

Sensation, Satan or Son of David?

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Date: 12 May 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, over the last few weeks, Matthew has been showing us that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the promised King from God to bring God's good and loving rule into the world.

And this week, he is looking for a response. Now, think about the people you know for a minute. If you did a survey of your neighbors in your block or in your street, maybe your colleagues at work, your classmates at school or at uni, your friends, and you asked them, what do you think about Jesus?

What do you think they would say? How many of them do you think would have a bad word to say about him? About Christianity, perhaps, about the church or about Christians, possibly, but I reckon not about Jesus.

If they know anything about him at all, what do people say? A good man who died before his time, a great teacher, a social justice warrior, a visionary.

But here's the question. Do they follow him? Do they really know who it is that they're responding to? Have they gone back to the Gospels to see what he did, to hear what he said?

[1 : 25] C.S. Lewis famously said about the Jesus we find in the Gospels that he doesn't leave the option open of simply saying nice things about him. A man who was merely a man, said Lewis, and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic, or else he would be the devil of hell. You can shut him up as a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He did not leave that open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus is either a liar or a lunatic, or he is Lord. And Matthew gives a similar choice to make in our passage today.

Here's how the people who were there at the time responded to the real Jesus, he says. They either said he was a sensation, or they said he was Satan, or they called him Son of David, and his heir to the throne of God's kingdom.

[2 : 40] And if we think he's somewhere in between, that he's kind of goodish, or kind of half right, then we have not been reading this right. No one who was there at the time sat comfortably on the fence with Jesus.

The Jesus they saw either blew them away in awe, or they blew up in anger. So which is it for us? Well, Matthew dwells longest today on the right response to believe in him as the son of David, before conceding that there were and are those who see Jesus only as a sensation, or indeed as Satan.

So that's how we'll spend our time in the passage. Don't worry, not every point is as long as our first one. But let's see firstly then, why people at the time came to Jesus as the son of David.

If you've been with us in chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew, you'll see the irony of this all the way through, hasn't it? It's been, show me, don't tell me, right? What he's been doing proves what he's said.

[3 : 45] But who is it in verse 27 who sees him rightly? Do you see it? Two blind men. Isn't that interesting?

Two blind men followed him, calling out, have mercy on us, son of David. They haven't seen what Jesus has been doing, but we do know that they have a spiritually 20-20 vision because son of David is the same way that Matthew introduced us to Jesus right at the start of the gospel.

One verse one, this is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David. And then he showed us how Jesus is descended from the royal family of King David.

So in one sense, these men haven't seen anything, but in another sense, they have seen everything. Ironically, the opposite is also true, of course, isn't it? Some who have seen everything have in fact been blind all along to the king's true identity. So who do these men see and say that he is, well, son of David was a title loaded with people's expectations.

[5 : 00] God had promised in the past that a son from David's family would always sit on the throne of his kingdom forever. But it had been a long, long time since that had been true.

And so the prophets spoke and the people set their hearts on a son of David, a promised king from David's family to take the throne to bring God's good and loving rule into the lives of people once again.

And then one day, these men point and say, there he is, the son of David, the promised king. We've seen with our ears, we've believed in our hearts, now we confess with our mouths that he is the true king from God. So they have a right view of him.

And now Matthew wants us to watch their response to them, to him closely. How do people who've got Jesus right, therefore respond?

[6 : 04] Well, Matthew tells us, verse 27, that they followed him. We've seen from Matthew that word follow doesn't simply mean they walked behind him, but that they have committed their lives to him.

And as they followed him, they cried out, have mercy on us, son of David. There's nothing proud or presumptuous about that, is there?

Jesus has done countless healing miracles by now, but they don't go behind him saying, you chuck one our way, Lord, us next. What have you got for us?

So they follow, don't they, without claiming any right that they think they have to be seen by him.

They cry out to be seen by him because of his mercy.

They see that to be saved by the son of David, it is all about who he is and not about who they are.

And so we want to say, don't we, kind of, their faith saved them.

[7 : 06] But Jesus gets behind that question. Here's the question. Who is their faith in? That's what Jesus wants to know, isn't it? Verse 28. When he'd gone indoors, the blind men came to him and he asked them, do you believe that I am able to do this?

If you think we've done enough, Lord, they said. If you think we're good enough, Lord, they said. If we believe hard enough, Lord, they said.

Did they? No. Do you believe that I am able to do this? Yes, Lord, they replied.

Nothing in our hands we bring. Simply to your cross we cling. Then he touched their eyes and said, according to your faith, let it be done to you.

And their sight was restored. Friends, who was their faith in? Their faith in their own goodness or worthiness could have been just as strong, couldn't it? But it would not have saved them.

[8 : 11] It was their faith in the one who promised to save them. They were healed, not according to the strength of their faith, but the object of their faith.

Not according to whatever merits of their own that they trusted in, but according to the overflow of his mercy that they trusted in. Friends, Matthew wants us to see that the right response to the real Jesus is to rest our faith in him completely and throw ourselves on his mercy.

Not to reserve some belief in ourself, in our own goodness, our own worthiness, our deservingness of him, but his power and his willingness to make us whole.

He shows us that two more times in verses 18 to 25. A synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, my daughter has just died, but come and put your hand on her and she will live.

No posturing, no self-pitying, just faith in the son of David to put the world right again. Then a woman who'd been subject to bleeding for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of her cloak.

[9 : 23] She said to herself, if only I touch his cloak, I will be healed. No qualifications, no credentials, no cast an eye over my record, Jesus.

No, if only I can make contact, even just with his clothes, the world will be the right way up again.

Some of you might remember, we saw these same miracles eight weeks ago in Luke's gospel.

It's a great example of how the gospels work slightly differently from each other. They often report the same events, but each gospel writer brings something into focus that the others leave in the background.

And I say that because, remember, Luke wanted to spot the difference between this desperate dad and the bleeding woman. But if you were to read Luke 8 side by side with Matthew chapter 9, you'll see Matthew leaves a lot of the color and detail on the cutting room floor.

Because what Matthew wants us to see, brothers and sisters, is less the differences between this man and this woman, and more what is the same. They both come humbly to him.

[10:35] They both trust wholly in him. Both of them are, in humanly speaking, hopeless situations, but both say simply this, if Jesus, is dead, then rescue.

My daughter is dead, but come, and she will live. I can't get better, but if I touch him, I will be healed. And like the two blind men, they simply come, don't they, with total confidence in Jesus' authority as the true king and his kindness as the true savior.

That he will intervene in their lives for good, not because of their merits, but because of his mercy. And just like the two blind men, Jesus does rescue each of them.

The woman first, verse 22, Jesus turned and saw her. Take heart, daughter, he said. Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment. And the man, verse 25, Luke, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

As we've seen before, with a word, with a touch, life. Friends, it is not a stretch for Jesus to save people. It's not beyond his workload, is it?

[11:51] It's his bread and butter. That is why I came, he said. Life for the dead, no problem. Wholeness for the broken, no sweat. And so who does he do that for?

Well, it is for those who trust him to do it for them. What does he say, verse 22, to the woman? Your faith has healed you.

Trusting in the real Jesus, friends, the real Jesus, the son of David, the savior of the world, the true king from God saves us. Not because we brought enough, or even because we believed hard enough.

But because we put our trust in him. Because of who he is. And what he can do. So what is the right response to the real Jesus?

Well, to recognize him for who he is. I hope over the past weeks that we've done that. Hasn't he proved himself to us? He's proved his words to be true. That he is the true king.

[12:52] The rightful king. The one who has authority. The merciful shepherd. Hasn't he shown us that? And therefore, to put our trust confidently in him and humbly in him to save us.

Confidently and humbly. Now, isn't that a contradiction? You say, well, no. Because to put our faith wholly in him and confidently, boldly in him, we have to be humble in ourselves, don't we?

What's a contradiction? It's saying we can trust confidently in him and confidently in us. That doesn't work, does it? Matthew wants us to see. To respond rightly to Jesus as he is on his terms.

We trust him 100% for who he is. And we reserve 0% of that trust in ourselves and who we are.

But if that sounds like too much faith today, well, we need to hear this, don't we, from these verses, that it is the object of our faith and not the strength of our faith that saves us.

[14:03] Our faith is just a reaching hand out to him, a few words whispered to him. That can't possibly save us, can it? What matches our reach, our words for our own sin?

But however weakly we reach or however quietly that we speak to him, if we do it out of a wholehearted trust in him, he will save us.

The nurse puts the life-saving tablets in a cup and places it next to you with a cup of water. What is it that's going to make the difference? It's not the cup that the tablets are in.

It's not your hand reaching out to take them, not even the water that you take them with. It is the tablets themselves that will save your life. You have to take them, but your holding and swallowing them is just how you get the life-saving medicine into your system.

So with Jesus, friends, so with him, we must take hold of him confidently and humbly by faith. But it is not the strength of our hold on him that saves us.

[15:11] It is Jesus himself who saves us. We cry out to him for his mercy, and in his mercy, he comes to us to save.

And so if you have not reached out to him yet, would you this morning? Would you this morning?

It's not the strength of your reach. It's not the strength of your grasp. But simply that you trust in the strength of him, in the strength of his character, who he is, the strength of his work, what he has done.

However weak your faith is, that if it is in the real Jesus, then he will intervene and come into your life and save you as you are. Because that is the right response to him, the promised son of David. But Matthew also wants us to see that there are other responses to him too. And partly, I think, to show us the difference between simply being wowed by him and putting our trust in him.

So secondly then, for some people, Jesus is not the son of David. He is only a sensation. We get that in verse 33. Just glance at those verses with me. While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus.

[16:29] And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel. And of the countless healing miracles that Jesus undoubtedly did, Matthew has chosen a brilliant selection.

Add them all together in chapter 9, and you get exactly the vision that we heard about from Isaiah earlier. When he promised the Lord came to save, then he said, will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped?

Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue sing for joy. So it's been as if Matthew's ticking them off one by one by one. So we see that Jesus really is the Lord finally come to save his people.

And for all the exorcisms Jesus has done so far, the crowds know, don't they, that they're witnessing something special. They say nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel before. And I take it that they mean that no one we know of or have ever heard of has caused a mute person to speak before. Right?

[17:38] They are very impressed. If this was today, this would be all over the internet in seconds. Videos, interviews, articles, they are in awe of what they have seen.

And not for the first time. Back in verse 8, Jesus forgave the sins of the paralyzed man and healed his paralysis. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe.

And they praised God who had given such authority to man. And before that even, in chapter 7, verse 28, they were stunned not only by Jesus' healings, but by his teaching.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching. Because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

The crowds have repeatedly had their minds blown open by Jesus. They are amazed. And yet, even though they have never heard anyone speak like him or seen anyone do what he does, they can only see a sensation.

[18:43] They are wowed by him. They say he does all things well. They give him five-star reviews. They like his Facebook page. They keep up with his podcasts. But they stop short of recognizing who he is.

They stop short of following him. They don't cry out to him for mercy. They don't call him son of David. Tragically, there are millions, if not billions of people in the world today in exactly that position, some in this room.

How many people do you know who have a bad word to say about Jesus? And yet, how many people put two and two together and see that the great and never-before-seen things that he said and that he did must make him the promised Messiah?

Apparently, Gandhi read the Sermon on the Mount at least once a day after he met some Christians who gave him a Bible. He later said about Jesus' sermon, it delighted me beyond measure.

It gave me comfort and boundless joy. Yet, he did not see the point or recognize the preacher. He did not follow Jesus or cry out to him for mercy.

[20:04] Friends, merely thinking well of Jesus is not a sufficient response to him. It's not. You can respect him. You can think that what he said is what the world needs to hear.

You might think of yourself like some celebrities have begun to do as a cultural Christian. And yet, you stand outside Jesus' kingdom and don't follow him as king or cry out to him as savior.

Let me say that that is tragic. That we would have the numbers set out so clearly for us in the Gospels and yet not be able or perhaps willing to add them together and come to the right conclusion and to see him as the Messiah.

We would rather leave it and call him a good man and a sensation than to do the sums and recognize him as our savior. Well, C.S. Lewis was right to say that Jesus does not give us that option of sitting on the fence with him.

If we do the sums, he's either a fraud or he's deluded or he is Lord. If Jesus is not who he said he was, he doesn't deserve our respect.

[21 : 16] What is cultural Christianity? What is that? Jesus does not give us that. That's not his kingdom. If he is the Messiah, he deserves our wholehearted trust and obedience.

The crowd saw a sensation, but sensation doesn't cut it, friends. He is the savior or as others said at the time, he is Satan. See that, verse 34?

But the Pharisees said, it is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons. You know, I don't think many people would call Jesus demonic today, but it says something, doesn't it, that the people who were there and saw and heard him, and some of them did.

And if we read the Gospels and if we really grappled with the real Jesus, I'm sure if we're sitting on the fence, we would fall off the fence, but there is a real possibility that we might fall off it on the wrong side.

Jesus' power and authority was beyond dispute. Nobody doubted that he did the things that he did. And yet, said the Pharisees, no one could do these things in the way Jesus is doing them and it really be from God.

[22 : 32] They said his authority can't be from God because he's not doing the things that we thought God wanted. And so his authority, his power must therefore come from a darker place in the spiritual spectrum, from the kingdom of darkness and from the prince of demons.

Again, if you don't think that what Jesus says is true, well, that is a more reasonable response to him than to think of him as only a good person. But if the Pharisees, and indeed if we now measure Jesus by God's standards rather than our standards, it becomes obvious that that's the wrong reaction altogether.

We've seen, haven't we, how often Jesus and his kingdom clash with people's expectations. People thought being born in Israel was a ticket into God's kingdom. Jesus says, no, it wasn't.

And others would come in and take their place at the feast. People thought that they could follow Jesus in their own time and in their own way. Jesus says it costs everything to follow him and it can't be put off.

People thought that the temple was the only place God would forgive sins. Jesus said he has the authority to forgive sins. People thought that God's kingdom was for those with their lives put together.

[23 : 50] Jesus says his kingdom is for the sick and sinners. Time and again, Jesus has collided head on with what people thought God was doing in the world or wanted God to do in the world.

But time and again, friends, Jesus has proved that he is right to do the things he's done and say the things he's said and we are wrong to doubt him. Our expectations of what God is doing today are probably different from what the Pharisees thought but we still bring our own ideas and agenda to the table, don't we?

And Jesus still shocks us today by not doing what we thought or what we want him to do. As long as Jesus agrees with me, then he's right, we say.

But friends, grapple with what Jesus really came for, what he really said, and you might end up cursing him. But that doesn't make him wrong. He's doing what God has always said his Messiah would do.

Here he is fulfilling the law and the prophets, bringing God's good rule into the world. If that cuts against the grain of our little kingdoms, it is not because Jesus is cutting in the wrong direction.

[25 : 07] It is because our lives are facing the wrong way. If Jesus looks like he is doing the devil's work to us, it is because we are looking out through the bars of the devil's kingdom.

As it is in another of C.S. Lewis' books, *The Screwtape Letters*, our affectionate uncle assures us from the safe comfort and familiarity of our demonic cell that Jesus is the enemy and not the Savior. But think about it. If Jesus really healed the sick and he really cast out demons and he really proclaimed good news from God, which no one at the time denied that he did, how can he be God's enemy?

How wrong are we to think that of him? What does it say about us if we do? We can't get to verse 34 based on the evidence that we have in front of us.

So what is leading us there? Where does that resistance come from? What is going on in your heart that Jesus, you think, is fighting for the other side and you are not behind him?

[26 : 22] Three responses to Jesus. Only one is right. Sensation, Satan, son of David. But before we finish, Matthew gives us one more S to call Jesus.

It's there in verse 36. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like a sheep without a shepherd.

We saw before that verse 35 closes off this long section that started back in chapter 4 with a nearly identical verse. But before Matthew moves on, okay, before we leave here, he says, let's see one last picture of Jesus.

Who is he? He is shepherd, says Matthew. The crowds didn't yet know him or follow him. Yet when Jesus saw the crowds, how did he respond?

He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. In some ways, it's an echo, isn't it, of that title, Son of David.

[27 : 39] David the shepherd who became a king. But what this pastoral scene and pastoral in both senses of that word shows us is the compassion of the king for the crowds, the love and tenderness of the shepherd for wandering and defenseless sheep.

Friends, he is a savior for the hurt and the wandering and the lost. He is a king for those who are hurt. And he looks on us today with that same compassion and mercy with which he looked on the crowds, on the two blind men, on the paralyzed man, on the bleeding woman, on the sick and the demon-possessed, on the unclean and sinners.

And he comes to us with all his grace and authority and power and love and says, trust me. trust me with your whole heart, your whole life, with your eternity.

He says, I am willing and I am able to save. So know me, trust me, follow me, your good shepherd who leads you to God.

Let's come to him as we pray together. Amen. Amen.