

As I was reading my Bible this week according to the church's reading plan, I was struck by the group of miracles in Matthew 8-9 that repeatedly emphasize certain truths about our Lord. Please read the three stories stitched together from this section in Matthew 8:23-9:3. The significant truths we find in these passages are fundamental to our faith in Jesus Christ.

In verses 23-27, Jesus and his disciples get in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. While on the waters, a great storm swoops down on the sea, causing the boat be rocked and swamped by the wild waves. The disciples panic, thinking they will drown to death, and wake up Jesus who has been sleeping through it so far. **“And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm”** (8:26). Then, the disciples responded in awe. Verses 28-34, after Jesus and his disciples safely cross the sea, recount the time when Jesus removed demons from two men. These demon-possessed men were fiercesome, which made them notorious among the locals. Yet, when Jesus appeared, the demons came cringing towards him and asked him to not torture them. Jesus drove the demons out of the men and allowed them to enter a nearby heard of pigs, which then rushed into the sea and drowned. When the neighboring city heard of it, they came out to him and begged him to leave them alone. Finally, in verses 1-8, Jesus and his disciples crossed back over to Capernaum, where a paralytic was brought to him. **“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven”** (9:2). Some scribes heard this and accused him of blasphemy in their hearts, but Jesus perceived this and rebuked them. Jesus said that he would prove that he had been given the authority to forgive sins by making the man rise and walk. So, he commanded the man to rise up and walk; and the man was healed and walked home. The crowd was fearful since they saw the authority that God had given to him.

These three stories have a common theme: they all reveal the authority and power of Jesus Christ, to whom we need to respond with humility, awe, and faith. Matthew, the author of this Gospel, wanted us to be in amazed by the power and authority of Jesus. Power, authority, and mastery are essential to the structure of creation. God gave mankind authority over the earth when he made them. God made the man the head of the household and the wife to be submissive to her husband. Even the animals have power structures in their packs, prides, herds, and flocks. God himself is the Lord of heaven and earth, having mastery over everything that he has made. Exercising authority over something with skill and power is marvelous. We love to see masters at their work. An animal trainer exercising good authority over an animal is beautiful. Think of

dogs that are trained to hunt, fetch, herd, or do tricks. Power in action also grabs our attention: people love to watch sports, where human strength, elegance, and agility are on display. We even like to watch people who are really good at their work, whether craftsmen, cleaners, cooks, mechanics, or carpenters. When we see good authority, we respond with awe, respect, and trust. Here, in the book of Matthew, we get to see Jesus at his work, exercising authority over things far more astonishing than what mere men can do. Jesus commands a stormy sea, Satanic minions, sickness, and sins in this passage. Jesus has power over these things.

In these stories, we see that Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The demons immediately recognize him as the Son of God, and he shows it by the miraculous power he wields. Yet, we also see that Jesus is the Son of Man as he sleeps in the boat, and walks around like everyone else. He is fully God and fully man with full authority over heaven and earth. Notice the things that Jesus has authority over in this passage again. He has authority over nature, demons, sickness, and sin—all the things that threaten frail men and women. The severe cold in winter reminds us that we could easily die from long exposure to the weather. We are often unaware of the spiritual beings around us, which are capable of great power over us. This present pandemic is a clear example of sickness being able to overwhelm our day-to-day living and take precious lives. Death and suffering entered the world through sin. Sin, disobedience to God, is our greatest problem. When we commit sin, our soul is hostile towards God, which produces spiritual death. Our sin eats away at us. Then, there is Jesus, who holds the world in his hands, drives away demons with the words of his mouth, heals the sick, and offers forgiveness to all the world through his own blood. Jesus is a mighty, wonderful, and perfect Savior. He has power over everything, and he also has sympathy towards us as a brother.

As such a Savior, he alone should be the object of our faith. We must place our faith in him and not ourselves. Matthew is writing to impress us with the trustworthy character of Jesus. We must believe in him—not just that he existed—we must believe him for all that he is. We need to have confidence in all his abilities, including forgiveness. He truly can save us; he has all of the ability to save us from our sins. If we believe that, then we will come to him to have our sins forgiven. Faith seeks Jesus. If we believe that Dairy Queen is giving away ice cream, and if we want ice cream, then we will go and get some ice cream. The same is true with faith in Jesus. If we really believe he is who he says he is, then we will come to him so that we can serve him as our Lord and Savior. Remember, he said that whoever comes to him, he will never cast out.