

Prayer

Jesus Christ, we praise You for we find our peace in you. In You, we may know the victory of the Cross, the love of the Father, the care of the Christian community, the empowerment of the Spirit, the wisdom of Your Word and the wonder of Your presence. May we never find ourselves doubting the extraordinary power of Your love for us, made real in each of these ways. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Conferences

Pray for evangelists who hold great rallies and conferences across the world, attracting large crowds. Pray that their work might be blessed with many converts to the Faith.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the fighting between Russia and Georgia.*
- *Pray for peace talks in Zimbabwe*
- *Give thanks for those who seek to make peace*

Meditation

You have taken us as we are, Lord God,
And You have challenged us and changed us.

You have lifted us out of the troubled depths of life
And delivered us onto the firmer ground of Faith.

You have listened to all the complaints we've made
And directed us back towards righteousness and truth.

You have seen the sins we struggle to confess,
And dealt with them in glorious power, to save us.

You have heard our calls for help when in despair,
And fought the enemy on our behalf, for liberation

You have felt the scars of human incapacity
And touched our wounds, and healed us.

Your, O Lord, is the power and the Glory!

Bible Study - Matthew 9:31-34

³² *After they had gone away, a mute man who had a demon was brought to Him.* ³³ *And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke! The crowds were amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!'*
³⁴ *but the Pharisees said, 'He casts out the demons by using the ruler of the demons!'*

Review

This passage of Matthew tells us the brief story of a story of mute man with a demon. Again, it is very different from anything else we can find in this early collection of events in Jesus' ministry, and Matthew has chosen it for a good reason and to make a point. Along with the previous story about the healing of the two blind men (9:27-31), its inclusion

enabled Jesus to report to John's disciples (11:5) 'the blind receive their sight ... the deaf hear'. This thought, however, brings us face to face with one of the difficulties of this passage, which is that most translations speak of a man who was 'mute' which means someone who cannot speak, not someone who cannot hear! However, in Greek, the same word 'kophos' means either 'dumb', 'mute', or 'deaf'! This however, is understandable given that hearing and speaking are closely connected and although we can diagnose these things more clearly today, in ancient times, there was a certain confusion about these conditions which may be why they were described by the same word.

The important thing however is not the condition of this man, but the link that is made here (for the first time in Matthew) between illness and demon possession. Jesus takes all this in His stride, and Matthew simply reports that the demon is cast out by Jesus, and with 'a word'; and the success of the deliverance is shown by the fact that the man speaks. The extraordinary nature of what Jesus had just done came to the ears of the crowd and the Pharisees. Whilst we cannot underestimate the importance of the miracle for the man himself nor the example of Jesus' authoritative ministry from which we can learn, it is the response to what Jesus did which is important here. The crowds respond with amazement 'nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!' but the Pharisees say, 'He casts out demons by using the prince of demons!'

Matthew reports the words of the crowd first to emphasise the newness and originality of what Jesus was now doing. But the crowds had already responded with awe (9:8) and were also astounded at His teaching (7:29); how much more could they take from Jesus before they became familiar with what He was doing, as any crowd quickly does? One of the amazing features of Jesus' ministry was that He continued to do and say things which amazed the crowds and kept them wanting to hear more from Him, even though they did not necessarily understand Him fully.

The Pharisees, however, responded to Jesus' deliverance ministry with the most venomous attack upon Jesus they had so far made. When they first came across Jesus, they initially observed Him, possibly objecting in silence to His teaching during the Sermon on the Mount, before one of them was rejected by Jesus as a disciple (8:18). They quickly progressed to openly criticising Jesus as He healed the paralysed man (9:2f.), but now they had now seen enough and reached their conclusion. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being in league with the 'prince of demons' (9:34). It was their way of explaining how he had authority over the forces of darkness, and the implication was clear. They would have nothing to do with any claim that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed the opposite, and that He came from Satan.

We shall hear more of this in later studies; but I will conclude with some comments about our own ministry. Matthew clearly chose stories about Jesus that would inform and guide our practice, for He was writing to the early Church, and he would soon describe the ministry of the disciples as integral to the work of Jesus. He wanted those who read his Gospel to see the unchanging emphasis in these healing miracles on the authority of Jesus, and on faith. Throughout Jesus' ministry, faith was vital to those who asked for and received healing, though Jesus accepted it either from those who were ill, or from those who brought them (see 9:2f.). You could say that those who did not express faith openly nevertheless did so through their participation in what happened to them, so the paralytic man, for example (9:2ff) hardly had a choice about what happened, and neither did the little girl who was raised to life. Nevertheless, each story is full of the faith of those around these people, and Jesus responded warmly to it.

These healings remind us of the mercy of God for those of us who bring our loved ones to the Lord in prayer. We can have confidence that God will act upon our faith, in His own way and according to His purposes, but definitely in answer to our own prayers of faith for

others. None of us should give up on praying for those the Lord has given us to love, it may be their only hope of healing and salvation. Secondly, those of us who are involved with the healing and deliverance ministry must do so on the solid rock of our relationship with God through Christ, for this is where our authority comes from. Without this we have no authority, yet with it, we have complete authority, even to cast out a demon with a word. It is part of the equipment of ministry to be secure in our relationship with Jesus and the Father, and essential for the exercise of the healing and deliverance ministry.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you feel about the deliverance ministry. What place does it have in the life of the church today?
2. Why did Matthew say that this man 'had a demon'? How can anyone possibly make such a decision?
3. What does this brief story tell us about faith and the authority of Jesus?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

As one who has some experience in what is called 'deliverance ministry', I can say with confidence that it should not be considered unless those who do this ministry have the authority of Christ to do so. There are no rules and regulations about this, it is a spiritual matter and one which depends upon discernment and the gifts of the Spirit. However, it is something which needs to be discussed within the life of the church.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do you know anyone who has a speech impediment? If possible, by using the internet or by talking to people you know, try and find out more about the lives today of those who are dumb or deaf. How can the love of Jesus be made known to them?*
- *Discuss with a friend your own experience with what might be called the 'demonic'. Subjects such as this are best discussed openly in the life of the church and not kept private.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, stay close to us;
Holy Spirit, breathe afresh on us;
Father Almighty, take control;
For in Your presence, we are complete. AMEN