

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord God of love and compassion, bless those who are hurting today, for whatever reason. Give comfort to those who are struggling with personal difficulties and do not know which way to turn. Show them that Your love is dependable in the midst of their troubles, and You will always help those who cry out to You. Bless all these people with the true spiritual peace which You alone can give. Hear our prayer, Lord God; AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

**1. For yourself**

*Read Revelation 22, and let it inspire you to pray for yourself, and for your own future*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Let Revelation 22 inspire your prayers for your family and friends, and their future before God*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Let Revelation 22 suggest prayers you can say for the church and for its eternal future in God's eyes*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for the world, especially for those who may be heading for disaster because they ignore God and the way that He has made the world work*

### Meditation

Lord God, You are a worker of miracles.

The miracle of grace that opens people's hearts,  
And by Your Spirit, reveals the truth of Your Word.

The miracle of hope that reveals eternal truth  
That God's true love has from heaven to save us.

The miracle of healing that cures the body,  
And shows the world You care for all Your creation.

The miracle of wholeness that heals the soul,  
In which the Spirit breathes new life into tired lives.

The miracle of love that brings real happiness,  
To those who place their trust in the love of Christ.

The miracle of faith by which we find the peace  
To love and worship God until Christ comes in glory!

Lord God, You are a worker of miracles!

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Matthew 9:18-26

<sup>18</sup> While Jesus was talking about these things to them, suddenly a community leader came in and knelt in front of Him, and said,

‘My daughter has just died; but come and place your hand on her, and she will live.’

<sup>19</sup> Jesus got up and followed him with His disciples.

<sup>20</sup> But a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years suddenly came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak, <sup>21</sup> for she said to herself,

‘If I could only touch his cloak, I will be made well.’

<sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and when He saw her, He said,

‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’

And the woman was made well at that moment.

<sup>23</sup> When Jesus arrived at the community leader’s house and saw the flute players and the noise of the crowd, <sup>24</sup> He said,

‘Go away; for the girl is not dead but is asleep.’

But they laughed at Him. <sup>25</sup> When the crowd had been put outside, He went in and took hold of her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup> News of this spread throughout that region.

## Review

Jesus was at the meal table of Matthew the tax collector (see 9:9-17), when he was approached by a community leader, probably the leader of the local synagogue, with a stunning request. He asked outright for Jesus to come and bring his little daughter back to life; she had already died! Jesus immediately got up from the table and left to go to the little girl, followed by the disciples. They were just about to be let loose on the world in their own independent mission (10:1ff), and needed to know how Jesus dealt with every situation. Then, even more amazingly, as they were pursuing this supremely urgent request, another incident occurred by which a woman was dramatically healed from a haemorrhage of blood! Whilst all the stories of Jesus’ healing ministry have come to be treasured by the Christian community over the years, these two stories and the way they interrelate have become some of the most memorable of the stories of Jesus’ healing ministry.

Matthew writes these stories with amazing brevity. We are used to hearing both of these stories from either Mark (5:21-34) or Luke (8:40-56), and they both tell us many of the other well known details of the story. In these two Gospels we find the additional information that the leader’s name is ‘Jairus’, the girl was ‘at the point of death’ (in Mark), that the woman used other doctors, that power that went ‘out’ of Jesus, and that the trembling of the woman when brought to the Lord. They also tell us that Peter, James and John went into the room where the little child had just died and how Jesus presented the child to her father and mother, with the instruction that she should eat. Luke adds a few further points which are characteristic of his writing, like the woman’s declaration that she has been healed and the mention of the child’s ‘spirit’ (8:47&55). We are so used to all these details being part of this story that it is a surprise to find they are all missing in Matthew!

Why then would Matthew reduce a story to nine verses which has taken twenty three in Mark and a similar number in Luke? It is because Matthew’s heart was focussed exclusively on highlighting what Jesus did, and emphasising His role in both stories as healer and Messiah. He was not interested to ‘tell a story’ with all its details, just for the sake of everyone’s interest. This is heightened dramatically by the way he spoke at the outset of the story about the death of the little girl (9:18), and also by the way he drops all the facts of the story that are superfluous to the role of Jesus. This is the only time that Matthew records Jesus as raising someone from the dead in his Gospel; and it is important for two reasons. Firstly, Jesus said to John’s disciples ‘Go and tell John ... the blind receive their sight ... the dead are raised ...’ (Matt 11:5). This comment would be inappropriate if Jesus had not already raised someone from the dead! Secondly, raising someone from the dead is a prophetic sign of Jesus’ own death and resurrection. The only other person raised from death in any of the other Gospels is Lazarus (John 12:1f.), so both the little girl and Lazarus are signs of Jesus’ coming resurrection.

It may be natural for preachers to make a choice about texts for preaching by going for the human interest provided by the Gospels of Mark and Luke. These give much more scope for developing the whole drama, and people today enjoy hearing the human details about events because they are used to this from television drama. However, whilst Mark and Luke undoubtedly have a wonderful story to tell about the people who were healed, especially the woman, Matthew’s shortened version should be recognised for what it is, a description of Jesus’ authority as a healer, and a story which points prophetically to His resurrection.

## Going Deeper

The two stories of the woman with a haemorrhage and the raising of the little girl each have their purpose and place in the Gospel, which we will now study. As the stakes become higher, every action and deed recorded by Matthew points to the way that Jesus put the Gospel into action and in so doing broke through all manner of religious and social conventions.

### ***New life for the woman with a haemorrhage***

We will begin by holding over the opening verse 18, and beginning with the amazing story of what happened on Jesus' journey to see the little girl who had died. As Jesus hurried to respond to this emergency, a woman approached Jesus from behind (9:20). Because of her continual haemorrhage of blood instead of a woman's normal monthly period, she was locked in a permanent state of uncleanness according to Jewish ritual law; for as long as a woman bled, she was unclean (Lev 15:25). This dire state of affairs was not just medical and religious, but it had equally dire social consequences, because she would have been outcast from normal family life on these religious grounds, unable to live with her husband or other female members of her extended family, perhaps even having to live like a leper. In addition, she had no chance of bearing children in this medical state, and this was a disgrace for a woman. It was a quite appalling state for any human being to have to endure.

This woman would have expected a prominent Jewish man to recoil from her, as would have been her experience. This probably explains why she approached Jesus from behind (9:20), seeking to touch his clothes discretely. Her thoughts are recorded (9:21) by way of letting us know about her faith in Jesus; 'if only I touch His cloak, I will be made well!' This was an astonishing faith, expressed very similarly to that of the Gentile centurion who had earlier pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant (8:7). In the same way that Jesus responded to the expressed faith of the centurion, he responded to the absolute and unrelenting faith of the woman.

In Matthew's story Jesus was not aware of any power going out of him; Matthew simply says that he 'turned' (v22). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught 'your Father knows what your need before you ask' (Matt 6:8), and as He turned, He fulfilled these words Himself, for He knew the woman's need and also her faith. The idea that our Lord turns aside to respond to our need is a powerful one which demonstrates the power and love of God in salvation and healing. The Lord only 'turns' for something important; and the only other place in Matthew where Jesus is said to have 'turned' is when he looked at Peter to say 'get behind me Satan' after Peter had tried to talk Jesus out of His path to the Cross. In its own way, this was also a healing act of the Lord as He dismissed Satan from the beloved senior disciple.

Jesus then encouraged the woman, 'take heart, daughter' (9:22) in the same way that He had encouraged the paralysed man (9:2; 'take heart, son') and proceeded to announce her healing on account of her faith. When scripture says that she was made well 'at that moment', it sounds like a very precise moment. However, the Greek of this passage is quite general. The issue is not when she was healed, whether it was when she touched his cloak or when he pronounced her healed. The miracle was that she was healed, and from that time, she knew it, and from that time, her healing became her story, not Jesus'; and Matthew says no more about the woman. We are left with the realisation that this healing was not just a healing of a chronic condition, but the restoration of a woman to full life in the community. She would now be able to offer the proper sacrifices from Leviticus (chapter 15) for the end of her bleeding and take her place back in her family and in society. This was a gift of new life, her own 'resurrection'!

### ***New life for a child, and a family***

The loss of a child at any place and in any generation is a tragedy, but it is perhaps unexpected that a community leader should be so concerned for the loss of a daughter. A daughter was normally the responsibility of a mother, and had little to do with the male side of the family as she was valued less than a son. When this leader came to Jesus after her death and begged Jesus to come, it was therefore a remarkable call of faith for more than one reason. Jesus was looking for faith amongst the people of God (see 8:10) and he was now seeing it in the lives of ordinary people, even if his disciples were had difficulty with it during the storm at sea (8:23-27)! Perhaps the leader had heard Jesus' talk of 'new wine' whilst listening to the conversation at the table of Matthew (9:17). Certainly, he did not side with the critical Pharisees and scribes but realised that Jesus might be able to do a 'new' thing that would help his grieving family; this was faith of a high order!

As Jesus arrived at the house, he was greeted by the noise of the musicians and professional weeping women employed for funeral rites in those days. Jesus quipped to them that the girl was not dead but sleeping (9:24). This has puzzled many people, as Jesus was clearly going to someone who was dead, so why say the girl was sleeping? Firstly, 'sleeping' is used several times in the New Testament to refer to those who were dead (see, for example, John 11:13 and Matt 27:52, and also 1 Thess 5:10), and some believe that Jesus commonly referred to death as 'sleeping'. Secondly, it could be that Jesus was employing some irony, indicating his own prognosis (she was alive and sleeping) rather than the accepted diagnosis (she was dead). Whichever was Jesus' intent, He wanted the musicians and mourners to go away.

The story is then profoundly simple. Jesus went into the house to see the little girl, and with little fuss, took her by the hand and raised her up to life (9:25). The Greek word used, not surprisingly, is that which the New Testament uses for the resurrection. Again, Jesus knew what was needed without having to dig further into the faith of the father or delay in any way. He went straight to the heart of the matter and brought all His power and authority to bear on the needs of the child and her family. In Matthew we do not know her name (she is called 'Talitha' in Mark 5:41) or any other details of the story; we are left in amazement.

The final verse indicates that, as expected, news of this event spread very quickly; but strangely, no reaction is recorded. Where the previous healing had been met with awe and the praising of God (9:8), it seemed that people were somewhat stunned by this turn of events. Perhaps it was because few people observed the miracle, and perhaps it was that they realised the significance of what they had heard. The Messiah was raising the dead! This raising of a child from death also reminds us of Elijah and Elisha, who each performed a similar miracle in their ministries (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:32-37), something of which Matthew would have been every aware. The stories were well known, and people expected that when the Messiah came, He would do just this!

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## Discipleship

### Application

These two wonderfully interwoven stories of Jesus are recorded in a simple way for us by Matthew. This is because he wants us to see the power and authority of Jesus in response to two most powerful and profound human expressions of faith. Jesus healed those who needed His help, He restored them to full life and in so doing, He demonstrated the Gospel at work. It is not only the disciples who need to take heed of what Jesus did, for we and they are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps and do this work for other people ourselves. Some feel that the work of Jesus is symbolic, some feel that we must perform the ministry of healing as Jesus did, some look for examples of the resurrection of the dead even today. However we respond to the Gospel work of Jesus, we must do it.

Today, there are many people who are calling out for healing so that their lives can be restored. They would reach out to Jesus just as the woman did; old people who are not properly cared for and people with chronic conditions which may not be well treated and whose sickness prevents them from living a full life; those who are spiritually compromised because of the inability of the church to offer them real salvation, healing or spiritual 'new life'. Sometimes we hear stories of people being brought back to life; and that is wonderful too, because out of the graciousness of God, all these things point to the power of Jesus to change things for the better at the deepest human levels. He can 'give us our lives back' and 'give us real life' in every possible sense of these sayings.

As we read on in Matthew we will increasingly realise that Jesus was acutely aware of His own journey towards the Cross, and His coming death and resurrection, and just as what happened then points towards His great work of salvation on the Cross, so all the miracles of healing that happen today also demonstrate God's salvation through Christ, and Christ alone.

### Questions for groups

1. Explore the significance of touch within this story; who touches who, and for what reason, and expressing what?
2. Do you prefer to read these stories from Mark and Luke? Try doing this. Does the other reading say something more about Jesus?
3. How is Jesus' resurrection power and authority most often expressed today?

### Discipleship challenges

- *There may be issues in your own life which the Lord longs for you to bring to Him in faith, not knowing exactly what He will do or how, but in faith that He will do what He sees fit. The issues are all to do with our faith, not His desire to help.*
- *Pray for the ministry of healing within your church, however it is practiced. Pray to bless all those who seek to do the Lord's will by being His channels of peace, love and healing within broken lives and families.*

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## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, I set down my tasks at the end of this day in peace and in tranquility. Bring me to a place of rest where I my soul can commune with You without the problems of mental stress or the noise of work. And within that peace, heal me and restore me I pray. Thank You, Lord Jesus, Thank You: AMEN

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