

## ***One Thing We Should Never Do***

Matthew 9:18-26

G.K. Chesterton wrote a series of mysteries called *The Father Brown Stories*. Father Brown was something of a Sherlock Holmes figure that solved all sorts of crimes that nobody else could solve. Toward the end of his career, Father Brown was asked by some friends “the secret to his many successes in solving crimes.”

Blinking his big expressionless eyes behind the little round glasses, he blandly replies, “You see, it was I who killed all those people.” Everyone gasps staring with appalled astonishment at the timid mousy priest. Then he goes on, “I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer himself, of course I knew who he was.” (*Eat this Book*, Eugene Peterson, p. 102)

That’s a good depiction of how we should read the Bible – especially the gospels and other narratives. Instead of reading the Scriptures in a detached, clinical way, we should enter into the plot/story and try to think and feel like the people who are being described. In this way we put ourselves in a position to hear God say to us the same types of things that He said to people thousands of years ago.

Today we are going to attempt to read Matthew 9:18-26 in this fashion, allowing God to speak to our hearts and minds. We are between series: we have finished a series on work, and we will begin a Lenten series in two weeks that leads up to Easter. This morning I am teaching from this passage in Matthew 9 that illustrates ***one thing we should never do***. Several people (and groups of people) interact with Jesus in this passage. As we observe what they did (in relation to Jesus) we will see one thing that we should never do. As we work our way through this passage I think that this “one thing” will become clear.

I’ll first set the context. The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew 5 through 7; there Jesus teaches about life in the Kingdom of God. In the drama of Scripture, Jesus announced that God is in the process of establishing His kingdom. He is in the process of repossessing the nations for Himself. Everyone who wants to be part of that kingdom and be used by God to establish His kingdom needs to repent and believe the gospel. As you live in the kingdom in this world, you will shine like a light in the darkness; specifically, the way you treat people will be radically different from the rest of the world.

The two chapters after the Sermon on the Mount record nine miracles which demonstrate the power of the kingdom Jesus has been describing. Jesus heals a man with leprosy, calms the storm when the disciples think they are going to die at sea, casts out demons that are tormenting people. Those who experience the power of the kingdom are typically (not always) those who come to Jesus humbly and in faith.

Today’s passage records two of these miracles that demonstrate the power of the kingdom. Let’s pick up the narrative in verse 18:

18 While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live."

Whereas there was only one temple (in Jerusalem), there were synagogues in over a hundred cities and towns all over Palestine. Synagogues were a place for Jews to gather for prayer and worship. Each synagogue was led by a group of elders; the head elder was the "ruler" of the synagogue. The man who came to Jesus (verse 18) was the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum.

Notice this man's reverence for Jesus and faith in Jesus. He "bowed down before Him" – an expression of reverence and deference. He said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." This man actually believed that Jesus had the ability to bring his daughter back from the dead. Notice that this man tells Jesus how he wants Him to heal his daughter. I think we should read this more as a pleading request than a command: "come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live."

Maybe that's something we should never do - tell Jesus how He should answer our prayers. Maybe it would have been better for this man to have said, "Jesus, however you want to do it, bring my daughter back to life." Maybe Jesus prefers vague, nondescript prayers.

Actually Jesus did not seem mind specific requests like this. As a matter of fact, back in chapter 8 when the centurion told Jesus that his servant was "lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented," Jesus said, "I will come and heal him" (NIV "Shall I come and heal him?"). The centurion actually talked Jesus out of making the trip; he told Jesus, "Just say the word and my servant will be healed." Jesus actually deferred to the centurion on the logistics of healing his servant. Jesus honored that man's faith.

We have to conclude that making specific, faith-filled requests of Jesus isn't something we should never do. Verse 19 confirms this.

19 Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did His disciples.

In response to the synagogue leader's request, Jesus began to follow him back to his house, disciples in tow. This man was desperate (as any of us would be if our daughter had died), so he made a bold, specific request of Jesus.

I will pause here and ask, "In what ways are you like the man in Matthew 9 - so desperate for Jesus to do something in your world?"

- A circumstance that threatens everything you love and care about
- A friend or family member who is in trouble
- A work situation that is making your life miserable
- Some sinful habit that is robbing you of joy and fruitfulness

This is the strongholds week in our Rooted course (10-week discipleship experience

that about 180 are doing). We're evaluating our lives and asking, "Where have I given the enemy permission to have his way in my life? How have I allowed sin to become habituated in my mind and soul and my body?" When we meet this week we aren't merely going to pray, "Your will be done - whatever that is. . ." No, having done the hard work of being honest before God, we are going to repent and ask God for deliverance from specific strongholds in our lives - whether bitterness, control, idolatry, rejection, fear, or pride.

Let's pick up the narrative in verse 20

20 And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; 21 for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well."

Whereas the synagogue official believed that Jesus could heal intentionally with a touch, this woman believed that the power would flow from his garments. She had exhausted her medical options, and so she came to Jesus to try to touch the "fringe of His cloak."

Maybe this woman's action and thinking suggests something we should never do. Maybe she was superstitious and presumptuous to think that the healing power of God would flow from Jesus, into his cloak, and into her body. Or maybe she, being "unclean" because of her hemorrhaging, was wrong to touch Jesus; maybe unclean people weren't permitted to touch someone as holy as Jesus.

Under that logic, maybe we should keep our distance and never invade Jesus' personal space. Maybe we should assume that "If Jesus wants to work in my life, He will. He knows my needs, so why should I have to ask, seek, and knock?"

Strike two. If we look back in chapter 8 again, we have confirmation that Jesus doesn't mind unclean people coming close and making bold requests for their needs. In 8:2-4 we read how a man with leprosy "came up to Jesus"; lepers were supposed to keep their distance because they were "unclean" (btw, unclean did not equal sinful). This man comes close to Jesus and says, "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean." Next we read: "Jesus **stretched out His hand and touched him**. . ." He didn't have to do that; He could have spoken a word and healed the man. Jesus does not expect us to keep our distance.

Verse 22 confirms this.

22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well.

This woman was most likely older than Jesus, but He calls her "daughter," a very endearing way of addressing her. Then He says, "Take courage"; instead of being timid and fearful, she should be full of courage. Then He says, "Your faith has made you well." Jesus saw her faith when she reached out and touched the fringe on His cloak. She

believed in Jesus' power and authority even over her malady. "At once the woman was made well." [Interestingly, we have a similar account in Matthew 14:34-36. There we read that "as many as touched [the fringe of Jesus' cloak] were healed."]

In what ways do we need to be like this woman who pushed through the crowd and believed that touching the hem of Jesus' cloak would heal her? Or the leprous man who fell down at Jesus' feet? They had both been unclean a long time; they were both out of other options. But they took a risk and exercised faith in Jesus to make them well.

I know some of you approach Jesus as this woman in Matthew 9 and the leprous man in Matthew 8. You have not been shy about drawing near to Jesus and asking Him to address various issues in your life. But perhaps there are others of us here who've been keeping our distance from Jesus - for any number of reasons (feelings of being unworthy, self-condemnation, unsure how to come to Jesus, etc.).

The assurance we have in the gospels is that Jesus welcomes everyone to come near to Him. And when we do, He is mainly looking for faith: Are we confident in Him and His power? In the gospels Jesus says things like: "Where is your faith?" "Your faith has made you well." "When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?" Jesus is looking for faith. Even a very small amount of faith is virtuous.

Let me clarify that I'm not suggesting that you go directly to Jesus without any encouragement and input from other people. For all we know, the woman in Matthew 9 took the risk and touched the hem of Jesus' cloak at the urging of a friend who had heard Jesus teach and seen His power. I need this in my life. Sometimes I when talk about a situation with a friend, s/he will say, "Maybe you should take that to Jesus. . ." Sometimes I need that direct reminder. We all need others to encourage to go directly to Jesus in faith. And then we need people to support us in that walk. This is especially true if you are in a dark place in your life; or if you are consumed by doubts and/or unbelief. God has designed the body of Christ so that we need other believers in our walk with Jesus.

Notice what happened when Jesus finally got to the house of the synagogue official:

23 When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him.

In Jesus' day a Jewish wake was a noisy affair. People were actually required to hire at least two flute players and a professional "wailer" – a woman who would audibly cry and weep and mourn (Blomberg, p. 161). Jesus came to the official's house in the midst of such "noisy disorder" – which signified that the girl had already died. His comment was, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." Mourning and disorder were inappropriate given that her "death," in effect, was only temporary. Like a person who wakes from a deep sleep, this little girl would come back to life.

The crowd understood what Jesus was saying. Matthew records their response: "And

they began laughing at Him.” I don’t know if you can remember the last time others laughed at you; it’s a humiliating thing, especially in public. They were mocking Jesus for the idea that the little girl would “wake up” and come back to life. What kind of fool or charlatan would say “the girl has not died, but is asleep”? They expressed their ridicule by “laughing at Jesus.”

Jesus apparently didn’t come back at them with words. He simply sent them out of the house and did what He had come to do:

25 But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26 This news spread throughout all that land.

As her dad had requested, Jesus laid His hand on her and she lived. This was yet more powerful evidence that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The takeover had begun. Having authority over death itself meant that the fall would one day be reversed. Jesus wasn’t doing tricks trying to impress people. He was demonstrating that this offer of the kingdom was and is real.

This passage illustrates that ***one thing we should never do is laugh at Jesus***. We never want to imitate the crowd that thought Jesus didn’t know what He was talking about when He said the little girl was only asleep. . . that Jesus says He can do things He really can’t do . . . that He makes promises He can’t keep. Imitating their mocking would be foolish because Jesus ***is*** the One who healed the sick, cast out tormenting demons, calmed the storm, and brought the little girl back to life.

- Instead of laughing at Jesus, we should be like the man with leprosy: “If you are willing you make me well.”
- Instead of laughing at Jesus, we should be like the centurion who said, “Just speak a word and my servant will be healed.”
- Instead of laughing at Jesus, we should be like the woman who said, “If I just touch His garment I will get well.”
- Instead of laughing, we should be like the man who said, “Just lay your hand on my daughter and she will live.”

In other words, if Jesus really is the Promised One who is establishing the kingdom of God, the only sane response is ***faith***.

This is true in an absolute sense. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). We laugh at Jesus when we come to the settled conviction that He was merely a good teacher or one of many ways to the Father. Rather, we should imitate the faith of those we’ve noticed in Matthew 8 and 9 today. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will experience new life. You will become a new creature in Christ and you can begin experiencing His peace and His power. There is no better day than today; yesterday is gone, tomorrow may or may not come, but today if you hear His voice come to the Father through Jesus.

This is true in our daily discipleship. We come close to laughing at Jesus when we ignore Him and/or don’t take seriously what He says to us. John Stott made the statement that “Teacher and Lord were no mere courtesy titles” (*Authentic Christianity*,

p. 39). When people called Jesus “Teacher,” He expected them to learn from Him. When people called Him “Lord,” He expected them to obey Him. He had that much wisdom and that much authority (John 13:13). And He **has** that much wisdom and authority.

If you call Jesus Teacher and Lord, are you active listening and learning and seeking to obey His voice? Or do you neglect His word and dismiss whole swaths of His teaching as irrelevant or impractical? If you need to, imitate the faith of those we’ve noticed today and fall before Jesus in faith.

We are going to give you a couple of minutes to sit before God. Ask yourself, is there any way I’m laughing at Jesus? If so, how? And how can I walk in faith?