

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, Your love is never ending, infinitely expressive, forever undeserved, supremely generous, overwhelmingly joyful, powerfully caring, utterly unselfish, completely satisfying and awesomely true; for You died for me and rose again to give me both new life and Your Holy Spirit. My soul rejoices in Your presence: Alleluia!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Church Conferences

Pray today for the major Christian organisations in your country and the conference events they run, whether they are open to the public or for organisation members only.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for peace talks in Zimbabwe*
- *Give thanks for those who seek to make peace*
- *Pray for those who struggle with dependency upon drugs*

Meditation

What within our world has not been touched by human hands?
Even the depths of the seas, our last great planetary unknown
Are being explored, with new things found each day.

Each mountain side and field of grass has felt the human touch,
And every breeze contains a molecule of human breath;
Every route across the world is charted, every footpath mapped.

Yet neither you nor I can find a place where God has not yet been,
For within our beautiful creation's ever changing patterns,
It is He who holds the beat of nature's heart within His hand.

He nurtures our sustaining world for us, for life, for the future,
And for all the re-creation yet to come, when all is born anew
Within the Kingdom; without the pain, and perfected in Love.

Bible Study - Matthew 9:27-31

²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' ²⁸ When He went into the house, the blind men came up to Him; and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe I can do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' ²⁹ Then He touched their eyes and said, 'Let it be done to you according to your faith' ³⁰ and their sight returned. Then Jesus strictly ordered them, 'See that no one knows of this.' ³¹ But they went on their way and spread news about Him throughout that region.

Review

As the series of healing miracles and stories of faith in chapters 8 and 9 comes to an end, Matthew draws together some of the important themes of his story. The theme of new life is beautifully described in today's passage, for sight would have been a true gift of 'new life' to the two men who called out to Jesus (9:27). Along with the other healing miracle stories in this part of Matthew, this passage adds to our understanding of the healing ministry of

Jesus, and illustrates the ministry of the church to people in need. Here, we can see the intimacy and care with which Jesus dealt with two blind men, and it is an example to all who would follow in Jesus' footsteps. In addition, two themes are never far from the surface of this story, and they are authority and faith. The supreme authority given to Jesus by the Father was the key to His healing ministry, and the response of faith was what was required from those who sought His ministry.

The healing of the blind was a classic act of the Messiah, as expected by the Jewish people (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 42:7, 43:8 etc), and there are several stories of the healing of blind people in each Gospel (e.g. Matt 20:30-34, Luke 18:35, John 9:1f.). Many of these have similar characteristics, and some have attempted to work out which stories are the same instances, and which are different situations. However, I reckon that the truth may well reflect the truth that with no cure for cataracts in those days, there would have been many blind or partially blind people, particularly amongst the elderly, and Jesus probably healed large numbers of them. It is also interesting to note that although the Old Testament describes several people who are made blind by God because of their sin (e.g. Gen 19:11, Deut 28:28ff, 2 Kings 6:18), nowhere does Jesus ask a blind person to repent of sin, and nowhere does He have to forgive their sin so that they may be healed. Indeed, in John 9, Jesus specifically discounts sin as relevant to the healing of one particular blind man, something which incensed the Pharisees (John 9:17ff).

In our passage, Jesus was returning after healing the community leader's daughter when two blind men shouted out 'have mercy on us, Son of David!' This reminds us that Jesus had earlier said 'blessed are the merciful' (5:7), and here were two blind men calling for the 'mercy' of healing. More than that, however, the men called Jesus 'Son of David', which is not a term used of Jesus as yet in Matthew, so it needs some explanation. In Jesus' day there was a well known document called the 'Testament of Solomon'. Today we call such documents 'inter-testamental', because they were kept in synagogues and holy places and not thought of as part of the scriptures; they were just illustrative and educational. This particular document described the life and work of Solomon, who was called 'the Son of David' (which he was), and it spoke about Solomon's ministry of healing (including the blind) and exorcism, and also some 'magic' (which is why it remains outside the Bible!). Perhaps these blind men, as is so often the case with people who have impairments, had perceived things that others had overlooked. They saw that this Jesus who people were calling the 'Messiah', was the true 'Son of David' and they believed that just like Solomon had done, Jesus would heal them! It is an interesting and quite feasible story, although we can never know for sure.

However it arose, the two men showed extraordinary faith in Jesus, and when He asked them a straight question; 'Do you believe I can do this?' (9:28), they replied positively, and they were healed immediately by Jesus' touch and His word. Jesus Himself had taught, 'ask and you shall receive (7:7)! They did not just have a general faith that God would do something; they believed that God would work through Jesus as the Messiah, and this was the faith they had that Jesus responded to. Jesus healed the men with no fuss, and His use of touch was in common with His other miracles at that time (see 8:3,15, 9:25,29).

This radical new faith in Jesus as Messiah does perhaps explain why Jesus asked the men to keep quiet (9:30). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were beginning to become more stubborn in their resistance to His ministry, and whilst He wanted to give people the healing they needed, He did not want to give the Pharisees more ammunition to oppose Him. We will see more of the Pharisees' opposition later, together with Jesus' concern about how this confused ordinary people (9:36). The fact that the two men were disobedient to Jesus' call illustrated Jesus' concern, for fame was not important to Jesus' ministry (9:31). He had not come to court popularity, but to do what was right for the salvation of the world.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think that it is possible to see the healing the blind men as an allegory of giving people sight in terms of insight into Jesus?
2. Do we give Jesus enough credit for being the 'Messiah', God's Holy One come to save the World? How do we do this in church today?
3. What lessons can we learn from this text about the healing ministry of the church?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I always find the healing stories of Jesus touching because they are all so different, as different as the individual people Jesus healed and the situations in which Jesus found Himself. It is my constant prayer that as one who is called to minister healing to those who need it and will receive it, I am as flexible and responsive to the people and situations I find myself in, as Jesus was.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you known what it is like to be blinded for a period of time? It is profoundly scary and can be very difficult, even to lose the sight of one eye, as some folks do in later years.*
- *Make a special effort to research blindness on the internet and also investigate blindness as it is experienced in other countries. Using this material, pray for those who are blind over a period of time, and pray for those who work with the blind.*

Final Prayer

At the end of a day, Lord Jesus, when good things have happened and the worst has been overcome, may we rest in the knowledge that You have been our constant guide. Then, in full confidence of Your love and power, lead us into tomorrow with faith and without fear.
AMEN