

CHAPTER 9

We have in this chapter remarkable instances of the power and pity of the Lord Jesus, sufficient to convince us that he is both able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, and as willing as he is able. His power and pity appear here in the good offices he did,

I. To the bodies of people, in curing the palsy (v. 2-8); raising to life the ruler's daughter, and healing the bloody issue (v. 18-26); giving sight to two blind men (v. 27-31); casting the devil out of one possessed (v. 32-34); and healing all manner of sickness (v. 35).

II. To the souls of people; in forgiving sins (v. 2); calling Matthew, and conversing freely with publicans and sinners (v. 9-13); considering the frame of his disciples, with reference to the duty of fasting (v. 14-17); preaching the gospel, and, in compassion to the multitude, providing preachers for them (v. 35-38). Thus did he prove himself to be, as undoubtedly he is, the skilful, faithful Physician, both of soul and body, who has sufficient remedies for all the maladies of both: for which we must, therefore, apply ourselves to him, and glorify him both with our bodies and with our spirits, which are his, in return to him for his kindness to both.

MATTHEW 9:1-8

CHRIST HEALS A MAN SICK OF THE PALSY

The first words of this chapter oblige us to look back to the close of that which precedes it, where we find the Gadarenes so resenting the loss of their swine, that they were disgusted with Christ's company, and besought him to *depart out of their coasts*. Now here it follows, *He entered into a ship, and passed over*. They bid him begone, and he took them at their word, and we never read that he came into their coasts again. Now here observe,

1. His justice — that he left them. Note, Christ will not tarry long where he is not welcome. In righteous judgment, he forsakes those places and

persons that are weary of him, but abides with those that covet and court his stay. *If the unbeliever will depart from Christ, let him depart*; it is at his peril, ^{<4175>}1 Corinthians 7:15.

2. His patience — that he did not leave some destroying judgment behind him, to punish them, as they deserved, for their contempt and contumacy. How easily, how justly, might he have sent them after their swine, who were already so much under the devil's power. The provocation, indeed, was very great: but he put it up, and passed it by; and, without any angry resentments or upbraidings, he *entered into a ship, and passed over*. This was the day of his patience; he came not to *destroy men's lives*, but to save them; not to kill, but to cure. Spiritual judgments agree more with the constitution of gospel times; yet some observe, that in those bloody wars which the Romans made upon the Jews, which began not many years after this, they first besieged the town of Gadara, where these Gadarenes dwelt. Note, Those that drive Christ from them, draw all miseries upon them. Woe unto us, if God depart from us.

He came *into his own city, Capernaum*, the principal place of his residence at present (^{<4111>}Mark 2:1), and therefore called *his own city*. He had himself testified, that a prophet it least honoured in *his own country and city*, yet thither he came; for he *sought not his own honour*; but, being in a state of humiliation, he was content to be despised of the people. At Capernaum all the circumstances recorded in this chapter happened, and are, therefore, put together here, though, in the harmony of the evangelists, other events intervened. When the Gadarenes desired Christ to depart, they of Capernaum received him. If Christ be affronted by some, there are others in whom he will be glorious; if one will not, another will.

Now the first occurrence, after Christ's return to Capernaum, as recorded in these verses, was the cure of the man sick of the palsy. In which we may observe,

I. The *faith of his friends* in bringing him to Christ. His distemper was such, that he could not come to Christ himself, but as he was carried. Note, Even the halt and the lame may be brought to Christ, and they shall not be rejected by him. If we do as well as we can, he will accept of us. Christ had an eye to their faith. Little children cannot go to Christ themselves, but he will have an eye to the faith of those that bring them, and it shall not be in vain. *Jesus saw their faith*, the faith of the paralytic

himself, as well as of them that brought him; Jesus saw the habit of faith, though his distemper, perhaps, impaired his intellect, and obstructed the actings of it. Now their faith was,

1. A strong faith; they firmly believed that Jesus Christ both could and would heal him; else they would not have brought the sick man to him so publicly, and through so much difficulty.
2. A humble faith; though the sick man was unable to stir a step, they would not ask Christ to make him a visit, but brought him to attend on Christ. It is fitter than we should wait on Christ, than he on us.
3. An active faith: in the belief of Christ's power and goodness, they brought the sick man to him, *lying on a bed*, which could not be done without a deal of pains. Note, A strong faith regards no obstacles in pressing after Christ.

II. The *favour of Christ*, in what he said to him; *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*. This was a sovereign cordial to a sick man, and was enough to *make all his bed in his sickness*; and to make it easy to him. We read not of any thing said to Christ; probably the poor sick man could not speak for himself, and they that brought him chose rather to speak by actions than words; they set him before Christ; that was enough. Note, It is not in vain to present ourselves and our friends to Christ, as the objects of his pity. Misery cries as well as sin, and mercy is no less quick of hearing than justice. Here is, in what Christ said,

1. A kind compellation; *Son*. Note, Exhortations and consolations to the afflicted speak to them as to sons, for afflictions are fatherly discipline, <sup>Hebrews 12:5.
2. A gracious encouragement; "*Be of good cheer. Have a good heart on it; cheer up thy spirits.*" Probably the poor man, when let down among them all in his bed, was put out of countenance, was afraid of a rebuke for being brought in so rudely: but Christ does not stand upon ceremony; he bids him *be of good cheer*; all would be well, he should not be laid before Christ in vain. Christ bids him *be of good cheer*; and then cures him. He would have those to whom he deals his gifts, to be cheerful in seeking him, and in trusting in him; to be of good courage.
3. A good reason for that encouragement; *Thy sins are forgiven thee*. Now this may be considered,

(1.) as an introduction to the cure of his bodily distemper; “Thy sins are *pardoned*, and therefore thou shalt be healed.” Note, As sin is the cause of sickness, so the remission of sin is the comfort of recovery from sickness; not but that sin may be pardoned, and yet the sickness not removed; not but that the sickness may be removed, and yet the sin not pardoned: but if we have the comfort of our reconciliation to God, with the comfort of our recovery from sickness, this makes it a mercy indeed to us, as to Hezekiah, ^{<387>}Isaiah 38:17. Or,

(2.) As a reason of the command to *be of good cheer*, whether he were cured of his disease or not; “Though I should not heal thee, wilt thou not say thou hast not sought in vain, if I assure thee that *thy sins are pardoned*; and wilt thou not look upon that as a sufficient ground of comfort, though thou shouldst continue *sick of the palsy*?” Note, They who, through grace, have some evidence of the forgiveness of their sins, have reasons to be of good cheer, whatever outward troubles or afflictions they are under; see ^{<384>}Isaiah 33:24.

III. The *cavil of the scribes* at that which Christ said (v. 3); They *said within themselves*, in their hearts, *among themselves*, in their secret whisperings, *This man blasphemeth*. See how the greatest instance of heaven's power and grace is branded with the blackest note of hell's enmity; Christ's pardoning sin is termed blasphemy; nor had it been less, if he had not had commission from God for it. They, therefore, are guilty of blasphemy, that have no such commission, and yet pretend to pardon sin.

IV. The conviction which Christ gave them of the unreasonableness of this cavil, before he proceeded.

1. He *charged them with it*. Though they did but say it within themselves, he *knew their thoughts*. Note, Our Lord Jesus has the perfect knowledge of all that we say within ourselves. Thoughts are secret and sudden, yet naked and open before Christ, the eternal Word (^{<382>}Hebrews 4:12, 13), and he *understands them afar off*, ^{<383>}Psalms 139:2. He could say to them (which no mere man could), *Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?* Note, There is a great deal of evil in sinful thoughts, which is very offensive to the Lord Jesus. He being the Sovereign of the heart, sinful thoughts invade his right, and disturb his possession; therefore he takes notice of them, and is much displeas'd with them. In them lies the *root of bitterness*, ^{<385>}Genesis

6:5. The sins that begin and end in the heart, and go no further, are as dangerous as any other.

2. He *argued them out of it*, v. 5, 6. Where observe,

(1.) How he *asserts* his authority in the *kingdom of grace*. He undertakes to make out, that the *Son of man*, the Mediator, has *power on earth to forgive sins*; for *therefore* the Father has *committed all judgment to the Son*, and has given him this authority, *because he is the Son of man*, ~~(REF)~~ John 5:22, 27. If he has *power to give eternal life*, as he certainly has (~~(REF)~~ John 17:2), he must have power to forgive sin; for guilt is a bar that must be removed, or we can never get to heaven. What an encouragement is this to poor sinners to repent, that the power of pardoning sin is put into the hands of the *Son of man*, who is bone of our bone! And if he had this *power on earth*, much more now that he is exalted to the Father's right hand, to give *repentance and remission of sins*, and so to be both a *Prince and a Saviour*, ~~(REF)~~ Acts 5:31.

(2.) How he *proves* it, by his power in the kingdom of nature; his power to cure diseases. Is it not as easy to say, *Thy sins are forgiven thee*, as to say, *Arise and walk*? He that can cure the disease, whether *declaratively* as a Prophet, or *authoritatively* as God, can, in like manner, forgive the sin. Now,

[1.] This is a general argument to prove that Christ had a divine mission. His miracles, especially his miraculous cures, confirm what he said of himself, that he was the Son of God; the *power* that appeared in his cures proved him *sent of God*; and the *pity* that appeared in them proved him sent of God *to heal and save*. The God of truth would not set his seal to a lie.

[2.] It had a particular cogency in this case. The palsy was but a symptom of the disease of sin; now he made it to appear, that he could effectually cure the original disease, by the immediate removal of that symptom; so close a connection was there between the sin and the sickness. He that had power to remove the punishment, no doubt, had power to remit the sin. The scribes stood much upon a legal righteousness, and placed their confidence in that, and made no great matter of the *forgiveness of sin*, the doctrine upon which Christ hereby designed to put honour, and to show that his great errand to the world was to *save his people from their sins*.

V. The immediate cure of the sick man. Christ turned from disputing with them, and spake healing to him. The most necessary arguings must not divert us from doing the good that our *hand finds to do*. He saith to *the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go to thine house*; and a healing, quickening, strengthening power accompanied this word (v. 7): *he arose and departed to his house*. Now,

- 1.** Christ bid him *take up his bed*, to show that he was *perfectly cured*, and that not only he had no more occasion to be *carried* upon his bed, but that he had strength to *carry it*.
- 2.** He sent him to *his house*, to be a blessing to his family, where he had been so long a burden; and did not take him along with him for a show, which those would do in such a case who seek the honour that comes from men.

VI. The impression which this made upon the multitude (v. 8); they *marvelled, and glorified God*. Note, All our wonder should help to enlarge our hearts in *glorifying God*, who alone does marvellous things. They glorified God for what he had done for this poor man. Note, Others' mercies should be our praises, and we should give him thanks for them, for we are members one of another. Though few of this multitude were so convinced, as to be brought to believe in Christ, and to follow him, yet they admired him, not as God, or the Son of God, but as a *man* to whom God *had given such power*. Note, God must be glorified in all the power that is *given to men* to do good. For all power is originally his; it is in him, as the Fountain, in men, as the cisterns.

◀◀◀ MATTHEW 9:9-13

MATTHEW CALLED

In these verses we have an account of the grace and favour of Christ to poor publicans, particularly to Matthew. What he did to the bodies of people was to make way for a kind design upon their souls. Now observe here,

I. The call of Matthew, the penman of this gospel. Mark and Luke call him Levi; it was ordinary for the same person to have two names: perhaps

Matthew was the name he was most known by as a publican, and, therefore, in his humility, he called himself by that name, rather than by the more honourable name of Levi. Some think Christ gave him the name of Matthew when he called him to be an apostle; as Simon, he surnamed Peter. Matthew signifies, *the gift of God*, Ministers are God's gifts to the church; their ministry, and their ability for it, are God's gifts to them. Now observe,

1. The posture that Christ's call found Matthew in. He was *sitting at the receipt of custom*, for he was a publican, ^{<467>}Luke 5:27. He was a custom-house officer at the port of Capernaum, or an exciseman, or collector of the land-tax. Now,

(1.) He was in his calling, as the rest of them whom Christ called, ^{<408>}Matthew 4:18. Note, As Satan chooses to come, with his temptations, to those that are idle, so Christ chooses to come, with his calls, to those that are employed. But,

(2.) It was a calling of ill fame among serious people; because it was attended with so much corruption and temptation, and there were so few in that business that were honest men. Matthew himself owns what he was before his conversion, as does St. Paul (^{<311>}1 Timothy 1:13), that the grace of Christ in calling him might be the more magnified, and to show, that God has his remnant among all sorts of people. None can justify themselves in their unbelief, by their calling in the world; for there is no *sinful* calling, but some have been saved *out of it*, and no *lawful* calling, but some have been saved *in it*.

2. The preventing power of this call. We find not that Matthew looked after Christ, or had any inclination to follow him, though some of his kindred were already disciples of Christ, but Christ prevented him with the blessings of his goodness. He is found of those that seek him not. Christ *spoke first*; we have not chosen him, but he hath chosen us. He said, *Follow me*; and the same divine, almighty power accompanied this word to convert Matthew, which attended that word (v. 6), *Arise and walk*, to cure the man sick of the palsy. Note, A saving change is wrought in the soul by Christ as the *Author*, and his word as the *means*. His gospel is the *power of God unto salvation*, ^{<411>}Romans 1:16. The call was effectual, for he came at the call; *he arose*, and followed him immediately; neither denied, nor deferred his obedience. The power of divine grace soon answers and overcomes all objections. Neither his commission for his

place, nor his gains by it, could detain him, when Christ called him. *He conferred not with flesh and blood,* ^{<815>}Galatians 1:15, 16. He quitted his post, and his hopes of preferment in that way; and, though we find the disciples that were fishers occasionally fishing again afterwards, we never find Matthew at the receipt of custom again.

II. Christ's converse with publicans and sinners upon this occasion; Christ called Matthew, to introduce himself into an acquaintance with the people of that profession. *Jesus sat at meat in the house,* v. 10. The other evangelists tell us, that Matthew made a *great feast*, which the poor fishermen, when they were called, were not able to do. But when he comes to speak of this himself, he neither tells us that it was his own house, nor that it was a feast, but only that he *sat at meat in the house*; preserving the remembrance of Christ's favours to the publicans, rather than of the respect he had paid to Christ. Note, It well becomes us to speak sparingly of our own good deeds.

Now observe,

1. When Matthew invited Christ, he invited his disciples to *come along with him*. Note, They that welcome Christ, must welcome all that are his, for his sake, and let them have a room in their hearts.

2. He invited many publicans and sinners to *meet him*. This was the chief thing Matthew aimed at in this treat, that he might have an opportunity of bringing his old associates acquainted with Christ. He knew by experience what the grace of Christ could do, and would not despair concerning them. Note, They who are effectually brought to Christ themselves, cannot but be desirous that others also may be brought to him, and ambitious of contributing something towards it. True grace will not contentedly eat its morsels alone, but will invite others. When by the conversion of Matthew the fraternity was broken, presently his house was filled with publicans, and surely some of them will *follow him*, as he *followed Christ*. Thus did Andrew and Philip, ^{<814>}John 1:41, 45; 4:29. See ^{<814>}Judges 14:9.

III. The displeasure of the Pharisees at this, v. 11. They cavilled at it; *why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* Here observe,

1. That Christ was quarrelled with. It was not the least of his sufferings, that he *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*. None was more quarrelled with by men, than he that came to take up the great

quarrel between God and man. Thus he denied himself the honour due to an incarnate Deity, which was to be justified in what he spake, and to have all he said readily subscribed to: for though he never spoke or did anything amiss, every thing he said and did was found fault with. Thus he taught us to expect and prepare for reproach, and to bear it patiently.

2. They that quarrelled with him were the Pharisees; a proud generation of men, conceited of themselves, and censorious of others; of the same temper with those in the prophet's time, who said, *Stand by thyself, come not near me; I am holier than thou:* they were very strict in avoiding *sinner*s, but not in avoiding *sin*; none greater zealots than they for the *form* of godliness, nor greater enemies to the *power* of it. They were for keeping up the traditions of the elders to a nicety, and so propagating the same spirit that they were themselves governed by.

3. They brought their cavil, not to Christ himself; they had not the courage to face him with it, but to his disciples. The disciples were in the same company, but the quarrel is with the Master: for they would not have done it, if he had not; and they thought it worse in him who was a prophet, than in them; his dignity, they thought, should set him at a greater distance from such company than others. Being offended at the Master, they quarrel with the disciples. Note, It concerns Christians to be able to vindicate and justify Christ, and his doctrines and laws, and to be *ready always to give an answer to those that ask them a reason of the hope that is in them*, ⁽¹⁾ Peter 3:15. While he is an Advocate for us in heaven, let us be advocates for him on earth, and make his reproach our own.

4. The complaint was his *eating with publicans and sinners*: to be intimate with wicked people is against the law of God (⁽²⁾ Psalm 119:115; 1:1); and perhaps by accusing Christ of this to his disciples, they hoped to tempt them from him, to put them out of conceit with him, and so to bring them over to themselves to be their disciples, who kept better company; for they *compassed sea and land to make proselytes*. To be intimate with publicans was against the *tradition of the elders*, and, therefore, they looked upon it as a heinous thing. They were angry with Christ for this,

(1.) Because they *wished ill to him*, and sought occasion to misrepresent him. Note, It is an easy and very common thing to put the worst constructions upon the best words and actions.

(2.) Because they *wished no good to publicans and sinners*, but envied Christ's favour to them, and were grieved to see them brought to repentance. Note, It may justly be suspected, that they have not the grace of God themselves, who grudge others a share in that grace, who are not pleased with it.

IV. The defence that Christ made for himself and his disciples, in justification of their converse with publicans and sinners. The disciples, it should seem, being yet weak, had to seek for an answer to the Pharisees' cavil, and, therefore, bring it to Christ, and he heard it (v. 12), or perhaps overheard them whispering it to his disciples. Let him alone to vindicate himself and to plead his own cause, to answer for himself and for us too. Two things he urges in his defence,

1. The necessity and exigence of the case of the publicans, which called aloud for his help, and therefore justified him in conversing with them for their good. It was the extreme necessity of poor, lost sinners, that brought Christ from the pure regions above, to these impure ones; and the same was it, that brought him into this company which was thought impure. Now,

(1.) He proves the necessity of the case of the publicans: *they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*. The publicans are sick, and they need one to help and heal them, which the Pharisees think they do not. Note,

[1.] Sin is the sickness of the soul; sinners are spiritually sick. Original corruptions are the diseases of the soul, actual transgressions are its wounds, or the eruptions of the disease. It is deforming, weakening, disquieting, wasting, killing, but, blessed be God, not incurable.

[2.] Jesus Christ is the great Physician of souls. His curing of bodily diseases signified this, that he arose with *healing under his wings*. He is a skilful, faithful, compassionate Physician, and it is his office and business to heal the sick. Wise and good men should be as physicians to all about them; Christ was so. *Hunc affectum versus omnes habet sapiens, quem versus aegros suos medicus* — *A wise man cherishes towards all around him the feelings of a physician for his patient*. Seneca *De Const.*

[3.] Sin-sick souls have need of this Physician, for their disease is dangerous; nature will not help itself; no man can help us; such need have

we of Christ, that we are undone, eternally undone, without him. Sensible sinners see their need, and apply themselves to him accordingly.

[4.] There are multitudes who fancy themselves to be sound and whole, who think they have *no need of Christ*, but that they can shift for themselves well enough without him, as Laodicea, ^{<3817>} Revelation 3:17. Thus the Pharisees desired not the knowledge of Christ's word and ways, not because they had no need of him, but because they thought they had none. See ^{<3840>} John 9:40, 41.

(2.) He proves, that their necessity did sufficiently justify his conduct, in conversing familiarly with them, and that he ought not to be blamed for it; for that necessity made it *an act of charity*, which ought always to be preferred before the formalities of a religious profession, in which *beneficence* and *munificence* are far better than *magnificence*, as much as substance is better than shows or shadows. Those duties, which are of moral and natural obligation, are to take place even of those divine laws which are positive and ritual, much more of those impositions of men, and traditions of the elders, which make God's law stricter than he has made it. This he proves (v. 13) by a passage quoted out of ^{<3866>} Hosea 6:6, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*. That morose separation from the society of publicans, which the Pharisees enjoined, was *less than sacrifice*; but Christ's conversing with them was more than an act of common mercy, and therefore to be preferred before it. If to do well ourselves is better than sacrifice, as Samuel shows (^{<3852>} 1 Samuel 15:22, 23), much more to do good to others. Christ's conversing with sinners is here called mercy: to promote the conversion of souls is the greatest act of mercy imaginable; it is *saving a soul from death*, ^{<3850>} James 5:20. Observe how Christ quotes this, *Go ye and learn what that meaneth*. Note, It is not enough to be acquainted with the letter of scripture, but we must learn to understand the meaning of it. And they have best learned the meaning of the scriptures, that have learned how to apply them as a reproof to their own faults, and a rule for their own practice. This scripture which Christ quoted, served not only to vindicate him, but,

[1.] To show wherein true religion consists; not in external observances: not *in meats and drinks* and shows of sanctity, not in little particular opinions and doubtful disputations, but in doing all the good we can to the bodies and souls of others; in righteousness and peace; in *visiting the fatherless and widows*.

[2.] To condemn the Pharisaical hypocrisy of those who place religion in rituals, more than in morals, ^{<423>}Matthew 23:23. They espouse those forms of godliness which may be made consistent with, and perhaps subservient to, their pride, covetousness, ambition, and malice, while they hate that power of it which is mortifying to those lusts.

2. He urges the nature and end of his own commission. He must keep to his orders, and prosecute that for which he was appointed to be the great Teacher; now, says he, "*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*, and therefore must converse with publicans." Observe,

(1.) What his errand was; it was to *call to repentance*. This was his first text (^{<407>}Matthew 4:17), and it was the tendency of all his sermons. Note, The gospel call is a call to repentance; a call to us to change our mind and to change our way.

(2.) With whom his errand lay; not with *the righteous*, but with *sinners*. That is,

[1.] If the children of men had not been *sinners*, there had been no occasion for Christ's coming among them. He is the Saviour, not of man as *man*, but of man as *fallen*. Had the first Adam continued in his original *righteousness*, we had not needed a second Adam.

[2.] Therefore his *greatest business* lies with the *greatest sinners*; the more dangerous the sick man's case is, the more occasion there is for the physician's help. Christ came into the world to *save sinners*, but especially *the chief* (^{<515>}1 Timothy 1:15); to call not those so much, who, though sinners, are comparatively righteous, but the worst of sinners.

[3.] The more sensible any sinners are of their sinfulness, the more welcome will Christ and his gospel be to them; and every one chooses to go where his company is desired, not to those who would rather have his room. Christ came not with an expectation of succeeding among *the righteous*, those who conceit themselves so, and therefore will sooner be sick of their Saviour, than sick of their sins, but among the convinced humble *sinners*; to them Christ will come, for to them he will be welcome.

⌘ MATTHEW 9:14-17

CHRIST'S REPLY TO THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN

The objections which were made against Christ and his disciples gave occasion to some of the most profitable of his discourses; thus are the interests of truth often served, even by the opposition it meets with from gainsayers, and thus the wisdom of Christ brings good out of evil. This is the third instance of it in this chapter; his discourse of his power to forgive sin, and his readiness to receive sinners, was occasioned by the cavils of the scribes and Pharisees; so here, from a reflection upon the conduct of his family, arose a discourse concerning his tenderness for it. Observe,

I. The objection which the disciples of John made against Christ's disciples, for not fasting so often as they did; which they are charged with, as another instance of the looseness of their profession, besides that of eating with publicans and sinners; and it is therefore suggested to them, that they should change that profession for another more strict. It appears by the other evangelists (⌘ Mark 2:18 and ⌘ Luke 5:33) that the disciples of the Pharisees joined with them, and we have reason to suspect that they instigated them, making use of John's disciples as their spokesmen, because they, being more in favour with Christ and his disciples, could do it more plausibly. Note, It is no new thing for bad men to set good men together by the ears; if the people of God differ in their sentiments, designing men will take that occasion to sow discord, and to incense them one against another, and alienate them one from another, and so make an easy prey of them. If the disciples of John and of Jesus clash, we have reason to suspect the Pharisees have been at work underhand, blowing the coals. Now the complaint is, *Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples fast not?* It is pity the duties of religion, which ought to be the confirmations of holy love, should be made the occasions of strife and contention; but they often are so, as here; where we may observe,

1. How they boasted of their own fasting. *We and the Pharisees fast often.* Fasting has in all ages of the church been consecrated, upon special occasions, to the service of religion; the Pharisees were much in it; many of them kept two fast-days in a week, and yet the generality of them were hypocrites and bad men. Note, False and formal professors often excel others in outward acts of devotion, and even of mortification. The

disciples of John *fasted often*, partly in compliance with their master's practice, for he came *neither eating nor drinking* (⁴¹¹⁸Matthew 11:18); and people are apt to imitate their leaders, though not always from the same inward principle; partly in compliance with their master's doctrine of repentance. Note, The severer part of religion is often most *minded* by those that are yet under the discipline of the Spirit, as a *Spirit of bondage*, whereas, though these are good in their place, we must pass through them to that life of delight in God and dependence on him, to which these should lead. Now they come to Christ to tell him that they *fasted often*, at least they thought it often. Note, *Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness*, ⁴¹⁰⁶Proverbs 20:6. There is a proneness in professors to brag of their own performance in religion, especially if there by any thing extraordinary in them; nay, and not only to boast of them before men, but to plead them before God, and confide in them as a righteousness.

2. How they blamed Christ's disciples for not fasting so often as they did. *Thy disciples fast not.* They could not but know, that Christ had instructed his disciples to keep their fasts private, and to manage themselves so as that they might not *appear unto men to fast*; and, therefore, it was very uncharitable in them to conclude they did *not fast*, because they did not proclaim their fasts. Note, We must not judge of people's religion by that which falls under the eye and observation of the world. But suppose it was so, that Christ's disciples did not *fast* so often or so long as they did, why truly, they would therefore have it thought, that they had more religion in them than Christ's disciples had. Note, It is common for vain professors to make themselves a standard in religion, by which to try and measure persons and things, as if all who differed from them were so far in the wrong; as if all that did less than they, did too little, and all that did more than they, did too much, which is a plain evidence of their want of humility and charity.

3. How they brought this complaint to Christ. Note, If Christ's disciples, either by omission or commission, give offence, Christ himself will be sure to hear of it, and be reflected upon for it. *O, Jesus, are these thy Christians?* Therefore, as we tender the honour of Christ, we are concerned to conduct ourselves well. Observe, The quarrel with Christ was brought to the disciples (v. 11), the quarrel with the disciples was brought to Christ (v. 14), this is the way of sowing discord and killing love, to set people against ministers, ministers against people, and one friend against another.

II. The apology which Christ made for his disciples in this matter. Christ might have upbraided John's disciples with the former part of their question, *Why do ye fast often?* "Nay, you know best why you do it; but the truth is, many abound in external instances of devotion, that scarcely do themselves know why and wherefore." But he only vindicates the practice of his disciples; why they had nothing to say for themselves, he had something ready to say for them. Note, As it is wisdom's honour to be justified of all her children, so it is her children's happiness to be all justified of wisdom. What we do according to the precept and pattern of Christ, he will be sure to bear us out in, and we may with confidence leave it to him to clear up our integrity.

But thou shalt answer, Lord, for me. — Herbert

Two things Christ pleads in defence of their *not fasting*.

1. That it was not a season proper for that duty (v. 15): *Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?*

Observe, Christ's answer is so framed, as that it might sufficiently justify the practice of his own disciples, and yet not condemn the institution of John, or the practice of his disciples. When the Pharisees fomented this dispute, they hoped Christ would cast blame, either on his own disciples, or on John's, but he did neither. Note, When at any time we are unjustly censured, our care must be only to clear ourselves, not to recriminate, or throw dirt upon others; and such a variety may there be of circumstances, as may justify us in our practice, without condemning those that practise otherwise.

Now his argument is taken from the common usage of joy and rejoicing during the continuance of marriage solemnities; when all instances of melancholy and sorrow are looked upon as improper and absurd, as it was at Samson's wedding, ⁽¹⁷⁴⁷⁾Judges 14:17. Now,

(1.) The disciples of Christ were the *children of the bride-chamber*, invited to the wedding-feast, and welcome there; the disciples of the Pharisees were not so, but *children of the bond-woman* (⁽⁸⁰⁵⁾Galatians 4:25, 31), continuing under a dispensation of darkness and terror. Note, The faithful followers of Christ, who have the Spirit of adoption, have a continual feast, while they who have the spirit of bondage and fear, cannot rejoice for joy, as other people, ⁽³⁹¹⁾Hosea 9:1.

(2.) The disciples of Christ had *the bridegroom with them*, which the disciples of John had not; their master was now cast into prison, and lay there in continual danger of his life, and therefore it was seasonable for them to *fast often*. Such a day would come upon the disciples of Christ, when the bridegroom should be taken from them, when they should be deprived of his bodily presence, and *then should they fast*. The thoughts of parting grieved them when he was going, ^{<BIB>}John 16:6. Tribulation and affliction befel them when he was gone, and gave them occasion of *mourning* and *praying*, that is, of religious fasting. Note,

[1.] Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom of his Church, and his disciples are the *children of the bride-chamber*. Christ speaks of himself to John's disciples under this similitude, because that John had used it, when he called himself a friend of the bridegroom, ^{<BIB>}John 3:29. And if they would by this hint call to mind what their master then said, they would answer themselves.

[2.] The condition of those who are the children of the bride-chamber is liable to many changes and alterations in this world; they sing of mercy and judgment.

[3.] It is merry or melancholy with the children of the bride-chamber, according as they have more or less of the bridegroom's presence. When he is with them, the candle of God shines upon their head, and all is well; but when he is withdrawn, though but for a small moment, *they are troubled*, and walk heavily; the presence and nearness of the sun makes day and summer, his absence and distance, night and winter. Christ is all in all to the church's joy.

[4.] Every duty is to be done in its proper season. See ^{<BIB>}Ecclesiastes 7:14; ^{<BIB>}James 5:13. There is a time to mourn and a time to laugh, to each of which we should accommodate ourselves, and bring forth fruit in due season. In fasts, regard is to be had to the methods of God's grace towards us; when he *mourns to us*, we must *lament*; and also to the dispensations of his providence concerning us; there are times when *the Lord God calls to weeping and mourning*; regard is likewise to be had to any special work before us, ^{<BIB>}Matthew 17:21; ^{<BIB>}Acts 13:2.

2. That they had not strength sufficient for that duty. This is set forth in two similitudes, one of putting *new cloth into an old garment*, which does but pull the old to pieces (v. 16); the other of putting *new wine into old*

bottles, which does but burst the bottles, v. 17. Christ's disciples were not able to bear these severe exercises so well as those of John and of the Pharisees, which the learned Dr. Whitby gives this reason for: There were among the Jews not only sects of the Pharisees and Essenes, who led an austere life, but also *schools of the prophets*, who frequently lived in mountains and deserts, and were many of them Nazarites; they had also private academies to train men up in a strict discipline; and possibly from these many of John's disciples might come, and many of the Pharisees; whereas Christ's disciples, being taken immediately from their callings, had not been used to such religious austerities, and were unfit for them, and would by them be rather unfitted for their other work. Note,

(1.) Some duties of religion are harder and more difficult than others, like *new cloth* and *new wine*, which require most intenseness of mind, and are most displeasing to flesh and blood; such are religious fasting and the duties that attend it.

(2.) The best of Christ's disciples pass through a state of infancy; all the trees in Christ's garden are not of a growth, nor all his scholars in the same form; there are *babes in Christ* and grown men.

(3.) In the enjoining of religious exercises, the weakness and infirmity of young Christians ought to be considered: as the food provided for them must be such as is proper for their age (^{<419D>}1 Corinthians 3:2; ^{<515D>}Hebrews 5:12), so must the work be that is cut out for them. Christ would not speak to his disciples that which they could not then bear, ^{<419D>}John 16:12. Young beginners in religion must not be put upon the hardest duties at first, lest they be discouraged. Such as was God's care of his Israel, when he brought them out of Egypt, not to lead them by the way of the Philistines (^{<1237>}Exodus 13:17, 18), and such as was Jacob's care of his children and cattle, not to overdrive them (^{<123D>}Genesis 33:13), such is Christ's care of the little ones of his family, and the lambs of his flock: he gently leads them. For want of this care, many times, *the bottles break*, and *the wine is spilled*; the profession of many miscarries and comes to nothing, through indiscretion at first. Note, There may be *over-doing* even in *well-doing*, a being *righteous over-much*; and such an *over-doing* as may prove an *undoing* through the subtlety of Satan.

THE RULER'S DAUGHTER RAISED

We have here two passages of history put together; that of the raising of Jairus's daughter to life, and that of the curing of the woman that had *the bloody issue*, as he was going to Jairus's house, which is introduced in a parenthesis, in the midst of the other; for Christ's miracles were thick sown, and interwoven; *the work of him that sent him* was his daily work. He was called to do these good works from speaking the things foregoing, in answer to the cavils of the Pharisees, v. 18: *While he spake these things*; and we may suppose it is a pleasing interruption given to that unpleasant work of disputation, which, though sometimes needful, a good man will gladly leave, to go about a work of devotion or charity. Here is,

I. The ruler's address to Christ, v. 18. *A certain ruler*, a ruler of the synagogue, *came and worshipped him*. *Have any of the rulers believed on him?* Yes, here was one, a church ruler, whose faith condemned the unbelief of the rest of the rulers. This ruler had a little daughter, of twelve years old, just dead, and this breach made upon his family comforts was the occasion of his coming to Christ. Note, In trouble we should visit God: the death of our relations should drive us to Christ, who is our life; it is well if any thing will do it. When affliction is in our families, we must not sit down astonished, but, as Job, *fall down and worship*. Now observe,

1. His humility in this address to Christ. He came with his errand to Christ himself, and did not send his servant. Note, It is no disparagement to the greatest rulers, personally to attend on the Lord Jesus. He *worshipped him*, bowed the knee to him, and gave him all imaginable respect. Note, They that would receive mercy from Christ must give honour to Christ.

2. His faith in this address; "*My daughter is even now dead,*" and though any other physician would now come too late (nothing more absurd than *post mortem medicina* — *medicine after death*), yet Christ comes not too late; he is a Physician after death, for he is *the resurrection and the life*; "*O come then, and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.*" This was quite above the power of nature (*a privatione ad habitum non datur regressus* — *life once lost cannot be restored*), yet within the power of Christ, who has *life in himself, and quickeneth whom he will*. Now Christ

works in an ordinary, *by nature* and not *against* it, and, therefore, we cannot in faith bring him such a request as this; while there is life, there is hope, and room for prayer; but when our friends are dead, the case is determined; *we shall go to them, but they shall not return to us*. But while Christ was here upon earth working miracles, such a confidence as this was not only allowable but very commendable.

II. The readiness of Christ to comply with his address, v. 19. *Jesus* immediately *arose*, left his company, *and followed him*; he was not only willing to grant him what he desired, in raising his daughter to life, but to gratify him so far as to come to his house to do it. Surely *he never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain*. He denied to go along with the nobleman, who said, *Sir, come down, ere my child die* (~~408~~ John 4:48-50), yet he went along with the ruler of the synagogue, who said, *Sir, come down, and my child shall live*. The variety of methods which Christ took in working his miracles is perhaps to be attributed to the different frame and temper of mind which they were in who applied to him, which he *who searcheth the heart* perfectly knew, and accommodated himself to. He knows what is in man, and what course to take with him. And observe, when *Jesus followed him, so did his disciples*, whom he had chosen for his constant companions; it was not for state, or that he might come with observation, that he took his attendants with him, but that they might be the witnesses of his miracles, who were hereafter to be the preachers of his doctrine.

III. The healing of the poor woman's bloody issue. I call her a poor woman, not only because her case was piteous, but because, she had *spent it all upon physicians*, for the cure of her distemper, and was never the better; which was a double aggravation of the misery of her condition, that she had been full, but was now empty; and that she had impoverished herself for the recovery of her health, and yet had not her health neither. This *woman was diseased with a constant issue of blood twelve years* (v. 20); a disease, which was not only weakening and wasting, and under which the body must needs languish; but which also rendered her ceremonially unclean, and shut her *out from the courts of the Lord's house*; but it did not cut her off from approaching to Christ. She applied herself to Christ, and received mercy from him, by the way, as he followed the ruler, whose daughter was dead, to whom it would be a great encouragement, and a help to keep up his faith in the power of Christ. So

graciously does Christ consider the frame, and consult the case, of weak believers. Observe,

1. The woman's great faith in Christ, and in his power. Her disease was of such a nature, that her modesty would not suffer her to speak openly to Christ for a cure, as others did, but by a peculiar impulse of the Spirit of faith, she believed him to have such an overflowing fulness of healing virtue, that the very *touch of his garment* would be her cure. This, perhaps, had something of fancy mixed with faith; for she had no precedent for this way of application to Christ, unless, as some think, she had an eye to the raising of the dead man by the touch of Elisha's bones, ^{<2K1>}2 Kings 13:21. But what *weakness of understanding* there was in it, Christ was pleased to overlook, and to accept the sincerity and strength of her faith; for he *eateth the honey-comb with the honey*, ^{<2S1>}Song of Solomon 4:11. She believed she should be healed if she did but *touch the very hem of his garment*, the very extremity of it. Note, There is virtue in every thing that belongs to Christ. The holy oil with which the high priest was anointed, *ran down to the skirts of his garments*, ^{<1P1>}Psalm 133:2. Such a fulness of grace is there in Christ, that *from it we may all receive*, ^{<1J1>}John 1:16.

2. Christ's great favour to this woman. He did not suspend (as he might have done) his healing influences, but suffered this bashful patient to steal a cure unknown to any one else, though she could not think to do it unknown to him. And now she was well content to be gone, for she had what she came for, but Christ was not willing to let her to so; he will not only have his power magnified in her cure, but his grace magnified in her comfort and commendation: the triumphs of her faith must be to her praise and honour. He *turned about* to see for her (v. 22), and soon discovered her. Note, It is great encouragement to humble Christians, that they who hide themselves from men are known to Christ, who sees in secret their applications to heaven when most private. Now here,

(1.) He *puts gladness into her heart*, by that word, *Daughter, be of good comfort*. She feared being chidden for coming clandestinely, but she is encouraged.

[1.] He calls her *daughter*, for he spoke to her with the tenderness of a father, as he did *to the man sick of the palsy* (v. 2), whom he called *son*. Note, Christ has comforts ready for *the daughters of Zion*, that are of a sorrowful spirit, as Hannah was, ^{<1S1>}1 Samuel 1:15. Believing women are Christ's *daughters*, and he will own them as such.

[2.] He bids her *be of good comfort*: she has reason to be so, if Christ own her for a *daughter*. Note, The saints' consolation is founded in their adoption. His bidding her *be comforted*, brought comfort with it, as his saying, *Be ye whole*, brought health with it. Note, It is the will of Christ that his people should be comforted, and it is his prerogative to command comfort to troubled spirits. He *creates the fruit of the lips, peace*, ^{257b} Isaiah 57:19.

(2.) He puts honour upon her faith. That grace of all others gives most honour to Christ, and therefore he puts most honour upon it; *Thy faith has made thee whole*. Thus *by faith she obtained a good report*. And as of all graces Christ puts the greatest honour upon faith, so of all believers he puts the greatest honour upon those that are most humble; as here on this woman, who had more faith than she thought she had. She had reason to *be of good comfort*, not only because she was *made whole*, but because her *faith had made her whole*; that is,

[1.] She was spiritually healed; that cure was wrought in her which is the proper fruit and effect of faith, the pardon of sin and the work of grace. Note, We may then be abundantly comforted in our temporal mercies when they are accompanied with those spiritual blessings that resemble them; our food and raiment will be comfortable, when by faith we are fed with *the bread of life*, and *clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ*; our rest and sleep will be comfortable, when by faith we repose in God, and dwell at ease in him; our health and prosperity will be comfortable, when by faith our souls prosper, and are in health. See ^{238c} Isaiah 38:16, 17.

[2.] Her bodily cure was the fruit of faith, of her faith, and that made it a happy, comfortable cure indeed. They out of whom the devils were cast, were helped by Christ's sovereign power; some by the faith of others (as v. 2); but it is *thy faith that has made thee whole*. Note, Temporal mercies are then comforts indeed to us, when they are received by faith. If, when in pursuit of mercy, we prayed for it in faith, with an eye to the promise, and in dependence upon that, if we desired it for the sake of God's glory, and with a resignation to God's will, and have our hearts enlarged by it in faith, love, and obedience, we may then say, it was received by faith.

IV. The posture in which he found the ruler's house, v. 23. — He *saw the people and the minstrels*, or musicians, *making a noise*. The house was in a hurry: such work does death make, when it comes into a family; and,

perhaps, the necessary cares that arise at such a time, when our dead is to be decently buried out of our sight, give some useful diversion to that grief which is apt to prevail and play the tyrant. The people in the neighbourhood came together to condole on account of the loss, to comfort the parents, to prepare for, and attend on, the funeral, which the Jews were not wont to defer long. The musicians were among them, according to the custom of the Gentiles, with their doleful, melancholy tunes, to increase the grief, and stir up the lamentations of those that attended on this occasion; as (they say) is usual among the Irish, with their *Ahona, Ahona*. Thus they indulged a passion that is apt enough of itself to grow intemperate, and affected to *sorrow as those that had no hope*. See how religion provides cordials, where irreligion administers corrosives. Heathenism aggravates that grief which Christianity studies to assuage. Or perhaps these musicians endeavoured on the other hand to divert the grief and exhilarate the family; but, *as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart*. Observe, The parents, who were immediately touched with the affliction, were silent, while *the people and minstrels*, whose lamentations were forced, made such a noise. Note, The loudest grief is not always the greatest; rivers are most noisy where they run shallow. *Ille dolet vere, qui sine teste dolet* — *That grief is most sincere, which shuns observation*. But notice is taken of this, to show that the girl was really dead, in the undoubted apprehension of all about her.

V. The rebuke that Christ gave to this hurry and noise, v. 24. He said, *Give place*. Note, Sometimes, when *the sorrow of the world* prevails, it is difficult for Christ and his comforts to enter. They that harden themselves in sorrow, and, like Rachel, *refuse to be comforted*, should think they hear Christ saying to their disquieting thoughts, *Give place*: “Make room for him who is *the Consolation of Israel*, and brings with him *strong consolations*, strong enough to overcome the confusion and tyranny of these worldly griefs, if he may but be admitted into the soul.” He gives a good reason why they should not thus disquiet themselves and one another; *The maid is not dead but sleepeth*.

1. This was eminently true of this maid, that was immediately to be raised to life; she was really dead, but not so to Christ, who knew within himself what he would do, and could do, and who had determined to make her death but as a sleep. There is little more difference between sleep and death, but in continuance; whatever other difference there is, it is but a dream. This death must be but of short continuance, and therefore is but a

sleep, like one night's rest. He that quickens the dead, may well call the things which be not as though they were, ^{<R017>}Romans 4:17.

2. It is in a sense true of all that die, chiefly of them *that die in the Lord*.
Note,

(1.) Death is a sleep. All nations and languages, for the softening of that which is so dreadful, and withal so unavoidable, and the reconciling of themselves to it, have agreed to call it so. It is said, even of the wicked kings, that they *slept with their fathers*; and of those that shall arise to everlasting contempt, that they *sleep in the dust*, ^{<R018>}Daniel 12:2. It is not the sleep of the soul; its activity ceases not; but the sleep of the body, which lies down in the grave, still and silent, regardless and disregarded, wrapt up in darkness and obscurity. Sleep is a short death, and death a long sleep. But *the death of the righteous* is in a special manner to be looked upon as a sleep, ^{<R019>}Isaiah 57:2. They sleep in Jesus (^{<R020>}1 Thessalonians 4:14); they not only rest from the toils and labours of the day, but *rest in hope* of a joyful waking again in the morning of the resurrection, when they shall wake refreshed, wake to a new life, wake to be richly dressed and crowned, and *wake to sleep no more*.

(2.) The consideration of this should moderate our grief at the death of our dear relations: “say not, They *are* lost; no, they are but *gone before*: say not, They are *slain*; no, they are but *fallen asleep*; and the apostle speaks of it as an absurd thing to imagine that *they that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished* (^{<R021>}1 Corinthians 15:18); *give place*, therefore, to those comforts which the covenant of grace ministers, fetched from the future state, and the glory to be revealed.”

Now could it be thought that such a comfortable word as this, from the mouth of our Lord Jesus, should be ridiculed as it was? *They laughed him to scorn*. These people lived in Capernaum, knew Christ's character, that he never spake a rash or foolish word; they knew how many mighty works he had done; so that if they did not understand what he meant by this, they might at least have been silent in expectation of the issue. Note, The words and works of Christ which cannot be understood, yet are not therefore to be despised. We must adore the mystery of divine sayings, even when they seem to contradict what we think ourselves most confident of. Yet even this tended to the confirmation of the miracle: for it seems she was so apparently dead, that it was thought a very ridiculous thing to say otherwise.

VI. The raising of the damsel to life by the power of Christ, v. 25. *The people were put forth.* Note, Scorners that laugh at what they see and hear that is above their capacity, are not proper witnesses of the wonderful works of Christ, the glory of which lies not in pomp, but in power. The widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus, were raised from the dead openly, but this damsel privately; for Capernaum, that had slighted the lesser miracles of restoring health, was unworthy to see the greater, of restoring life; these *pearls were not to be cast before those that would trample them under their feet.*

Christ went in and *took her by the hand*, as it were to awake her, and to help her up, prosecuting his own metaphor of her being asleep. The high priest, that typified Christ, was not to come near the dead (^{<1021>}Leviticus 21:10, 11), but Christ *touched the dead*. The Levitical priesthood leaves the dead in their uncleanness, and therefore keeps at a distance from them, because it cannot remedy them; but Christ, having power to raise the dead, is above the infection, and therefore is not shy of touching them. He *took her by the hand, and the maid arose*. So easily, so effectually was the miracle wrought; not by prayer, as Elijah did (^{<1172>}1 Kings 17:21), and Elisha (^{<103>}2 Kings 4:33), but by a touch. They did it as servants, he as a Son, as a God, *to whom belong the issues from death*. Note, Jesus Christ is the Lord of souls, he commands them forth, and commands them back, when and as he pleases. Dead souls are not raised to spiritual life, unless Christ *take them by the hand*: it is done in the *day of his power*. He helps us up, or we lie still.

VII. The general notice that was taken of this miracle, though it was wrought privately; v. 26. *The fame thereof went abroad into all that land*: it was the common subject of discourse. Note, Christ's works are more talked of than considered and improved. And doubtless, they that heard only the report of Christ's miracles, were accountable for that as well as they that were eye-witnesses of them. Though we at this distance have not seen Christ's miracles, yet having an authentic history of them, we are bound, upon the credit of that, to receive his doctrine; and blessed *are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*, ^{<819>}John 20:29.

~~407~~ MATTHEW 9:27-34

TWO BLIND AND A DUMB MAN HEALED

In these verses we have an account of two more miracles wrought together by our Saviour.

I. The giving of sight to two blind men, v. 27-31. Christ is the Fountain of light as well as life; and as, by raising the dead, he showed himself to be the same that at first *breathed into man the breath of life*, so, by giving sight to the blind, he showed himself to be the same that at first *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*. Observe,

1. The importunate address of the blind men to Christ. He was returning from the ruler's house to his own lodgings, and these *blind men followed him*, as beggars do, with their incessant cries, v. 27. He that cured diseases so easily, so effectually, and, withal, at so cheap a rate, shall have patients enough. As for other things, so he is famed for an Oculist. Observe,

(1.) The title which these blind men gave to Christ; *Thou Son of David, have mercy on us*. The promise made to David, that of his loins the Messiah should come, was well known, and the Messiah was therefore commonly called *the Son of David*. At this time there was a general expectation of his appearing; these blind men know, and own, and proclaim it in the streets of Capernaum, that he is come, and that this is he; which aggravates the folly and sin of the chief priests and Pharisees who denied and opposed him. They could not see him and his miracles, but *faith comes by hearing*. Note, They who, by the providence of God, are deprived of bodily sight, may yet, by the grace of God, have *the eyes of their understanding so enlightened*, as to discern those great things of God, *which are hid from the wise and prudent*.

(2.) Their petition, *Have mercy on us*. It was foretold that the *Son of David* should be *merciful* (~~420~~ Psalm 72:12, 13), and in him *shines the tender mercy of our God*, ~~418~~ Luke 1:78. Note, Whatever our necessities and burthens are, we need no more for supply and support, than a share in the *mercy of our Lord Jesus*. Whether he heal us or no, if he *have mercy on us*, we have enough; as to the particular instances and methods of mercy, we may safely and wisely refer ourselves to the wisdom of Christ. They did not each of them say for himself, *Have mercy on me*, but both for one

another, *Have mercy on us*. Note, It becomes those that are under the same affliction, to concur in the same prayers for relief. Fellow-sufferers should be joint-petitioners. In Christ there is enough for all.

(3.) Their importunity in this request; they *followed him, crying*. It seems, he did not take notice of them at first, for he would try their faith, which he knew to be strong; would quicken their prayers, and make his cures the more valued, when they did not always come at the first word; and would teach us to *continue instant in prayer, always to pray, and not to faint*: and, though the answer do not come presently, yet to wait for it, and to follow providence, even in those steps and outgoings of it which seem to neglect or contradict our prayers. Christ would not heal them publicly in the streets, for this was a cure he would have kept private (v. 30), but *when he came into the house, they followed him thither, and came to him*. Note, Christ's doors are always open to believing and importunate petitioners; it seemed rude in them to rush into the house after him, when he desired to retire; but, such is the tenderness of our Lord Jesus, that they were not more bold than welcome.

2. The confession of faith, which Christ drew from them upon this occasion. When they came to him for mercy, he asked them, *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* Note, Faith is the great condition of Christ's favours. They who would receive the *mercy* of Christ, must firmly believe the *power* of Christ. What we would have him do for us, we must be fully assured that he is *able to do*. They followed Christ, and followed him crying, but the great question is, *Do ye believe?* Nature may work fervency, but it is only grace that can work faith; spiritual blessings are obtained only by faith. They had intimated their faith in the office of Christ as *Son of David*, and in his mercy; but Christ demands likewise a profession of faith in his power. *Believe ye that I am able to do this*; to bestow this favour; to give sight to the blind, as well as to cure the palsy and raise the dead? Note, It is good to be particular in the exercise of faith, to apply the general assurances of God's power and good will, and the general promises, to our particular exigencies. *All shall work for good*, and if all, then this. "*Believe ye that I am able, not only to prevail with God for it, as a prophet, but that I am able to do it by my own power?*" This will amount to their belief of his being not only *the Son of David*, but *the Son of God*; for it is God's prerogative to *open the eyes of the blind* (^{146:8}Psalm 146:8); he makes *the seeing eye*, (^{4:11}Exodus 4:11. *Job was eyes to the blind* (^{29:15}Job 29:15); was to them instead of eyes, but he could not

give eyes to the blind. Still it is put to us, *Believe we that Christ is able to do for us*, by the power of his merit and intercession in heaven, of his Spirit and grace in the heart, and of his providence and dominion in the world? To believe the power of Christ is not only to assure ourselves of it, but to commit ourselves to it, and encourage ourselves in it.

To this question they give an immediate answer, without hesitation: they said, *Yea, Lord*. Though he had kept them in suspense awhile, and had not helped them at first, they honestly imputed that to his wisdom, not to his weakness, and were still confident of his ability. Note, The treasures of mercy that are laid up in the power of Christ, are *laid out and wrought for those that trust in him*, ¹⁸¹⁸Psalm 31:19.

3. The cure that Christ wrought on them; *he touched their eyes*, v. 29. This he did to encourage their faith, which, by his delay, he had tried, and to show that he gives sight to blind souls by the operations of his grace accompanying the word, *anointing the eyes with eye-salve*: and he put the cure upon their faith, *According to your faith be it unto you*. When they begged for a cure, he enquired into their faith (v. 28), *Believe ye that I am able?* He did not enquire into their wealth, whether they were able to pay him for a cure; nor into their reputation, should he get credit by curing them; but into their faith; and now they had professed their faith he referred the matter to that: “I know you do believe, and the power you believe in shall be exerted for you; *According to your faith be it unto you*.” This speaks,

(1.) His knowledge of the sincerity of their faith, and his acceptance and approbation of it. Note, It is a great comfort to true believers, that Jesus Christ knows their faith, and is well pleased with it. Though it be weak, though others do not discern it, though they themselves are ready to question it, it is known to him.

(2.) His insisting upon their faith as necessary; “If you believe, take what you come for.” Note, They who apply themselves to Jesus Christ, shall be dealt with *according to their faith*; not according to their *fancies*, nor according to their *profession*, but *according to their faith*; that is, unbelievers cannot expect to find any favour with God, but true believers may be sure to find all that favour which is offered in the gospel; and our comforts ebb or flow, according as our faith is stronger or weaker; we are not straitened in Christ, let us not then be straitened in ourselves.

4. The charge he gave them to keep it private (v. 30), *See that no man know it.* He gave them this charge,

(1.) To set us an example of that humility and lowliness of mind, which he would have us to learn of him. Note, In the good we do, we must not seek our own praise, but only the glory of God. It must be more our care and endeavour to be useful, than to be known and observed to be so, ~~206~~ Proverbs 20:6; 25:27. Thus Christ seconded the rule he had given, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.*

(2.) Some think that Christ, in keeping it private, showed his displeasure against the people of Capernaum, who had seen so many miracles, and yet believed not. Note, The silencing of those who should proclaim the works of Christ is a judgment to any place or people: and it is just in Christ to deny the means of conviction to those that are obstinate in their infidelity; and to shroud the light from those that shut their eyes against it.

(3.) He did it in discretion, for his own preservation; because the more he was proclaimed, the more jealous would the rulers of the Jews be of his growing interest among the people.

(4.) Dr. Whitby gives another reason, which is very considerable, why Christ sometimes concealed his miracles, and afterwards forbid the publishing of his transfiguration; because he would not indulge that pernicious conceit which obtained among the Jews, that their Messiah should be a temporal prince, and so give occasion to the people to attempt the setting up of his kingdom, by tumults and seditions, as they offered to do, ~~205~~ John 6:15. But when, after his resurrection (which was the full proof of his mission), his spiritual kingdom was set up, then that danger was over, and they must be published to all nations. And he observes, that the miracles which Christ wrought among the Gentiles and the Gadarenes, were ordered to be published, because with them there was not that danger.

But honour is like the shadow, which, as it flees from those that follow it, so it follows those that flee from it (v. 31); *They spread abroad his fame.* This was more an act of zeal, than of prudence; and though it may be excused as honestly meant for the honour of Christ, yet it cannot be justified, being done against a particular charge. Whenever we profess to direct our intention to the glory of God, we must see to it that the action be according to the will of God.

II. The healing of a *dumb man*, that was *possessed with a devil*. And here observe,

1. His case, which was very sad. He was under the power of the devil in this particular instance, that he was disabled from speaking, v. 32. See the calamitous state of this world, and how various the afflictions of the afflicted are! We have no sooner dismissed *two blind men*, but we meet with a *dumb man*. How thankful should we be to God for our sight and speech! See the malice of Satan against mankind, and in how many ways he shows it. This man's dumbness was the effect of his being *possessed with a devil*; but it was better he should be unable to say any thing, than be forced to say, as those demoniacs did (⁴¹⁸⁹Matthew 8:29), *What have we to do with thee?* Of the two, better a dumb devil than a blaspheming one. When the devil gets possession of a soul, it is made silent as to any thing that is good; dumb in prayers and praises, which the devil is a sworn enemy to. This poor creature *they brought to Christ*, who entertained not only those that came of themselves in their own faith, but those that were *brought to him* by their friends in the faith of others. Though *the just shall live eternally by his faith*, yet temporal mercies may be bestowed on us with an eye to their faith who are intercessors on our behalf. They brought him in just as *the blind man went out*. See how unwearied Christ was in doing good; how closely one good work followed another! Treasures of mercy, wondrous mercy, are hid in him; which may be continually communicated, but can never be exhausted.

2. His cure, which was very sudden (v. 33), *When the devil was cast out, the dumb spake*. Note, Christ's cures strike at the root, and remove the effect by taking away the cause; they open the lips, by breaking Satan's power in the soul. In sanctification he heals the waters by casting salt into the spring. When Christ, by his grace, *casts the devil out* of a soul, presently *the dumb speaks*. When Paul was converted, *behold, he prays*; then *the dumb spake*.

3. The consequences of this cure.

(1.) *The multitudes marvelled*; and well they might; though *few believed, many wondered*. The admiration of the common people is sooner raised than any other affection. It was foretold, that the new song, the New-Testament song, should be sung for *marvellous works*, ⁴⁹⁸¹Psalms 98:1. They said, *It was never so seen in Israel*, and therefore never so seen any

where; for no people experienced such wonders of mercy as Israel did. There had been those in Israel that were famous for working miracles, but Christ excelled them all. The miracles Moses wrought had reference to Israel as a people, but Christ's were brought home to particular persons.

(2.) *The Pharisees* blasphemed, v. 34. When they could not gainsay the convincing evidence of these miracles, they fathered them upon the devil, as if they had been wrought by compact and collusion: *he casteth out devils* (say they) *by the prince of the devils* — a suggestion horrid beyond expression; we shall hear more of it afterwards, and Christ's answer to it (⁴⁰²⁵Matthew 12:25); only observe here, how *evil men and seducers wax worse and worse* (⁵⁰⁸³2 Timothy 3:13), and it is both their sin and their punishment. Their quarrels with Christ for taking upon him to *forgive sin* (v. 3), for *conversing with publicans and sinners*, (v. 11), for *not fasting* (v. 14), though spiteful enough, yet had some colour of piety, purity, and devotion in them; but this (which they are left to, to punish them for those) breathes nothing but malice and falsehood, and hellish enmity in the highest degree; it is diabolism all over, and was therefore justly pronounced unpardonable. Because the people marvelled, they must say something to diminish the miracle, and this was all they could say.

~~4025~~ MATTHEW 9:35-38

JESUS PREACHES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

Here is,

I. A conclusion of the foregoing account of Christ's preaching and miracles (v. 35); *He went about all the cities teaching and healing*. This is the same we had before, 4:23. There it ushers in the more particular record of Christ's preaching (Matthew 5, 6 and 7) and of his cures (Matthew 8 and 9), and here it is elegantly repeated in the close of these instances, as the *quod erat demonstrandum* — *the point to be proved*; as if the evangelist should say, "Now I hope I have made it out, by an induction of particulars, that Christ preached and healed; for you have had the heads of his sermons, and some few instances of his cures, which were wrought to confirm his doctrine: and *these were written that you might believe.*" Some think that this was a second perambulation in Galilee, like the former; he visited again those whom he had before preached to. Though

the Pharisees cavilled at him and opposed him, he went on with his work; he *preached the gospel of the kingdom*. He told them of a kingdom of grace and glory, now to be set up under the government of a Mediator: this was gospel indeed, *good news, glad tidings of great joy*.

Observe how Christ in his preaching had respect,

1. To the private towns. He visited not only the great and wealthy cities, but the poor, obscure villages; there he preached, there he healed. The souls of those that are meanest in the world are as precious to Christ, and should be to us, as the souls of those that make the greatest figure. *Rich and poor meet together* in him, citizens and boors: his *righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages* must be rehearsed, ^{<OBJ>}Judges 5:11.

2. To the public worship. He taught *in their synagogues*,

(1.) That he might bear a testimony to solemn assemblies, even then when there were corruptions in them. *We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*

(2.) That he might have an opportunity of preaching there, where people were gathered together, with an expectation to hear. Thus, even where the gospel church was founded, and Christian meetings erected, the apostles often *preached in the synagogues of the Jews*. It is the wisdom of the prudent, to make the best of that which is.

II. A preface, or introduction, to the account in the following chapter, of his sending forth his apostles. *He* took notice of *the multitude* (v. 36); not only of the crowds that *followed him*, but of the vast numbers of people with whom (as he passed along) he observed the country to be replenished; he noticed what nests of souls the towns and cities were, and how thick of inhabitants; what abundance of people there were in every synagogue, and what places of concourse the openings of the gates were: so very populous was that nation now grown; and it was the effect of God's blessing on Abraham. Seeing this,

1. He pities them, and was concerned for them (v. 36); *He was moved with compassion on them*; not upon a temporal account, as he pities the blind, and lame, and sick; but upon a spiritual account; he was concerned to see them ignorant and careless, and ready to perish for lack of vision. Note, Jesus Christ is a very compassionate friend to precious souls; here his bowels do in a special manner yearn. It was pity to souls that brought him

from heaven to earth, and there to the cross. Misery is the object of mercy; and the miseries of sinful, self-destroying souls, are the greatest miseries: Christ pities those most that pity themselves least; so should we. The most Christian compassion is compassion to souls; it is most Christ-like.

See what moved this pity.

(1.) *They fainted*; they were destitute, vexed, wearied. *They strayed*, so some; were loosed one from another; *The staff of bands was broken*, ^{<1114>}Zechariah 11:14. They wanted help for their souls, and had none at hand that was good for any thing. The scribes and Pharisees filled them with vain notions, burthened them with the traditions of the elders, deluded them into many mistakes, while they were not instructed in their duty, nor acquainted with the extent and spiritual nature of the divine law; therefore *they fainted*; for what spiritual health, and life, and vigour can there be in those souls, that are fed with husks and ashes, instead of *the bread of life*? Precious souls *faint* when duty is to be done, temptations to be resisted, afflictions to be borne, being not nourished up with the word of truth.

(2.) *They were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*. That expression is borrowed from ^{<1027>}1 Kings 22:17, and it sets forth the sad condition of those that are destitute of faithful guides to go before them in the things of God. No creature is more apt to go astray than a sheep, and when gone astray more helpless, shiftless, and exposed, or more unapt to find the way home again: sinful souls *are as lost sheep*; they need the care of shepherds to bring them back. The teachers the Jews then had pretended to be *shepherds*, yet Christ says they had not *shepherds*, for they were worse than none; idle shepherds that led them away, instead of leading them back, and fleeced the flock, instead of feeding it: such shepherds as were described, ^{<2215>}Jeremiah 23:1, etc. ^{<3342>}Ezekiel 34:2, etc. Note, The case of those people is very pitiable, who either have no ministers at all, or those that are as bad as none; that seek their own things, not *the things of Christ* and souls.

2. He excited his disciples to pray for them. His pity put him upon devising means for the good of these people. It appears (^{<1182>}Luke 6:12, 13) that upon this occasion, before he sent out his apostles, he did himself spend a great deal of time in prayer. Note, Those we pity we should pray for. Having spoken to God for them he turns to his disciples, and tells them,

(1.) How the case stood; *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.* People desired good preaching, but there were few good preachers. There was a great deal of work to be done, and a great deal of good likely to be done, but there wanted hands to do it.

[1.] It was an encouragement, that *the harvest was so plenteous.* It was not strange, that there were multitudes that needed instruction, but it was what does not often happen, that they who needed it, desired it, and were forward to receive it. They that were ill taught were desirous to be better taught; people's expectations were raised, and there was such a moving of affections, as promised well. Note, It is a blessed thing, to see people in love with good preaching. The valleys are then covered over with corn, and there are hopes it may be well gathered in. That is a gale of opportunity, that calls for a double care and diligence in the improvement of it; a harvest-day should be a busy day.

[2.] It was a pity when it was so that *the labourers should be so few;* that the corn should shed and spoil, and rot upon the ground for want of reapers; loiterers many, but *labourers very few.* Note, It is ill with the church, when good work stands still, or goes slowly on, for want of good workmen; when it is so, the *labourers* that there are have need to be very busy.

(2.) What was their duty in this case (v. 38); *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest.* Note, The melancholy aspect of the times and the deplorable state of precious souls, should much excite and quicken prayer. When things look discouraging, we should pray more, and then we should complain and fear less. And we should adapt our prayers to the present exigencies of the church; such an understanding we ought to have of the times, as to know, not only what Israel ought to do, but what Israel ought to pray for. Note,

[1.] God is *the Lord of the harvest; my Father is the Husbandman,* ^{<651>}John 15:1. It is *the vineyard of the Lord of hosts,* ^{<387>}Isaiah 5:7. It is for him and to him, and to his service and honour, that *the harvest* is gathered in. *Ye are God's husbandry* (^{<489>}1 Corinthians 3:9); *his threshing, and the corn of his floor,* ^{<210>}Isaiah 21:10. He orders every thing concerning *the harvest* as he pleases; when and where *the labourers* shall work, and how long; and it is very comfortable to those who wish well to *the harvest-work,* that God himself presides in it, who will be sure to order all for the best.

[2.] Ministers are and should be *labourers* in God's *harvest*; the ministry is a *work* and must be attended to accordingly; it is *harvest-work*, which is needful work; work that requires every thing to be done in its season, and diligence to do it thoroughly; but it is pleasant work; they *reap in joy*, and the joy of the preachers of the gospel is likened to the *joy of harvest* (^{<2002>}Isaiah 9:2, 3); and *he that reapeth receiveth wages; the hire of the labourers* that reap down God's field, shall not be *kept back*, as theirs was, ^{<2003>}James 5:4.

[3.] It is God's work to *send forth labourers*; Christ makes ministers (^{<4001>}Ephesians 4:11); the office is of his appointing, the qualifications of his working, the call of his giving. They will not be owned nor paid as *labourers*, that run without their errand, unqualified, uncalled. *How shall they preach except they be sent?*

[4.] All that love Christ and souls, should show it by their earnest prayers to God, especially when *the harvest is plenteous, that he would send forth more skillful, faithful, wise, and industrious labourers into his harvest*; that he would raise up such as he will own in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints; would give them a spirit for the work, call them to it, and succeed them in it; *that he would give them wisdom to win souls; that he would thrust forth labourers*, so some; intimating unwillingness to go forth, because of their own weakness and the people's badness, and opposition from men, that endeavour to thrust them out of *the harvest*; but we should pray that all contradiction from within and from without, may be conquered and got over. Christ puts his friends upon praying this, just before he sends apostles forth to labour in *the harvest*. Note, It is a good sign God is about to bestow some special mercy upon a people, when he stirs up those that have an interest at the throne of grace, to pray for it, ^{<4007>}Psalms 10:17. Further observe, that Christ said this to his disciples, who were to be employed as *labourers*. They must pray, First, That God *would send them forth. Here am I, send me*, ^{<2008>}Isaiah 6:8. Note, Commissions, given in answer to prayer, are most likely to be successful; Paul is a chosen vessel, for *behold he prays*, ^{<4001>}Acts 9:11, 15. Secondly, That he would send others forth. Note, Not the people only, but those who are themselves ministers, should pray for the increase of ministers. Though self-interest makes those that seek their own things desirous to be placed alone (the fewer ministers the more preferments), yet those that *seek the things of Christ*, desire more workmen, that more work may be done, though they be eclipsed by it.