippled probably, and many others. And these people were brought and laid at Jesus' feet, and he healed them all.

So, all we really read that's of any news is that the people did glorify the God of Israel because of what Jesus did. Now, it's interesting that Jesus, when he did healings, caused people to glorify God. Now, we know that Jesus is God, but the people weren't probably thinking in those terms.

The point is that Jesus didn't come to glorify himself. He came to glorify his Father. And many times today, people who have healing ministries, or would say they have healing

ministries, they glorify themselves more, and they lead people to think highly of them.

Perhaps they think that this is going to be profitable for the kingdom of God if a lot of people know their name and think highly of them and so forth, because more people will come to their meetings and be touched by God. But Jesus, it's interesting here, when Jesus healed people, the people glorified God. We're not told how he did it here.

We're not told whether he laid hands on them, what words he spoke over them, or whatever. But we're told that the result of him healing them caused people to look to God and glorify God and thank God. It's very important that ministry be conducted in such a way that it brings attention to God and gratitude to God rather than to the instrument that God is using.

And then we read, of course, of Jesus feeding a multitude again. It wasn't very far back. It was in the previous chapter that Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children.

Now this story, he feeds 4,000 men plus women and children. And on this occasion, it was apparently the same people who had brought these sick to Jesus, and he was healing them. And this healing meeting was quite protracted.

It says the people continued with Jesus for three days and had run out of food. Now, three days, these people were not in a place where they could buy food. And if they had some food with them when they started, they had used it all up.

And there was very little left. There were about seven loaves and a few fishes. This differs from the time when Jesus fed the 5,000.

Remember, there were five loaves and two fishes. The number of available items is different here. The number of people is different.

But essentially, the story is the same. There wasn't enough food. There were a lot of hungry people, a multitude.

And Jesus took what was available. He broke it, thanked God for it, and distributed it through the disciples, and everybody was fed. So we see then that Jesus repeated the miracle of the loaves.

Now, I don't really know that there's any new insight to be gained from this miracle that isn't applicable to the other miracle of feeding the 5,000. It's just another case of Jesus doing a wonderful thing to feed hungry people and using his miraculous ability to do so. And it says after that, that he sent away the multitudes and got into a boat and came to the region of Magdala.

Now, we don't read of any particular activity taking place in Magdala. But there was a woman from that region that we know as Mary Magdalene. Her last name was not

Magdalene.

The word Magdalene means a person from Magdala. Just like Jesus was called Nazarene, which just means a person from Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus the Nazarene. Mary of Magdala. Mary Magdalene.

Well, we don't read of Jesus ever meeting this woman here. But it may be on this occasion that he encountered her. We read of her later on in the Gospels.

She just kind of appears as being in the crowd or among the women that followed Jesus around. And when we first encounter her later on, we're told that Mary Magdalene was one that Jesus had cast seven demons out of. Now, we never read of this actual story of Jesus encountering Mary Magdalene, possessed with seven demons, and then casting those demons out of her.

But, although the story is not recorded, we may be looking at the time when that occurred. Because Jesus here comes to her city, it is not unlikely that he would have encountered her on this occasion. Although, of course, we can't be dogmatic because Jesus could have met her somewhere else.

The fact that she is from Magdala doesn't mean that she was in Magdala when Jesus encountered her. But this is all we know about Jesus ever visiting her town. And this may indeed be the time when he cast seven demons out of her.

When we come to Matthew 16, then, it says, "...then the Pharisees and Sadducees came and testing him, asked that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today, because the sky is red and threatening.

Hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign should be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them and departed." Now, that's all that happened in Magdala that is recorded.

Jesus came to Magdala and apparently was met right there on the shore by Pharisees and Sadducees. Now, these men were natural enemies. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were of conflicting rival religious parties.

Their theologies differed from one another and they were locked in continual debates over the rivalry. One reason I know this is because the Apostle Paul later in the book of Acts was on trial before the Sanhedrin, a Jewish court. And he perceived that some of the members of the Sanhedrin were of the Pharisees party and some were of the Sadducees party.

And so he stirred up trouble in the court by saying, I am siding with the Pharisees on this matter of the resurrection. That was a doctrinal issue the Sadducees and Pharisees differed about. And when Paul said, I believe in the resurrection and I'm on trial because of my belief in the resurrection, the Pharisees in the court said, hey, he's one of us.

We're on his side. And the Sadducees, of course, didn't approve. And a great dispute arose in the court between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over this issue.

And finally the court had to be adjourned because it got to be such chaos. That's how volatile the doctrinal differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees were. They could disrupt a whole courtroom if someone got them arguing about those things.

Well, these men, Sadducees and Pharisees, who normally opposed each other, came together against Jesus because they both had their own reasons for not liking Jesus. And they said, we would have you show us a sign from heaven. Now, it's not clear whether these men had been anywhere else and seen Jesus, but everywhere he's been so far that we've read about, he did signs.

Just immediately before this, he fed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread. That should be a sign of something. And really, all the things Jesus did were signs.

The miracles he did were signs. But they wanted to see a sign from heaven. It's not clear whether they meant that they had not observed any of his previous signs, but they would like to see a sign like he had done before.

And these signs emanate from heaven in the sense that God is working them through Jesus. Or whether they are saying that they want to see a sign that actually is visibly from heaven as when Elijah called fire out of heaven or something, where they could actually see a sign that comes out of heaven and is unmistakably from God. Well, Jesus did not really humor them.

The Apostle Paul said that the Jews are of a mind to look for signs, whereas Gentiles, he said, are seeking wisdom. And he said neither of them are really humored by God. God is not there to humor the Jews who look for a sign, nor the Gentiles who look for wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 1.22, Paul says, for the Jews request a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Now, here's a case of the Jews doing exactly what Paul said Jews do, asking for a sign.

And Jesus said to them, when it's evening you say it will be fair weather for the sky is red, and in the morning it will be foul weather today for the sky is red and threatening. In other words, if the sky is red at night, then the next day will be good weather. If the sky is red in the morning, then the day is going to have foul weather.

Now, there's of course a saying in our own culture about that. Something like red sky at night, sailors delight, red sky in the morning, sailors take warning. It's the same idea, the same observation.

Even in those days, although they did not have high-tech methods of anticipating weather patterns, it had been observed that one thing tends to lead to another, and that when weather is going to be bad, typically the sky is red and threatening in the morning. And if the weather is going to be good, typically the sky was red the previous night. You know, people do observe those patterns.

Even ancient people observed them, and they could tell, somewhat, from the sign of the red sky, whether it was in the morning or evening, whether the weather was going to be good or bad the next day. And Jesus said, you hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. Now, here we have the only case in the Scriptures where we find the expression, signs of the times.

Now, we hear that expression a great deal today, don't we? People say, well, these are signs of the times. We are, you know, Israel has become a nation again. The coalition of nations in Western Europe, the talk of a new world order, of a global conspiracy, you know, these are kinds of things that many Christians say are signs of the times.

In fact, many people have said that Jesus wants us to be looking for the signs of the times. And he reads, they quote these passages that we've just read in order to make that point. Some feel that if we don't recognize the signs of the times we're living in, it will be very displeasing to God, and therefore we ought to be watching for these signs.

And so, appropriately, I guess, in connection with this belief, there are ministries that do almost nothing else but look for signs that we are living in the end times. You see, there are many Christians who believe that Jesus is going to come back very soon. And they look at things going on in the world around them and say, these are signs of the times.

And they give us the indication that Jesus is coming back soon. You know, look how many earthquakes there are, look how many famines and pestilences there are. And when people do this, they feel that they're fulfilling some kind of a mandate from Christ that we need to watch for these signs.

Now, in my opinion, there is no such mandate from Christ. Let me say, first of all, that when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for not recognizing the signs of the times, he was not talking about the signs of the end times. Nor does the Bible ever speak of signs of the end times.

The term signs of the times, which appears only here in Scripture, is about the times when Jesus was here the first time, not the second coming. The Pharisees were rebuked because the times they were living in were, as Paul put it in Galatians 4.4, that was the

fullness of time. It was the time of which the prophets had spoken, when God would establish his kingdom of the Messiah.

And in fact, the Messiah had arrived and was doing things to indicate that he was the Messiah and that his kingdom was breaking in. And yet they couldn't recognize that they were living in the times of that fulfillment. And he says they were hypocrites because they were willing to recognize signs of the weather, but they were not, I think we could add the word, willing to recognize the signs of the times.

There's nothing hypocritical about not knowing something. But if you do know it, but you don't want to know it, and you want to pretend like you can't see it, then that's hypocrisy. And he said they were hypocrites.

They could see what was going on. They could recognize that something was happening, that God was introducing something, and Jesus was significant in that. They probably even had enough reason to believe that he was the Messiah, but they didn't want to believe those things.

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they wanted. His teachings on religion were not the kinds of teachings that agreed with their own. They did not want to give up their position of dominance in the religious society to a man like him.

And therefore they wanted to discredit him and not recognize him as the Messiah. And that was their hypocrisy. Now as far as signs of the end times, many people think there are such signs listed in Scripture.

I don't find any. Of course people think of Matthew 24 many times when they say, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of your coming at the end of the age? And Jesus talked about wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and pestilence and so forth. But in those cases he was talking about the signs that were preceding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. because in Matthew 24 Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the temple would be destroyed.

And that's what the disciples asked him about. What will be the sign that these things are about to take place? When will these things be? And he answered, this generation will not pass before these things take place. And they all did as a matter of fact.

And so Jesus does not really anywhere give signs that will precede his second coming. And when he does talk about his second coming he says this, it will come as a thief in the night. It will be like the days of Noah.

There were no signs given to people that the flood was about to come. It just came. They ate and drank and were given in marriage until the end and they didn't know at all until the time that the flood came.

You see, they were doing ordinary things. There was no indication that something was out of the ordinary. They were getting married as if they were going to live a long time.

They were eating and drinking as people would not do if they knew they were going to die the next morning. They'd probably lose their appetite. But these people were just going on with the ordinary matters of life because there was no recognizable sign that they were facing imminent disaster.

And Jesus said that's what it will be like in the days when the Son of Man comes. It's not that there's going to be signs. It's going to be like a thief he said.

Thieves don't send warnings ahead of time before they arrive. They don't send you phone calls and say, you know, I'm going to be arriving at three o'clock in the morning. Hope you'll be ready for me and then call a half hour later.

It's a half hour sooner. You know, it's now midnight and then they call back an hour later. You only have two hours now.

Thieves do not give warning ahead of time to let you know when they're coming. And Jesus said when he comes, it'll be like a thief. There were signs of the times in the first coming of Jesus.

The sign was that the new covenant had come and the old covenant system was on the way out. And its final dismissal was with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. And there were signs immediately preceded that, that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24. But when it comes to his second coming, he indicated that there will not be signs to indicate that it is near.

All the signs that Christians traditionally associate with it were signs of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. in their context in the scriptures. So when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for not knowing the signs of their times, he was not rebuking people today who don't recognize that the formation of a coalition of European nations is a sign of the end times. There's nothing in the Bible that says it's a sign of the end times.

And there's nothing to recognize there. Now, I'm not saying we aren't living in the end times. I don't know.

God only knows. That's what Jesus said. Even Jesus didn't know.

The angels don't know. It's something that only the Father knows about. And we are told to live as people who might be interrupted at any time by the coming of the Lord.

It's not because we're looking for this sign or that sign. It's because Jesus hasn't come yet, and therefore his coming is nearer than it was before, since time has elapsed since he promised. Therefore the event itself is closer than it used to be.

And who knows? It might happen in our lifetime. It could be. Whether it does or not, however, we will all face death in our lifetime.

The last days are here for all of us. It may not be the last days of earth. It may not be the last days of the Christian era.

It may not be the last days in the ultimate sense of the second coming of Christ, but it is the last days for you and for me because we are living in our last generation. This may not be the last generation for the world, but it's ours. And all of us are going to stand before God before our life is over.

That is certainly something we should be mindful of. And while we may not be commanded anywhere in Scripture to pay attention to signs that Jesus is going to come back soon, we certainly should pay attention to the general teaching of Scripture and of history, that all men die at the end of their lifetime. And when we do, we will face God.

It will be just as if Jesus came back, as far as we're concerned personally. We're going to have to face God in the same way, and we need to be prepared. And we should be as mindful of that future event as the Pharisees were of the weather of the next day.

They could tell that the next day the weather is going to be a certain way because of the clouds or the signs or whatever. They could not recognize or they would not recognize that the times they were living in were the times of fulfillment of prophecy. And they should have recognized that.

God wanted them to. Jesus was giving them every indication. And their refusal to see that, he said, was hypocrisy.

It was really inconsistency on their part because they were interested in recognizing the signs of tomorrow's weather, but they didn't have a sufficient interest to recognize when God is changing the whole course of history and establishing the messianic age, which he established in the Messiah when Jesus came. So the signs of the times when the Bible speaks of them, when Jesus speaks of them, do not refer to the signs of what we call the end times, the times before the second coming of Christ. The only way the Bible ever uses that expression is with reference to the signs of Jesus' first coming.

And the Jews of his day had many reasons to recognize that this was the right time. The 70th week of Daniel had come. Many indicators of the general timing of the Messiah's kingdom and of the signs that would accompany it were in the Old Testament.

And Jesus was essentially presenting them before the eyes of his generation, but they were not willing to see it because they didn't like Jesus as a leader. And maybe some of us have the same problem. We know who Jesus is, but we don't want to follow him because his leadership is not what we want.