

Matthew 9:27-34

Introduction

In this study, we will be reflecting on the last two miracle stories in Matthew's collection (chapters 8-9). The first story has no parallel in the other gospels. The second story has a parallel only in Luke (11:14-15). Luke's "version" is essentially the same as Matthew's, though Luke places the story in an entirely different context.

I. The miracles of Jesus are sermons about the Kingdom

Once again, these miracle stories are told with very few words – very short and very to the point. And once again, the primary point is what Jesus *does*. After all, that's the whole point of these chapters (8-9) – a collection of the mighty and wonderful *deeds* of Jesus! And what is it that Jesus does? Well, He gives two blind men their sight and He causes a mute man to speak. But these are not just "naked" displays of power. This is not just a miracle-working man putting on an amazing show. Each of these miracles is pregnant with *meaning* – each of them is a demonstration of the *kingdom* in all of its power and beauty. You could say that each miracle is a sermon that unpacks the riches of the kingdom. And we have seen over and over again that we can only understand the full depth of these sermons when we look to the Old Testament.

- ✓ Matthew 11:2-5 – Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ [the Messiah], he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come [the Messiah], or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

When John wants to know if Jesus is the promised king and Messiah, what kind of answer does Jesus give? He points John to the things He has been *doing* so that John can interpret these deeds in the light of Old Testament prophecy. When Jesus makes the blind to see and the mute to speak, it is in fulfillment of God's word through the prophets of old. It sounds pretty simple, doesn't it, pretty "cut and dried"? We might imagine the prophet saying: "When the Messiah comes, he will have the power to make blind people see and mute people speak." And now here is Jesus, and He has power to do these two things (one check... two checks). Therefore, He must be the Messiah. But this is *far* from being the whole story. Each of the items on our Messianic "checklist" can only be fully understood in the light of the *big picture* of redemptive history and the revelation of God to His people in the Old Testament. As soon as we divorce these items on our checklist from the Old Testament context in which they live and breath, then all we are left with is "bare facts". (The Messiah will give sight to the blind. Jesus gave sight to the blind. Jesus must be the Messiah.) But it's in this way that we miss the *sermon*. We miss the *unpacking* of the riches of the kingdom.

Matthew has told us very briefly and very simply how Jesus gave sight to two blind men and caused a mute man to speak. So how do these miracles open to us the true riches of the kingdom? To answer this question, we need to go back to the book of Isaiah. But first, we need to know

that the two conditions of deafness and muteness (being unable to hear and unable to speak) are closely related in the Bible (cf. Mark 7:31-37). It was often the case that people were mute *because* they were deaf. The point is not that they couldn't make any sounds with their throat, but that they couldn't communicate with words (they had a speech impediment). So in the Greek, the word that describes those who are deaf is the same exact word that describes those who are mute. This doesn't have to mean that the mute man in our story was also deaf (though he may have been). It's just to say that people associated the two conditions very closely together. We'll need to keep this in mind as we move through our study.

II. Isaiah's message of judgment (Isaiah 6:8-10; 42:18-20, 25; 43:8; 44:18-20)

- ✓ Isaiah 6:8-10 – And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “***‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts,*** and turn and be healed.”

This is the initial commissioning of the prophet Isaiah, and so it sets the tone for the entire book. God is telling Isaiah that his preaching will actually harden the hearts of the people. The more Isaiah proclaims the truth, the more it will only confirm the people in their unbelief – which God describes in terms of blindness and deafness. They will see with their physical eyes, but they won't really *perceive* with their spiritual eyes. They will hear with their physical ears, but they won't really *understand* with their spiritual ears. And so they are both blind and deaf. And this blindness and deafness is the judgment of God upon His people for their sin and rebellion.

- ✓ Isaiah 42:18-20, 25 – Hear, you ***deaf***, and look, you ***blind***, that you may see! Who is ***blind*** but my servant, or ***deaf*** as my messenger whom I send? Who is ***blind*** as my dedicated one, or ***blind*** as the servant of the LORD? He sees many things, but ***does not observe*** them; his ears are open, but he ***does not hear***... So [the LORD] poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, but ***he did not understand***; it burned him up, but ***he did not take it to heart***.
- ✓ Isaiah 43:8 – Bring out the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!
- ✓ Isaiah 44:18-20 – They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that ***they cannot see***, and their hearts, so that ***they cannot understand***. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; ***a deluded heart has led him astray***, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

In Isaiah's day, God's people were spiritually deaf and blind. Their deluded hearts had led them astray so that it was impossible for them to understand the truth. And deafness and blindness meant that they were also mute. If they couldn't *understand* the truth (by seeing and hearing), then there was certainly no hope of speaking the truth! And so God describes the people as having stammering tongues (Is. 32:4). What a terrible judgment! What a miserable and hopeless lot in life! To be completely blind and deaf to the very truth that brings deliverance and salvation – and that because of my own sin! So Isaiah's commission is to say to the people: “Keep on

hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes.” And I think that if you and I had been given this kind of commission, we would have asked the same question Isaiah does:

- ✓ Isaiah 6:11-12 – Then I said, “For how long, O Lord?” And he answered: “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.”

And then what? Isaiah had to be wondering, When will God’s people wake up? Will they ever *see* again. Will they ever *hear*? Will they ever again *speak* words of truth? But how can they, unless God works a miracle – unless God opens blinded eyes, unless God opens deaf ears? As we can imagine, Isaiah’s ministry was a discouraging one. At one point, he was compelled to ask: “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1) And the answer was very *few*, if any – because they were all blind and deaf. It’s only against this background of Isaiah’s commission and the discouraging results of his ministry that we can truly understand the following passages from Isaiah.

III. Isaiah’s message of hope (Isaiah 29:10-12, 17-18; 32:1-4; 30:20-21; 35:3-6; 42:6-7)

- ✓ Isaiah 29:10-12, 17-18 – The LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of ***deep sleep***, and has ***closed your eyes*** (the prophets), and ***covered your heads*** (the seers). And the vision of all this [what Isaiah has prophesied] has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot read.” ... Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? ***In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.***

The deaf will not simply *hear*, but they will hear *the words of a book*. And what book is this? It’s the vision of Isaiah. It’s the book that contains God’s words. This is what those who were formerly deaf will now hear. The book that was sealed will be opened to them. And notice that the blind will not simply see, but they will be delivered from their gloom and darkness.

- ✓ Isaiah 42:6-7 – I will give you as... a ***light*** for the nations, to ***open the eyes that are blind***, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in ***darkness***.

Those who formerly could not read (because they sat in the darkness of unseeing eyes) will now have their eyes opened to be able to read and understand God’s words. And what was that about Lebanon being turned into a fruitful field and the fruitful field being regarded as a forest (v. 17)? “No longer will the words of promise fall on hard, dry ground. Rather, they will find lodging in a receptive soil where they can spring up to luxurious growth” (Oswalt). The deaf will hear and the blind will see! Their hearts will finally be opened to understand the wonderful truth about God’s salvation.

- ✓ Isaiah 32:1-4 – Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water

in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. ***Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will give attention. The heart of the hasty will understand and know, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.***

God will reverse the judgment that He inflicted through Isaiah's ministry and instead of confirming the people in their deafness and blindness, God will mercifully *open* their eyes and *open* their ears so that they will *finally* "give attention". At long last, their hearts will "understand and know". And the one who stammered due to his blindness and deafness will now speak the words of truth "distinctly".

- ✓ Isaiah 30:20-21 – And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but ***your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying***, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Once again, notice that their eyes won't simply *see*, their eyes will see *their Teacher*. Their ears won't simply hear, their ears will hear a *word* behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk in it" when they turn to the right or when they turn to the left. And yet for right now, even these words of hope are completely unintelligible to God's people. It's like telling deaf people that one day they will hear, or signing to blind people that one day they will see.

- ✓ Isaiah 35:3-6 – Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ***Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.*** For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

Isaiah sees a day when the message of God's salvation will be met not with deaf ears and blind eyes, but rather with hearts that finally *understand* – hearts that finally believe the message and people to whom the arm of the Lord has finally been revealed. Do you think that anyone could have possibly longed for that day to come more than Isaiah? That would be a day when the tongues of people who had formerly been silent and mute would now be loosed to exult in God's salvation. Can you imagine what a day that would be!

IV. Isaiah's message of hope fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 9:27-34)

God foretold through the prophet Isaiah that He would bring about this day of rejoicing through His servant the Messiah.

- ✓ Isaiah 42:6-7 – I am the LORD; I have called you [the Messiah] in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ***to open the eyes that are blind***, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

And now, over seven hundred years later, we read that when Jesus encountered two blind men, “He touched their eyes... *and their eyes were opened.*” And when Jesus encountered a demon possessed man who was mute, He cast out the demon and “*the mute man spoke.*” In light of Isaiah, it’s obviously no accident that Matthew placed these two miracles side by side! What does this *mean*? It is a sign that the age of the kingdom has arrived (cf. Matthew 11:3-5) – the new age of salvation when the eyes and ears of God’s people will be opened, and their tongues will be loosed. After all, what is the ultimate point of being able to hear? It is so that we might hear the word behind us, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when we turn to the right or when we turn to the left. It is so that we might hear the words of God’s book. What is the ultimate point of being able to see? It is so that we might see our Teacher and read the words of God’s book. What is the ultimate point of being able to speak? It is that we might speak God’s truth clearly and sing for joy (cf. Luke 1:64 (cf. Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46). Being able to see and hear and speak are all symbols of being able to understand and truly believe the message of God’s salvation. Can you see? Can you hear? Has your tongue been loosed?

Notice that in the story of the blind men, the theme is very much one of *faith and belief*. The blind men “follow [Jesus], crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’” The irony is that while they are physically blind, they have obviously seen more than many! They call Jesus the “Son of David” (a first in Matthew) because they have *recognized* the salvation of God in the arrival of the kingdom. And Jesus highlights the spiritual sight of the blind men when He specifically asks (the only time in Matthew): “Do you *believe* that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord,’ Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your *faith* be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.” When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind men, it was a picture of how he had already opened the eyes of their hearts to believe and understand.

But if in the story of the blind men the theme is one of faith and belief, in the story of the mute man the theme is very much one of *unbelief and hardened hearts*. “The crowds marveled, saying, ‘Never was anything like this seen in Israel.’” They are impressed and amazed, but they don’t yet have eyes to see. And “the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by the prince of demons.’” For the first time in Matthew, we see the full extent of the blindness and deafness of the Pharisees. And if they are blind and deaf, then we know from Isaiah that they are also mute. They are a people of stammering tongues. They are not *able* to speak the truth about the Messiah and the arrival of His kingdom. Do you see what a stark contrast Matthew has drawn between the two blind men who actually see, and the “seeing” Pharisees who are actually blind – between the mute man who now speaks, and the Pharisees who can speak, but are actually mute?

John tells how one day Jesus gave sight to a man who had been blind from birth. Because Jesus performed this miracle on a Sabbath, the Pharisees became involved in an argument with the man who had been blind.

- ✓ John 9:24, 29-30, 33-34 – They said to him... “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes... If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

So who is really blind, and who really sees?

- ✓ John 9:35-39 – Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “**You have now seen him**; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, **I believe**,” and he worshiped him. Jesus said, “**For judgment I have come into this world, so that the [spiritually] blind will see and those who [say they] see will become blind.**”

In Matthew chapter thirteen Jesus says to His twelve Jewish disciples: “This is why I speak to [the people] in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, *in their case* the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled... But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (13:13-14, 16). There will always be those who are blind, and deaf, and mute (cf. Acts 28:23-28; 2 Cor. 4:4). But the good news of the kingdom is that God is presently in the business of opening blinded eyes, unstopping deaf ears and loosing the tongues that are mute – so that people can truly see and understand and celebrate His great salvation.

Conclusion

I think of those famous words from John Newton’s hymn “Amazing Grace”: “I once was lost but now am found; was *blind*, but now I *see*.” And then I’m reminded of Jesus’ words to Simon when he confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

- ✓ Matthew 16:17 – Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not *reveal* this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

“To whom has the [saving] arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1) To all those who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear.

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 2:7-10, 12 – We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has *seen*, nor ear *heard*, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has *revealed* to us through the Spirit... Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might *understand* the things freely given us by God.

We must be careful not to take for granted all that we have been enabled to see and hear. We must not take for granted the spiritual eyes and ears that we have been given. We can’t forget that it is only those whose tongues have been loosed by God’s sovereign grace who are *able* to say, “Jesus is Lord” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). We must always be striving to use our gift of sight to see *more* of God’s truth and to see it more *clearly*, to use our gift of hearing to hear *more* of God’s truth and to hear it more *distinctly*, and ultimately to use our gift of speech to speak ever *more* joyfully and accurately the truth of God’s salvation. Paul says:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:16-19 – I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you *a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know* what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

I once was blind, but now I see; I once was deaf, but now I hear; I once was mute, but now I sing!

Perhaps there is someone reading this study to whom it would be right for me to pose this question: Will you refuse to open your eyes and see? Will you refuse to open your ears and hear? Will you refuse to open your mouth and speak the beautiful truths of God's salvation? Will you shut your eyes, and cover your ears, and close your mouth? I pray that you won't! I pray that by God's grace your tongue might be loosed to sing joyfully of God's salvation!

Teaching our Children

- Q. What was the sad message of judgment that God gave to the prophet Isaiah?
A. Read Isaiah 6:8-10 (page 2) Also read and discuss Isaiah 42 & 44 (page 2)
- Q. If God's people could not see or hear (they were blind and deaf), then what else could they not do?
A. God's people could not speak (they were mute; "stammering tongues").
- Q. How would blindness and deafness cause a person to be mute?
A. If God's people couldn't *understand* the truth (by seeing and hearing), then they would certainly never be able to speak the truth (much less sing about the truth)!
- Q. What was the joyful message of hope that God gave to Isaiah?
A. Read the Scriptures under Roman Numeral III. on pages 3 & 4
~ One day the deaf will hear and the blind will see! Their hearts will finally be opened to understand the wonderful truth about God's salvation.
~ This will be a day when the tongues of people who had been silent and mute will now be loudly rejoicing in God's salvation.
- Q. How would God cause His blind people to see and His deaf people to hear?
A. God promised to send the Messiah. God promised that the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind.
- Q. What two miracles did Jesus perform in Matthew 9:27-34?
A. Jesus made two blind men to *see* and He made a mute man *speak*!
- Q. What do these two miracles teach us? What do they help us to understand?
A. The kingdom of God is here. Jesus is now opening people's eyes and ears so that they can understand the truth of His salvation and sing about it with joy.
- Q. Talk about the faith of the blind men and compare this with the unbelief of the Pharisees
Who was *truly* blind? (See paragraphs 2 & 3 on page 5)
A. ~The Pharisees were blind. They could not see what the blind men *could* see!
~ When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind men, it was a picture of how he had already opened the eyes of their hearts.
- ✓ Read and reflect on Matthew 13:13-14, 16 (top of page 6) and 1 Corinthians 2:7-10, 12 (bottom of page 6)
 - ✓ Exhort your children to trust God to open their eyes and ears so that they might see and hear and truly understand God's wonderful salvation – and always more and more! (Read Ephesians 1:16-19; top of page 7)
 - ✓ Remind your children that when our eyes and ears have been opened, then our mouths will also be opened to rejoice in God's salvation!