

Where Is Jesus Coming From? (Mt 8.1–9.34)

MATTHEW IS MORE OR LESS FOLLOWING THE STRUCTURE OF Mark's gospel, but he has his own way of handling the same issues, because he wants you to see other aspects of them. Mark showed Jesus getting baptized and driven out into the desert to be tested, and then, after John was handed over, coming into Galilee proclaiming God's regime. Jesus then called Peter and Andrew, James and John, and began his career in a synagogue on a Sabbath, where he taught with authority and cast an unclean spirit out of a man. This was the first of a series of healings that took Jesus outward from the synagogue, to Peter's mother-in-law, to many people at the door and in the street, to the outlying villages, and finally to one who couldn't even enter a village, much less a synagogue—a leper. In these five healings and in the five escalating controversies which immediately follow, the issue of Jesus' *authority* comes up again and again. In the end, the Pharisees reject him and begin plotting with the Herodians to destroy him.

Likewise, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus gets baptized and is tempted, comes into Galilee proclaiming heaven's regime, calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him, and teaches in the synagogues, just as he does in Mark. However, where Mark took you inside to watch an encounter with an unclean spirit, Matthew only summarizes Jesus' synagogue and healing activity in general terms (4.23). But Mark doesn't give us any glimpse of Jesus' teaching at this point; he only says that Jesus 'taught with authority' (Mk 1.22). On the other hand, after summarizing Jesus' synagogue activity, Matthew greatly expands on Jesus' teaching by having him go up a mountain and delivering a very extended inaugural discourse (chs 5–7). Then, when he comes down the mountain, he performs a series of eleven miracles, which comprise chapters 8 and 9 in their entirety—and these begin, rather than end, with the leper of Mark's final story.

Matthew's series of miracles itself only somewhat follows Mark's order, but as in Mark, the series is occupied with the question of Jesus' *authority*. Also as in Mark, the se-

ries ends with the Pharisees rejecting Jesus, although not plotting to destroy him (Mk 3.6)— that will not come until 12.14. Here instead, they accuse Jesus of being, in effect, a *witch*, 'casting out demons by the prince of demons' (9.34) (This is the insult with which Mark begins his second section.) Matthew makes this view of Jesus' *authority*— that *Jesus' authority is demonic*— the main question of the section as a whole, as we will see.

But the section is also concerned with *following* Jesus. So at the top level, Matthew is letting his reader see how the characters in his story respond to Jesus' authority, and how this relates to whether they follow him or not. The interesting thing is, Jesus' authority remains ambiguous to those in the story all the way through this entire section. We know, of course, that Jesus is 'God's son' (cf 3.17; 4.3,6), but *they* don't, because we were present at his birth, baptism, and temptation. Now we watch as a *pagan* centurion responds positively to Jesus (8.5-13), and *Pharisees* reject him (9.32-34)— even though they both have the same *incorrect* estimation of where he's coming from! As we consider these responses, we're find ourselves considering our own attitudes and responses to Jesus too.

Most of Matthew up to this point has been comprised of material not found in Mark. But much of the present two chapters does already exist in Mark. Matthew edits and tailors Mark's stories, and adds others, to tell the tale of Jesus' authority, Israel's misunderstanding, and the disciples' willingness to follow him despite their confusions. Thus besides *authority*, these chapters are concerned with *following* Jesus the nature of *faithfulness*. Nine of the twenty-four times that Matthew uses the verb 'follow' (*akolouthēō*, ἀκολουθέω) occur in these two chapters. The crowds are following him (8.1); he speaks to those who are following him (8.10); a scribe wants to follow him wherever he will go (8.19); he says 'follow me' (8.22) and the disciples follow him (8.23); he calls Matthew to follow him, and Matthew follows him (9.9); he himself follows a ruler whose daughter has died (9.19);

and blind men follow him (9.27), although in the end, they don't do as he says.

What authority does Jesus have, that he might command people to follow him? And how do we understand his authority, ourselves? And what is it, to follow Jesus?

The Structure of This Narrative Section

In our culture, stories usually have a historical or cause-and-effect progression, and a good story tells what has to take place before another can unfold, or explains it by flashbacks and the like. For us, a story means what happened next. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and many other ancient writers use different ways of telling stories. They often place a number of disparate episodes with a common theme into a kind of 'crystalline' structure such as a chiasm (AB-C-BA), or the five-expanding-plus-five-escalating series of Mark's first section, and so forth. The structure helps the storyteller and the audience to remember the sequence, and is itself often an important key to the meaning of its parts. What holds the story together is not a historical progression, but the structure. Thus although the individual episodes may be loosely stitched together by seemingly historical words like 'after this' or 'while he was speaking', there's often (or usually) no intrinsic connection between one moment and another. Instead of asking 'what happened next', we could as well ask, 'what else happened along these lines'—what other aspects of the problem, issue, event, or person should we know about? When the author has shown us all the facets of the diamond, he moves on to the next one.

Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew's story lie between two blocks of extended discourse—the Teaching on the Mountain (chs 5–7) with its fourteen triads, and the Missionary Discourse of ch 10. Chapters 8 and 9 display very careful organization. There are three groups of stories, and the groups contain four, three, and four episodes respectively. The first and last group have the same structure—three episodes and a general summary followed by an Old Testament quotation. The middle group is marked off on either side by material that has to do with 'following' Jesus, and between this material, there are three episodes. Moreover, the second, middle, and second-last episodes (marked below by an **X**) concern the exorcism of demons.

A	8.1-4	Healing a leper
X	8.5-13	Healing a centurion's boy
C	8.14-15	Healing Peter's mother-in-law
D	8.16	Summary: Healings and exorcisms:
E	8.17	OT citation: He took our sicknesses and bore our diseases
F	8.18	Following Jesus: The order to go to the other side
G	8.19-22	Two sayings about following: Foxes' have their holes; Let the dead bury their dead
H	8.23	The disciples follow
I	8.24-27	Stilling a storm
X	8.28–9.1	Destroying demons in Gentile territory
I	9.2-8	Healing/forgiving a paralytic
H	9.9	Following Jesus: The call of Matthew
G	9.10-13	Two sayings to the Pharisees: The sick, not the well, need physician; Mercy, not sacrifice
F	9.14-17	Two sayings to John's disciples: Bridegroom and new wine
A	9.18-26	Raising a dead girl (Jesus follows), and healing a woman
B	9.27-31	Healing two blind men
X	9.32-34	Healing a dumb demoniac
D	9.35	Summary: Healing every disease:
E	9.36	OT citation: The people are like sheep without a shepherd

The first episode of the section opens against the background of the large crowds present when Jesus comes down from the mountain where he gave his first extended teaching. A leper comes to Jesus and begs to be cleansed (8.1). After Jesus fulfills the leper's request, he commands, 'See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, *for a testimony to them*' (8.4; cf Lv 14.1-32).

Unlike Mark, there's nothing secret about this first healing; it takes place in the presence of 'many crowds' who are 'following him' (8.1). But apparently there is need for a testimony. People give testimony so that others will take whatever action is then required. Will the former

leper's testimony be accepted? Will Jesus' testimony be accepted?

Jesus healed 'all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics' that they brought to him (4.24). He has just finished 'teaching as one who had *authority*, and not as their scribes' (7.29). His words are known and his power is obvious, but what is the nature of his *authority*?

This is the explicit and implicit issue in numerous passages in this section, and the question of following him is at the heart of it.

8.15 The fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.

One serves someone in authority. As the centurion put in six verses earlier, 'I say... to my *slave*, "Do this," and he does it' (8.9).

Likewise, Matthew's ideal reader would know from Ps 29.3-4; 65.7; 89.9; 93.4; 107.29; 124.1-5 that control of the weather is a divine power. When Jesus showed his power to be as great as that,

8.27 the men marvelled, saying, 'What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'

8.28 'What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?'

The demons don't just think that Jesus has the power to torture them. They he's the one who has been given the authority to punish them when the time for their punishment comes.

In the end, the Pharisees— even though surely as dumb-founded as anyone else at Jesus' extraordinary power—

9.6 '...that you may know that the Son of Man has *authority* on earth to forgive sins...'

—evaluate it negatively:

9.34 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons'.

That is, he gets his authority over demons from Satan.

And this, except for the summary in 9.35-36, which draws attention to the faithlessness of Israel's leaders while it also introduces the next section, is how the whole of chs 8-9 ends. So the *witness* that Jesus orders in the case of the leper is *wrongly interpreted* and ultimately meets with *evil-hearted misinterpretation and rejection*. But Matthew is only getting started. The leper would have to go to the Temple to offer his sacrifice, and we do not learn until the end of the book how the Temple will ultimately respond to Jesus' authoritative words or deeds.

But meanwhile, the disciples who are 'following him wherever he goes' (8.19), have begun to understand 'what kind of man this is' (8.27).

The First Group of Stories

Looking at the outline above, we first find three stories in the first group that relate healings (8.1-4; 8.5-13; 8.14-15). Their respective themes are Jesus' will, his authority, and his power. Then we find a fourth (8.16), a general description followed by a statement that his healing activity follows the pattern of 'servant Israel' prophesied in Isaiah (8.17; cf Isa 53.4). This ABC-D structure also governs the final group of stories (9.18-36). These two groups are not chiasmic, but parallel (not ABC-D || D-CBA, but AXC-D || AXC-D)— but the second and second-last episodes (here, 'X') are internally chiasmic *with respect to each other*, a highly significant but usually overlooked fact that we will discuss when the time comes.

Healing a Leper

8.2. In the first episode, 'a leper came to [Jesus] and knelt before him, saying, "Lord..."' (8.2). Because we tend to read these stories apart from Matthew's narrative as a whole, we usually take his use of 'Lord' to be at least a hint that he recognizes Jesus' divinity. But within Matthew's actual story, Jesus has *just said* that calling him 'Lord' is not enough (7.21-23). Therefore, despite the leper's 'faith' (and about 'faith', more in a moment)— his prayer is actually ambiguous. In fact, his question is whether Jesus 'wants' to exercise his power on his behalf: 'Lord, if you *want*, you *can* [i.e., you *have the power*— the Greek word means both] to make me clean' (8.2). He has come to one whom he believes has power to heal. His is a correct view, but is it adequate?

8.3. Jesus responds to the leper on his own terms by touching him and saying, 'I want! (*thelō*, θέλω)— be clean!' (8.3).

Of course it's amazing that he has such power, and can heal leprosy with a touch and a single word. But what's really striking is precisely that he *touched* this man, who was untouchable because of his uncleanness. By very act of touching him, Jesus overcomes his untouchability, his separation from society (cf Lv 13.46), and even heals him. But in doing so, he becomes unclean himself (cf Lv 5.3— ritually unclean; he does not, of course, become a leper). And 'immediately [the man's] leprosy was cleansed' (8.3).

8.4. In the first place, the cleansed leper should 'tell no one' about his cleansing *but* he should 'go, show [himself] to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded'. He should tell no one, but he should tell someone.

But why would Jesus command him to ‘tell no one’ when ‘many crowds’ (8.1) have just seen the healing for themselves? Obviously the point is not to keep a secret, as is often the case in Mark.

Matthew chooses his words carefully. Jesus said, ‘show yourself to the priest’ in the singular, but the purpose of this is to witness to ‘them’, a plural. We might assume that ‘them’ refers to all the priests in general, and that wouldn’t be wrong. But Matthew has just said that ‘many crowds’ were present. Thus, not just priests but the crowds also will correctly understand what Jesus has done *when the former leper fulfills the ritual commanded by Moses, ‘as a testimony to them’*. In other words, the cleansing alone— the display of power— is not enough for Jesus’ audience (and for Matthew’s— that is, for us), or for the priest(s), to understand what Jesus has done. We must understand *why*. We must understand the nature of his authority.

Jesus doesn’t just want to cleanse the leper. He doesn’t even just ‘want’ him to be reintegrated into Israelite society. He also ‘wants’ people to see his deeds *in terms of the Torah and Prophets*, indeed as fulfilling rather than abolishing them (see 5.17).

This is important precisely because he healed the *unclean* by *touching* him, that is, by doing something unclean and becoming unclean himself. Jesus’ deed, done outside the Torah, must also be integrated into what is commanded in the Torah, so as to give witness to the people and to the priests and to us how the prophecies were being fulfilled in him (as 8.17 will explicitly state). We saw this same pattern in chapter 2, where what happened outside the Scripture (the star in the East, Nazareth of Galilee) and what happened inside it (the revelation of Scripture in Jerusalem, Bethlehem of Judea) turned out to be complementary.

The offering that Moses prescribed in Lv 14.1-9 was never meant to heal the disease; it only testified to a healing that God has bestowed, and reintegrated the leper into society. In healing the man, Jesus has done more than the Temple itself could do, but he has done it by breaking the Torah-defined boundary between unclean (lepers) and clean (the rest of society). This *could* be read as abrogating and abolishing the Torah— ‘You don’t have to pay attention to the Torah any more; I’m here to set you free from it.’ But that’s not Jesus’ point. He *cures* the man, and *wants* his deed to be complemented by the Torah’s ritual. His purpose is to restore the integrity— not just of this individual, or even of all individuals— but of a society that lives by the Torah.

If the leper were just to go out and tell everyone that he had been healed (as the blind men do in 9.31), ‘they’

would certainly acknowledge Jesus’ extraordinary *power*, but they would not understand his *authority*. Jesus is not just exercising power because he’s the ‘Son of God’ and can do as he pleases. He has come to declare the arrival of *heaven’s regime* (4.17,23; 5.3,10,19,20; 6.10,33; 7.21; 8.11,12; 9.35). In other words, by touching a leper, he’s just made it clear that God has begun to fulfill all that he promised his suffering people, in an unexpected way.

In this first miracle and in the command to ‘go and show yourself to the priest’, Jesus has indicated where he’s coming from. But will anyone get the picture?

Healing a Centurion’s ‘Boy’

8.5-6. The second episode in this section opens as a middle-ranking army officer— a centurion, or leader of a hundred men— whether Roman or not, we don’t know, but in any case a Gentile— comes and beseeches healing from a colonized Jewish wonderworker on behalf of his paralyzed ‘servant’ or, more literally, his ‘boy’ (*pais*, παῖς).

Matthew tells us that he comes ‘begging’ (*parakalōn*, παρακαλῶν, 8.6). Matthew doesn’t recite his request as such, but only shows him describing the boy— ‘Lord, my boy is lying at home paralyzed, grievously tortured’ (8.5).

The centurion’s expression, ‘my boy’, is odd within Matthew’s normal usage, and draws our attention to what the story is about. Here’s an important imperial officer humiliating himself before a colonial subject on behalf of a subordinate who is not even a soldier.

The ‘boy’ is not the centurion’s son, even though the word (*pais*, παῖς) can mean ‘child’ (cf 2.13). The centurion refers to him as ‘my boy’ (*ho pais mou*, ὁ παῖς μου), and except in 12.18, a quotation from Isaiah, Matthew always uses *pais* (παῖς) to designate someone *else’s* child. For example, the angel refers to Jesus as Mary’s ‘son’ (*huios*, υἱός, 1.25), but calls him ‘the child’ (*pais*, παῖς) when speaking about him to Joseph (2.13 [twice], 14,20 [twice], 21). He is also ‘the *pais*’ in relation to Herod, the star, and the magi (2.8, 9, 11).

Pais (παῖς) can, of course, mean a ‘servant’ or a ‘slave’ (a ‘boy’ in the British colonial sense)— cf 14.2, where Herod speaks to his ‘servants’ (*paisin*, παισίν)— and so most of our translations offer ‘my *servant* is at home paralyzed’, etc. But again, Matthew’s vocabulary of servitude is very consistent and points away from this. For ‘slave’, Matthew uses only *doulos* (δούλος) (31 times), and for ‘servant’, *diakonos* (διάκονος) (twice)— and though he uses *pais* (παῖς) or its diminutive *paidion* (παιδίον) for ‘boy’ or ‘child’ no fewer than 26 times, not once does he use it of a servant or a slave! So this ‘boy’ is clearly not a son— and yet he’s somehow more than a slave.

Well, not a son. So if indeed he's a servant of *some* kind, then what the centurion is doing and risking on his behalf is all the more striking, in view of Roman attitudes about slaves (and there weren't, by the way, *paid* 'servants' in those days). Cato, for example recommended that 'sickly' slaves, being 'superfluous' and 'useless,' should just be sold off (*Agr* 2.7; see also Plutarch, *Cat Maj* 4–5.2). Yet here we have an imperial officer abasing himself before an itinerant Jewish wonderworker— which is even *more* extraordinary when we take Roman attitudes toward *Jews* into account (see Tacitus, *Hist* 5.5; Juvenal, *Sat* 14.96-106)— our centurion is standing before one whom he would regard as a practitioner of an alien and unsavory cult. So surely the centurion's unseemly begging attests to the force not only of Jesus' reputation, but even more to the depth of his own loyalty to a 'boy' who at this point doesn't show much potential for future usefulness and whom he really ought to regard as little more than a beast of burden and a burdensome expense at that!

As to the boy's disease, we can take it as axiomatic that the centurion, and Matthew, view the 'torture' he's undergoing as brought about by a demon, and not caused, for example, by a polio virus. In fact, when Matthew tells us that Jesus "gave authority of/over unclean spirits to the twelve apostles *so as to cast them out and heal every disease*" (10.1), he seems to be suggesting that exorcism is a *necessary* component of any healing. And this same understanding was already reflected in 4.24, where

'they brought him all those
having it badly off by various diseases
and those by *tortures* constrained—
even *demoniacs*, and epileptics, and paralytics—
and he healed them'.¹

The cause of the boy's affliction is important. If he is 'tortured' not just by a disease but by a *demon*, then demons appear chiasmatically in the second and second-last sets of healings (centurion's boy, 8.5-13; and dumb demoniac, 9.32-34), as well as at the midpoint of the whole

¹ This verse probably ought to be divided as follows:

προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ πάντα
τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις
καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους
[καὶ] δαίμονιζομένους καὶ σεληνιαζομένους καὶ παραλυτικούς,
καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτούς

— as translated above. Most translations have something like ESV's 'all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains', but the syntax seems to distinguish 'those badly off because of various diseases' and 'those by [demonic] tortures constrained'; the following words, '[even] demoniacs, and epileptics, and paralytics' listing, precisely, the three kinds of demonically troubled people that Jesus heals in the gospel.

series (Gadarenes, 8.28-34). This gives chapters 8–9 this structure shown in the outline above: **AXCD–EFG–HXJ–GFE–ABXD**. This story about the centurion and his 'boy' thus emerges as a first important key to the meaning of the section as a whole.

8.7. In response to the centurion's plea, Jesus offers to 'come and heal the boy' (8.7). Clean Jews are not supposed to visit unclean Gentile homes. In the preceding story, Jesus transgressed the boundary between clean and unclean by touching a leper, an extremely unclean person (8.3-4). Now, Jesus proposes to transgress the Torah's boundaries again by going to the home not only of an unclean Gentile, but to that of an officer of an army that is the very presence of Israel's oppression.

Transgression of the boundary between clean and unclean is not good in and of itself, and Jesus is not into breaking the Torah just for the sake of doing so. His transgression *effected* the leper's reintegration into Israelite society, or at least established the fundamental change which the ritual would then certify and make possible once again. But the centurion and his boy presumably are Gentiles.² They neither seek nor need reintegration into Israelite society; they were never part of it in the first place.

And elsewhere, Matthew's Jesus forbids the disciples any outreach to the Gentiles: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10.5). He even says of himself, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (15.24). Mark's Jesus breaks bread in Jewish territory for 5,000 Jewish men and then in Gentile territory for 4,000 men and women who are apparently both Jews and Gentiles— but Matthew's Jesus breaks the same bread both times in *Jewish* territory. Only after the resurrection does Matthew's Jesus say to the disciples, "Going to all the nations, teach them..." (28.18).

So Jesus' proposal to visit the centurion's home is startling, even if in just a few verses he will order the disciples to go with him to the 'other side' (8.18), and the

² Though as mentioned above, they may or may not have been Romans: '[T]he soldiers stationed in Judea in the first century C.E. were non-Roman auxiliaries, not legionaries. Moreover, the incident took place not in Judea but in Galilee, which at the time was a nominally independent kingdom of the Herodian Antipas. Client kings of the time certainly modeled their armies on that of Rome. For example, in that of Nabataean Arabia (against whom Antipas fought after the death of John the Baptist) chiliarchs and centurions appear. Antipas himself used this terminology. All that can be definitely said is that the centurion in Matthew was a Gentile: his actual ethnicity cannot be determined...' (D. B. Saddington, 'The Centurion in Matthew 8:5-13: Consideration of the Proposal of Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., and Tat-Siong Benny Liew': *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125/1 (Spring 2006), 140-142), p 142).

'other side' will turn out to be the territory of the *Gentile Gadarenes* (8.28), where he will cast out two demons.

8.8-10. Jesus has proposed to visit. The centurion counterproposes that Jesus need not visit. We'd be speculating to say (as we always do) that he's 'being humble', or perhaps that he's being sensitive to Jewish defilement issues, or whatnot. Matthew doesn't give the centurion's motive for refusing Jesus' offer, for the story he's telling is not exactly about that, despite millions of pietistic sermons that talk about nothing else. What the centurion *does* talk about is Jesus' *authority*— 'I am not worthy... *Even I am under authority*... speak but a word... I say to my slave, Do this, and he does it' (8.9).

We usually assume that the centurion's response expresses— besides, of course, 'humility' and 'faith'— a correct appraisal of Jesus as the 'Son of God'. But at this point in Matthew's story, only Jesus (3.17), the devil (4.1-11), the reader who heard what the Voice from the sky said, and what the devil said ('If you are God's son...'), and Jesus himself know that he is the 'Son of God'. Moreover, we automatically assume that the centurion is thinking much as we do in our monotheistic system, where spirits are either servants or opponents of the one God and not really independent operators. The problem is, the centurion is a Gentile— that is, a polytheist.

For Greco-Roman polytheists, the line between gods and demons was vague. Demons could do good and gods could do evil. But there was no one god at the top who rules everything— only a variety of contexts where gods and demons might cooperate or boss each other around and, or might join forces or resist and compete with one another. To the centurion, a 'demon' would simply have been a being less powerful than a god and less endowed with individuality, who might be controllable with the right magic. In fact the main difference between gods and demons was that gods received regular and public worship and were somehow related to society as a whole, and demons were generally dealt with by private magic rites. Human suffering was their particular sphere, and a powerful magician might be able to control, deploy, and dismiss them, depending on what demons and powers he himself might be able to summon. But there would always be powers above and below him.

This is the cosmology in which the centurion *expressly understands* Jesus' 'authority': 'For *I too*,' he says, 'am a man *under authority*, with soldiers *under me*...' (8.9). Like any first-century Greco-Roman, he knows that wonderworkers and exorcists operate, as he does, within a *command structure*. He naturally assumes that Jesus can cast out the demon of paralysis because *he has authority within the demonic command structure*. Far from thinking

of Jesus as the 'Son of God' (something he has *not* said), the centurion has *just said* that he understands Jesus to be (at least!) a *centurion of demons!* Or maybe more than a centurion— perhaps a general— yet still, he is 'under authority, with soldiers under [him]'. Later on, the Pharisees will come right out and say it: 'He casts out demons *by the prince of demons*' (9.34).

This reading is confirmed by the chiasmic relationship between this, the second episode of the series (8.5-13), and the second-last episode (9.32-34), as we mentioned earlier. We can map it out this way:

comment	by centurion ('under authority')
amazement	of Jesus ('from none in Israel ')
healing	of tortured paralytic
healing	of dumb demoniac
amazement	of crowd ('never in Israel ')
comment	by Pharisees ('prince of demons')

Jesus, for his part, has offered to transgress the boundaries of Israel, in order to show compassion on the centurion's boy. But at the centurion's remark about his authority, he chooses not to transgress; he goes along with the centurion's request. *But that leaves open the possibility that the centurion is right*— that Jesus really *is* a centurion of demons.

Matthew has just upped the ante.

8.10-13. When Jesus hears what the centurion said, 'he marveled (*ethaumasen*, ἐθαύμασεν)' (8.10).

Most people take this to be positive. But for Matthew, 'marvel' is not necessarily positive. To cite the most extreme example of several that we could point out, Pilate is 'greatly amazed' (*thaumazein lian*, θαυμάζειν λίαν) at Jesus' silence (27.14)— but that doesn't prevent him from having him whipped and crucified. Jesus' 'amazement' *doesn't imply that he agrees with the centurion's assessment of his authority*.

However, when Jesus heard the centurion, 'he marveled and said to those who were *following* him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such [faith]"' (8.10). Jesus is now talking not to the centurion, but to those who were *following* him. So it's very important that we who follow Jesus today understand this carefully. What is it that *Jesus* finds so amazing?

People usually take the object of Jesus' amazement in either of two ways: either the centurion subscribes to the *idea* that 'Jesus is the Son of God', or believes that Jesus has the power to heal the boy at a distance.

If he's expressing a recognition that Jesus is the 'son of God', we would have to explain how it is that a polytheist who has no connection with Jewish expectation— can so easily grasp what no one else in the story can yet see— and even more astonishing, *resist closer contact?* If you ask a king for a favor, and the king says he wants to come to your home to bestow the favor, wouldn't the visit be part of the favor? And would you risk insulting the king and losing the favor you've asked for, by refusing the greater favor he offers? Such 'humility' would seem rather risky!

If the point is that the centurion thinks Jesus can heal at a distance— well, everyone who comes to him for healing believes he can heal. Distance seems a trivial difference.

But the centurion's 'beliefs' are not what Jesus is pointing to. It might seem so, since the KJV has '*not even in Israel have I found such faith*', but that is not what the best manuscripts say, and the difference is significant.

Jesus actually says, 'from no one in Israel have I found such trust' (8.10). It's not absence of faith that Jesus points to, but absence of people who trust him. And that's precisely what's going to play out in the next few chapters: a lot of people just don't trust him. 'He casts out demons by the prince of demons.'

So Jesus is saying, '*No one in Israel ever shows this kind of trust*'. And he goes on to contrast Gentile *people* who will 'sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in heaven's regime' (8.11) with 'the sons of the regime' (Jewish *people!*) who will be 'thrown into outer darkness' (8.12), because they have not shown 'such *trust (pistis, πίστις)*' (8.10).

Pistis (πίστις), which translates the Hebrew *emunah*, actually means 'faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, steadfastness, not walking away even when the going gets tough, trusting another and honoring their trust in us'.³ Only secondarily (if ever) do *pistis* and *emunah* refer to any kind of 'belief', for instance that Jesus is the 'Son of God' or even that he can heal the boy. The quality that the centurion is exhibiting is not belief, not 'faith', but *trust*. Nevermind that he thinks Jesus is a centurion of demons!— he *trusts* that Jesus will heal his 'boy'. And Jesus responds, 'From *no one* in Israel have I found such *trust*' (8.10).

³ The quote is from Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the UK, speaking at the Vatican's Humanum Colloquium on Complementarity, November 2014. See "Lord Sacks speech that brought Vatican conference to its feet", posted by Catholic Voices Media at <http://cvcomment.org/2014/11/18/in-full-the-lord-sacks-speech-that-brought-the-vatican-conference-to-its-feet/> on 18 Nov 2014.

At the same time, he is showing *faithfulness* towards his 'boy', for whom he is going way out on a limb, laying aside his self-worth (*hikanós, ἱκανός*; 'worthy') as he beseeches this Jewish healer. In doing so, he risks insult and ridicule both from Jesus and his entourage, and loss of face before his inferiors, equals, and superiors in the army. This would be nothing short of astonishing if the 'boy' is a slave, but even if he's just an account clerk in the pay office, his action is remarkable. And he *trusts* that Jesus, a member of the nation his army is brutally occupying, will actually perform the healing he's asking for.

Now, on top of that, he refuses Jesus' offer to come, even as he steadfastly persists in asking for the favor— and this also is included in the 'faithfulness' which makes Jesus marvel at him.

At this point, we have to return to what the centurion said about Jesus' authority. Is he right? Is Jesus too 'under authority, with soldiers under him'? Does anyone in the story yet have reason to think otherwise? The question will come up yet again in 9.32-34, and again in 12.22-37— each time in connection with amazement— and only that last time will Jesus directly address it. At that point, people will bring a man who is not just dumb and demonized, but blind as well— a figure who pulls together the paralytic 'boy' of 8.5-13, the blind men of 9.27-31, and the dumb demoniac of 9.32-34— all stories that echo this one— and Jesus will cast out the demon and heal him; the multitudes will be 'astonished' (*existanto, ἐξίσταντο*), and will start saying, 'Could this be David's son?' And again the Pharisees will respond, 'This one doesn't cast out demons except by Beelzebul the prince of demons' (12.23-34). And only at this point will Jesus finally reply that even *if* what they were saying was true, it could only mean that Satan's regime was at war with itself and about to fall (12.25-26)— 'but', he adds, 'if by God's Spirit I cast out demons, then God's regime has come upon you' (12.28)— and proceeds to speak of the impossibility of 'entering a strong man's house and plundering his goods, unless he first binds the strong man— then indeed he may plunder his house' (12.29).

That, then, will be Jesus' final answer not only to the Pharisees of 12.22-37 and of 9.34, but to centurion here as well: he's *not* a centurion of demons; rather, he's here to challenge Satan's entire hierarchy. He's the 'stronger man' who who has the mojo to 'bind the strong man' and 'plunder his house'. But Matthew has to get his characters to the point where this is not just a mere assertion of some kind. He has to let them see Jesus for themselves. For that reason, even after the whole series of chs 8–9, Matthew will still tell us that Jesus summoned the twelve and gave them, literally, '[the] power of unclean spirits' (*exousian pneumatōn akathartōn, ἐξουσίαν*

πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων; 10.1), to heal and to cast out. Matthew wants us to feel the ambiguity that his characters feel about the source and nature of Jesus' authority. Matthew is *letting us see the ambiguity that Jesus' acts of power had for those inside the story.*

But doesn't the centurion correctly perceive the nature of Jesus' authority, at least in *some* sense? Well, already with Satan in the desert (4.1-11), Jesus rejected imperialistic, command-style authority. He would not manipulate nature to satisfy himself (4.4); he would not assume command over angels (4.6); he would not kneel down and pay homage to the devil (4.8-9). Had he done any of these, he would indeed have been what his opponents now charge and what the centurion surmises— a high, but subordinate part of the devil's imperial / divine / demonic system of command and control. But elsewhere, Jesus is quite emphatic that his authority is not to be mistaken for the military/hierarchical authority of princes and generals. He denounces 'the rulers of the nations' (20.24-28) using the very words 'lord' and 'authority' (20.25) that the centurion uses of him here. He even declares that the 'slave' (whom the centurion says he can boss around) will be 'first' (*prōtos*, πρῶτος) and requires the 'first among you must be your slaves' (20.26-27).

Jesus' authority not only comes from a different source; it is of a different kind.

So the centurion's appraisal is in fact *not* accurate, and Jesus no more praises him for thinking he's 'under authority and has soldiers under [him]' than he praises the Pharisees for thinking that he casts out demons by the prince of demons. He does praise him, though, for his trust, of which the Pharisees show nothing.

If we're looking for sermon material we might consider whether *our* views about Jesus and 'faith' actually come from thinking of Jesus acts like a general!

But why does the centurion refuse? Jesus points out the centurion's *trust* (*tosautēn pistin*, τοσαύτην πίστιν, 8.10, 13). But as we said, *pistis* also means 'faithfulness'. It is not the centurion's trust alone, but also his faithfulness, that causes Jesus to take the centurion to be a sign that 'many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in heaven's regime, but the sons of the regime shall be cast out into outer darkness: there, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (8.11-12)? To what, or rather, to *whom* is the centurion showing 'such loyalty'?

The 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' to which the 'sons of the regime' will be exiled is the clue. Jesus will use this expression six times in Matthew's Gospel (8.12; 13.42, 52; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30), and in each case, he refers to people

who presently think they're insiders but who will be surprised to find themselves shut out. The issue is not (as we might guess just from this passage) that Gentiles will be admitted and Jews excluded from God's regime, or even that some people 'believe in' Jesus and get in, while others don't. For right after he uses the phrase for the last time (25.30), he tells the parable of the Last Judgment, when 'all the nations'— not just Jews but also the nations, including the Romans and their clients and their centurions— will be assembled and judged (25.31-46). At that time, both sheep and goats will call him 'Lord' (25.37, 44), just as the centurion did in 8.6. All will have the right 'faith', in the sense that they will recognize Jesus as the 'Son of God', even if they express surprise about having ever seen him before (25.37-39,44). But Jesus will judge them not over whether they say 'Lord, Lord' (cf 7.21,22; 25.11)— over whether they agree that he's the 'Son of God', or even whether they had the right idea about where his *authority* came from— but over what they *did* for the least of these my brethren' (25.40, 45). He will judge them on their *orthopraxy* more than their *orthodoxy*, and specifically on how they treated the *weak and needy*. In fact, just two chapters before the parable of the Last Judgment, Jesus tied 'faithfulness'— precisely that quality which the centurion has shown and Jesus has singled out— inseparably to 'justice and mercy' (23.23), and in a short time hence, he will tell the Pharisees to 'Go and learn what this means, "I want mercy, and not sacrifice"— for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners' (9.13).

So the centurion's 'faithfulness' or 'loyalty' is not a question of believing that Jesus is the 'Son of God', or even of an amazingly correct, if rather trivial, belief that Jesus can heal without having to make house calls. Rather, it consists in the fact that he *trusts Jesus* out of *loyalty to his 'boy'*.

In fact the centurion's 'insight' into Jesus' authority is actually *wrong*— but he's showing an astonishing degree of *loyalty or faithfulness by how far he's willing to go* for his *boy*. 'From no one in Israel— even though they're all monotheists!— 'have I found such *trust!*' (8.10). Nobody in Israel trusts him like this pagan who seeks healing for his 'boy'!

The centurion speaks of the authority of an officer over a soldier, and of a master over a slave. Yet he shows himself willing to submit his own 'worthiness' (*hikanos*, ἱκανός, 8.8) to a colonized Jew on behalf of his 'boy'. This is astonishing, and it calls forth an equally remarkable offer: Transgressing the Torah's prescriptions about clean and unclean, 'I will come and heal him' (8.7).

Nevertheless, the centurion refuses.

And Jesus, the one with 'authority', not only grants his client's request, but does so on the terms that the *centurion* dictates. Jesus exercises his *authority* to cast the demon of paralysis out of the boy, but in doing so he displays it in a way quite *opposite to how the centurion understands authority*. It is not by command, but (as Matthew will say in a moment) by 'taking (on) our weaknesses, and bearing our diseases' (8.17) that Jesus heals. Of course in this case he doesn't take on the boy's (demonic) paralysis, any more than he took on the leper's leprosy. At the centurion's request, he doesn't even defile himself by visiting a Gentile home, as he defiled himself by touching a leper. After all, transgressing the Torah is not the point. But the centurion's weakness is his *mis-taken view of Jesus' authority*. And Jesus accepts the centurion's weak or wrong *belief*, and heals the boy anyway, because he has shown 'such trust', as well as 'such faithfulness'.

Not by his words, but by his actions the centurion has shown that he gets that true authority is manifest in servanthood. Jesus confirms not his *understanding*, but his *loyalty*. And where Jesus' own *loyalty* lies (as we saw for example in his response to the leper— "'Lord, if you want, you can make me clean.'" ... "I want! Be clean!"')— is precisely not with hierarchies of command and control, but with the weak and the needy. This is what the Pharisees *don't* get when he heals the dumb demoniac of 9.34 and the blind and dumb demoniac of 12.24. But it's why Jesus keeps doing things that are not *authorized* (12.2, 4, 10, 12). With God, he *wants* mercy (9.13).

When in 12.22-32 Jesus finally and explicitly rejects his identification as Beelzebul's centurion, we find him stating that 'he who isn't with me is against me, and the one who isn't gathering with me, is scattering' (12.30). What's ultimately relevant is not the centurion's theory about Jesus' authority— both sheep and goats will call him 'Lord'— but rather his attitude toward the boy. The Pharisees will seek to undermine and oppose him as he heals demoniacs (9.32-32; 12.22-24), whereas the centurion seeks healing for one tortured by demons— *even though* he holds the Pharisees' view. Despite his understanding, he gathers with Jesus, while they scatter.

The centurion who goes to any length to obtain healing for 'one of the least of my brethren' (25.40, 45) joins Joseph, who pretended to be Jesus' father for the sake of a defenseless mother and child (1.18-25), joins those who will bring another paralytic to Jesus (9.2), and joins the Canaanite woman who will persist in the face of humiliation on behalf of her daughter (15.21-27), in showing great *faithfulness*. Ultimately, the centurion's *loyalty* turns out to be not towards a subordinate who is under terrible torture (8.6), but to *God* who *wants* justice and mercy

(23.23; 9.13). By contrast, Jesus will criticize his own disciples as having 'little faithfulness' when they fail to cast the demon out of a 'moonstruck' (i.e., 'epileptic') boy in 17.20. It's not that they fail to 'believe'; they just think they have some kind of 'authority' (cf 20.21)— whereas for Jesus, the only true authority— and in fact the only true faithfulness— is *love* (22.38-39; 23.23). 'From no one in Israel have I found such faithfulness' (8.10).

8.5, 11-12. Those who show 'such faithfulness' (8.10) will be seated at the Messianic banquet— and 'many from east and west' are showing such faithfulness, whereas the so-called 'sons of [heaven's] regime' do not (8.11-12).

Scholars generally agree that Matthew's readers would identify themselves with the 'many' who 'will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven' (8.11). And this would be the first indication that Matthew is writing for audiences comprised of Gentiles and/or persons excluded from the synagogue. In having Jesus say that 'many will come from east and west', Matthew affirms them— but at the same time he reminds them (i.e., us) that we need the centurion's kind of *faithfulness* towards 'one of the least of my brethren' rather than some special kind of 'authority' if we want to partake of Jesus' communion.

8.9 (again). Jesus commented on the centurion's faithfulness *after* the centurion had refused his offer to come and heal the boy. Jesus' 'wonder' and his remark about the centurion's 'faithfulness' therefore includes not only the fact that the centurion, an imperial military officer, is humbling himself before a colonized Jew on behalf of an underling, but also his refusal itself. Why would the centurion's refusal also be evidence of his *faithfulness*?

There is one interpretation of the word *pais* (παῖς) which might raise eyebrows, but which is well-attested in classical literature and actually can explain why the centurion refused Jesus' offer. As I said, Matthew's regular usage shows that the 'boy' was neither the centurion's own 'child' nor a 'slave'. Yet if he's not a child, he's obviously more than a slave. So what is he?

You'd never guess this from biblical scholarship, but classicists will point out that the word *pais* (παῖς) occurs in military contexts— and there, particularly in connection with centurions— where the closest translation in English would be 'boy-wife'— the 'passive' or junior partner in a homosexual relationship. Apparently in the Greek and Roman armies, as in the mines of South Africa during Apartheid, soldiers were not allowed to keep families. It was therefore not uncommon for soldiers to take a 'boy' for sexual companionship. Centurions, with their higher pay-grade and private quarters, were apparently

somewhat notorious for this. The boy in question was usually was, but not always, a slave.

Such relationships could become quite tender. This would explain the centurion's readiness to humble himself before an occupied colonial subject in order to obtain his healing. If that was the nature of their relationship, it provides one explanation for his reluctance to have Jesus come to his home. When Jesus said, 'Follow me', people followed him. He didn't want to lose the valued 'boy'!

And that would be true, whatever his relationship with this 'boy' that he values is. For to be sure, he may just be afraid of Jesus— Jesus the wonderworker who 'is under authority and has soldiers under [him]' (8.9). The Gadarenes will also ask Jesus to leave their territory, evidently because they didn't want someone with powers like his around. After all, 'the devil you know. . . '.

Some object to reading the 'boy' as 'boyfriend', but some such interpretation is needed both for the odd expression 'my boy' and the centurion's reluctance to have Jesus visit. If indeed the 'boy' is a 'boy-wife', it's interesting that Jesus didn't interfere with the relationship, but just healed the boy and in doing so, restored him to the centurion. Who knows what happened after that?

Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law

In Mark, after Jesus' encounter with the demon in the synagogue, he 'entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her, and he came and took her by the hand and raised her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them' (Mk 1.29-31). In Matthew, one could easily think that Jesus enters the house alone, for all he says is that 'when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever, and he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him' (8.14-15). This is very typical of how Matthew tends to simplify the stories he gets from other sources.

Matthew's Jesus heals the woman entirely from his own initiative, just as he calls disciples to 'follow' him (cf 9.9; also 4.18-22). He acts without needing anyone to tell him about her and without request or indeed any expression of faithfulness on her part. He just sees the sick woman and heals her, apparently just because he 'wants' to (cf 8.2-3; 9.13). The drama here is simply that Peter's mother-in-law was 'lying sick' (8.14) and then 'she arose and served him' (8.15). Jesus' power appears without ambiguity; but even here, his *authority* is manifest. She gets up to *serve* him.

That's about all we could say about this episode if we read it by itself, and since that's all we usually do with it, that's about all we ever do in fact say about it. But these two verses are related to what precedes and what follows, and indeed to the whole Gospel. So, first of all, the healing demonstrates anew that he 'wants' to heal (8.2-3; 9.13), that is, his *own* faithfulness to the weak and suffering.

It also suggests that being healed by Jesus is a kind of call to discipleship. 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (9.12-13): here, healing is parallel to calling sinners.

And finally, though we've seen that Jesus can heal at a distance by 'speaking but a word' (8.13), here we see that he continues to heal by touch, as he did with the leper. He didn't contract leprosy when he touched the leper, even though he did become unclean; so we don't expect that he will get the fever by touching this woman who has a fever; but since a fever doesn't render one unclean, he wouldn't become unclean either. So in what sense would this healing demonstrate how he takes or bears her disease, as the next verse but one will indicate (8.17)?

The answer turns out to be deeper than we expect. As we said the fact that the woman serves Jesus comes as an acknowledgment of his authority. In doing so, she becomes like the angels who served him after his temptation (4.11). But she also like the 'many women looking on from afar, who had *followed* Jesus from Galilee, *serving* him' (27.55). They were, of course, among the faithful few who witnessed his burial. Jesus hadn't just taken her fever; he took on her *death*.

Summary: Exorcisms and Healings

8.16. 'That evening they brought to him many demoniacs, and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick' (8.16). It was 'evening', in Jewish practice the beginning of a new day, and newness will be important in the closing part of the material on discipleship (9.17) that surrounds the central episodes.

Matthew emphasizes the demoniacs in this verse, although he mentions the sick as well. He tells us specifically that Jesus casts out the demons 'by word' or 'with [only] a word' (the Greek can be read either way). This will turn up in an interesting way below.

OT Citation:

He Took Our Sicknesses and Bore Our Diseases

8.17. The Septuagint of Isa 53.4 has, 'This one bears our sins and suffers pain for us'— but Matthew quotes the

Hebrew text, thereby retaining an ambiguity that we have to respect as well. 'He took our weaknesses and bore our diseases' can mean that Jesus simply took *away* weaknesses and diseases from the sick (without taking them upon himself). On the other hand, it can also mean that Jesus took *on* our infirmities and diseases. Obviously, by touching the leper he did not contract leprosy. But he shared with the leper what is, for Matthew, the fundamental characteristic of his disease, namely, uncleanness.

We have difficulty understanding this because disease, for us, is an infection by some kind of pathogen, a genetic defect, or some such. But for Matthew, a disease like leprosy is a form of uncleanness (ritual or moral), or a result or symptom of sin (cf 9.2-8, where Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins before telling him to walk), or an affliction by an unclean spirit. So Matthew is saying here in 8.17 that Jesus takes upon himself the fundamental characteristic of our weaknesses and diseases, namely, our uncleanness. He becomes unclean himself. It's not that he has no 'ability' to do otherwise, or even that contracting the man's uncleanness is an unfortunate side-effect of healing him. Jesus can heal and cast out demons 'by a word'. But *his taking on our condition is what our healing consists of*— precisely as we saw in the case of the leper, in the way he subordinated himself to the centurion's understanding of subordination, and in his death.

Center: Following Jesus, with Three Acts of Authority

The three central episodes of this series on Jesus' authority (8.24-27; 8.28-9.1; 9.2-8) are enveloped on either side by material about 'following' him, that is, on discipleship (8.18-23 and 9.9-17). Both the opening and closing sets of material on discipleship have the same structure, although the closing set is about twice as long. Interestingly, though, the section is equally divided by what happens after Jesus' command to go to the 'other side' (8.18-9.1), and what happens after he returns (9.1-17).⁴

Following Jesus to the Other Side

8.18. The discipleship envelope (8.18-23 and 9.9-17) opens as Jesus, 'seeing a crowd around him, gave orders to go over to the other side' (8.18). As teacher and 'Lord' (7.21-22; 8.2,6,8), Jesus has authority and can give orders

(*ekéleusen, ἐκέλευσεν*) to his disciples, although he does not lord it over them (20.25).

We might think that he 'gave orders to go to the other side' when he 'saw the crowds around him' (8.18) so that he could escape the crowds, as Mark has it (Mk 3.9). But nothing in Matthew suggests any such motive. On the other hand, Matthew *has* told us that Jesus' 'fame spread throughout all Syria' and that 'great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan' (4.24-25); and in very similar words, Matthew tells us at the end of this whole section, 'seeing the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (9.36; cf also 14.14; 15.30). Jesus has also said that he 'wanted' to cleanse the leper (8.3); he also said emphatically to the centurion, 'I [myself] will come and heal him' (8.7); and he had no more than to see Peter's mother-in-law lying ill, before he touched her and healed her (8.14-15). Everything in Matthew suggests that Jesus' motive for going to the other side was one of compassion. There is something he 'wants' to do on the 'other side', for which he took the crowds to be a signal.

But to whom does he 'give orders'? Again, if we've read Mk 4.35 and Luke 8.22, we might assume that he's commanding his disciples, but Matthew doesn't actually say this. In fact, Jesus commands no one in particular at this point, and the disciples who come to him in the next verses (8.19-20, 21-22) look like volunteers.

But they must know what following him entails. Thus now two would-be disciples want to follow Jesus on their own terms but are corrected by him. He doesn't reject them, but he corrects them by pointing to the conditions of his own life that disciples must accept if they would follow him.

8.19-20. A scribe approaches Jesus calls him 'teacher'. That can only mean that he himself is or would be a disciple. As a scribe, he would be familiar with rabbis and their way of teaching. Thus 'wherever' Jesus would establish his 'school' (as rabbis did), he hopes to be a disciple. But Jesus is not just another 'teacher' or rabbi; he is the 'Son of Man', and following him means sharing his condition. As he will make clear in 9.10-17, he does not do what the other rabbis do. Like him, the disciples will have 'nowhere to lay [their] head[s]', that is, no lair, no nest, no home. They will be without security in this world.

Since this is the first time Matthew uses the title 'Son of Man' (and thus the first time it appears in the New Testament), we need to consider it at this point as undefined except for connotations from, e.g., Dn 7.13-14; Ezekiel *passim*, 1 Enoch 37-71, or from a similar Aramaic

⁴ Seventeen verses and seventeen verses (if the transitional 9.1 belongs to 'his own city'), or 301 words and 314 words (if 9.1 belongs to the 'other side'), respectively.

phrase that simply designates (the speaker as) a typical human being— ‘Every son of man has to work every day, including me!’ But all we really know at this point is that, for Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’ is someone who ‘has nowhere to lay his head’— in contrast to a ‘teacher’, who may live in Jamnia, or Jerusalem, or Joppa amid his ‘school’ of disciples.

8.21-22. A second person, described as ‘another of the disciples’, addresses Jesus. That he is ‘another’ disciple confirms that the first one was a disciple too. But again his status is ambiguous. He acknowledges Jesus’ authority— even calls him ‘Lord’— and asks *permission* to ‘first go and bury my father’. But he is mistaken in thinking that Jesus will give him permission to go and bury his father— or perhaps even wait for him— before going to the other side. Following Jesus, the Son of man, entails not only accepting a homelessness like his, but even giving up the security and social status that derive from family relationships— even to the point of abandoning the most sacred duty of burying one’s own father. In 7.8-11 (and 6.8, 25-32), a ‘father’ is a provider of good things for his children, and a proper relationship to one’s father is a guarantee of those good things. Moreover, social standing comes largely from family. But following Jesus, the Son of man means giving up one’s relationship to father and family, the sources of security and social standing.

It’s not clear whether the disciple’s father is already dead or on his deathbed or even whether he’s just ‘getting up there in years’. But as far as the new life of heaven’s regime is concerned, not only is he already dead, but those who are concerned about burying him are dead themselves. Neither a dead father nor a dead family can provide security or guarantee status. Those who bury the dead ironically seek security with the dead, and thus are as good as dead themselves.

8.23. The material on discipleship opened with Jesus ordering a journey to the other side; now, ‘when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him’ (8.23)— the very activity that the two would-be disciples wanted to undertake (8.19-20, 21-22).

Where Mark tells us, in the parallel story, that ‘leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat’ (Mk 4.36), Matthew tells us that Jesus ‘got into the boat’ and ‘his disciples followed him’ (8.23). We understand that they have accepted the conditions that he’s laid down (8.19-22). So if we wanted a definition of discipleship from the Gospel up to this point, it would be that a disciple is one who listens to Jesus, the Son of Man, accepts to be homeless with him to the point of making Jesus more important than the security and status of family

and kin, and readily follows him wherever he goes, even to the ‘other side’.

After giving command, Jesus did not immediately begin the journey to the other side; the disciples needed to see what following him entailed (8.19-22). But now they’re actually going with him to the ‘other side’ (8.18). The journey will include the stilling of a storm (8.23-27), an encounter with fierce demons in Gentile territory (8.28-33), and rejection (8.34). At that point Jesus (and presumably the disciples) will cross back over and return to his own city (9.1). There he will show his authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic (9.2-8).

After these acts of authority over nature, demons, and sin, Matthew will close the envelope on following Jesus by narrating the call of Matthew (i.e. presumably himself) (9.9) and subsequent controversies (9.10-13).

As Matthew’s audience, we don’t yet know where that ‘other side’ is. We know that it will not offer a place to call home, or the comfort, security, and status of family, tribe, or nation. At this point we know only that the disciples are following Jesus, the Son of Man to the ‘other side’ (8.20).

Three Acts of Authority

The leper, the centurion, and Peter’s mother-in-law all perceived Jesus’ power. The leper raised the question of whether he *wanted* to exercise it; the centurion, of the *authority* by which he does so; and the mother-in-law showed a disciple’s *response* to his healing. The central section (8.18–9.17) now sets forth the *scope* of Jesus’ power and authority.

Enveloped between the opening (8.18-23) and closing (9.9-17) material on discipleship, the central stories— the stilling of the storm (8.24-27), the destruction of demons in Gentile territory (8.28-34), and the healing/forgiving of the paralytic (9.2-8)— describe three quite different situations.

In the first, Jesus the Son of Man demonstrates his power over the forces of nature, but the disciples are not sure what ‘what kind of person he is’, that is, what his ability to show such power says about him (8.27).

In the second, Jesus, who has called himself the Son of Man (8.20), shows his power over demons, who recognize him as the Son of God who defeated the devil (8.28; cf 3.17; 4.3,6), and who in due time will come with authority to ‘torture’ and to destroy them. But the Gentile Gadarenes only ask him to leave their territory, apparently because they fear and do not trust him.

In the third, Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, shows by healing a paralytic that he has the authority declare

God's forgiveness, and even to forgive sins himself (9.2,6).

Stilling a Storm

8.24. Jesus has gotten into the boat and the disciples have 'followed' him (8.23). He has promised them insecurity, so it's not surprising that the disciples who followed Jesus into the boat now find themselves in danger: 'And behold, there arose a great [storm] on the sea, so that the boat was being covered by the waves' (8.24).

Matthew does not actually say 'storm'. He has a *seismos megas* (σεισμός μέγας); literally, a 'great earthquake'. We can of course think of a tsunami of some kind, but in the Scriptures, these words evoke the cataclysms at the end of the age (cf 24.7), and so it is for Matthew, who speaks of 'earthquakes' four times— here and in 24.7, Jesus' discourse on the end; and also at his crucifixion (27.54) and resurrection (28.2)— each time not just a 'nature miracle' but a situation of final and cosmic significance.

Matthew omits a small detail of Mark's version of this story: in Mk 4.38, 'Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a *proskaphalion* (προσκεφάλιον)', usually translated 'pillow' but literally, a 'thing to lay your head on'. But Jesus has just said that 'the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head' (8.20), so Matthew mentions only that 'he was asleep' (8.24)! Matthew is a very careful writer!

8.25-26. The quake is severe, and the boat is being swamped. The disciples therefore rouse Jesus and cry, 'Save, Lord; we're about to lose it!' (8.25). The request seems quite appropriate. Like the leper (8.2) and the centurion (8.5-6), they come to Jesus (8.25), acknowledge his authority by calling him 'Lord', and plead for help in a situation far beyond their control.

Jesus' response then comes as a surprise!— 'Why are you being such cowards (*deiloi*, δειλοί)?' he asks!— adding, 'O you of little faith (*oligopistoi*, ὀλιγόπιστοι)?' (8.26).

The disciples have aroused him precisely because they believe he actually *can* save them. Should they not have done so? Should they have just relaxed and enjoyed the weather, while 'the boat was being swamped by the waves'? (8.24). Once again, 'belief' does not seem to be the point, even though everybody takes Jesus as saying, 'Oh you— why didn't you *believe* hard enough?— with the usual pietistic implication that if we 'just *believe* hard enough', our 'boats' will not be 'swamped' by the 'storms of life' either. Even though lots of Christians have said that, for example in Rwanda in 1994, 'believing hard enough' is not what Matthew is talking about. As we said above, in the Bible, *emunah* or *pistis* is *faithfulness* or *loyalty*, not 'faith'.

In fact the disciples' cowardice and 'little-faithfulness' (whatever that means) are more important to Jesus in Matthew's story than the storm itself, dangerous as it is. In contrast with Mk 4.35-41 and Lk 8.22-25, Jesus doesn't even calm the storm right away; he first deals with his disciples and their attitude.

8.26b. After reproving the disciples, Jesus does as they've requested. 'Having risen (*egertheis*, ἐγερθεῖς), he rebuked the winds and the sea' (8.26). Those who know Ps 29.3-4; 65.7; 89.9; 93.4; 107.29; or 124.1-5 will recognize that Jesus is doing something that God does, and specifically what he did for Israel at the Red Sea. But Matthew does not quote or allude directly to any of these verses or use their language. He does, however, say that Jesus calmed the earthquake once he had 'arisen'.

Jesus, the Son of Man, who has nowhere to lay his head and who demands that those who follow him count even the most sacred of family ties as of no importance, has commanded his Jewish disciples to go with him to the other side. He summons them to a journey with him that (for all they know) will bring them into contact not only with unclean people, unclean houses, and unclean food, but even with fierce demons. As they journey with him, they face a storm of eschatological proportions. Not surprisingly, they fear for their lives. But Jesus calls them 'cowards' and men of 'little faithfulness'. Their concern for themselves is apparently at odds with their mission to go to the 'other side' with Jesus.

8.27. After Jesus stills the storm, the 'men'— Matthew does not call them 'disciples' here, but just 'men' (*anthrōpoi*, ἄνθρωποι)— 'marveled (*ethaumasán*, ἐθαύμασαν), saying, "What kind of [person] is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"' (8.27).

They're safe now, but they're confused. What kind of guy is Jesus? He's got power, but what kind of power does he have? Is he a witch or a prophet? Does he work Beelzebub or for God? Where does he get his *authority*?

Destruction of Demons in Gentile Territory

The central narrative of this central section, and hence *the central narrative of chapters 8-9 as a whole*, opens as Jesus and his disciples arrive on the 'other side', which Matthew only now informs us belongs to the Gadarenes. Gadara was a city some kilometers away from the southeastern shore of the Lake of Galilee, but Matthew doesn't say that they went to Gadara itself, but only to the 'territory of the Gadarenes' (8.28). The people who lived there were Gentiles, a fact we will learn (if we don't already know) by the fact that some men associated with the city are keeping a herd of swine nearby. Scholars tell us we

should not exaggerate the separation of Jews and Gentiles during this period, but we will more readily understand the townspeople's hostile reaction at the end of the story if we keep in mind that they differ from Jesus and his disciples in religious practice and worldview (8.34, 9.1), just as the centurion did. As far as Matthew's larger narrative goes, the question, 'What kind of man is this' (8.27) is on the table, and while the disciples, who are Jews, have the advantage of belonging to Israel's story and of learning about Jesus from within that story, are themselves confused, people of other nations like the Gadarenes would be no more prepared to understand Jesus than the centurion was.

Unlike the parallel versions in Mk 5.1-10 and Lk 8.26-39, Matthew doesn't say that the two demoniacs were naked, or that they couldn't be constrained even with iron chains. Matthew's story of the Gadarene demoniacs is not even about a 'healing'. He doesn't mention what happened to his two demoniacs— he doesn't even say that they were 'sitting clothed and in their right mind' (Mk 5.15). I've never read anything satisfactory about why there are two, instead of one, as in Mark and Luke, though this is not the only place Matthew doubles the number of people, compared to his sources. Gone also are Mark's many allusions to Roman imperial power—the 'legion' and most of the other military terminology. Matthew presents us with two demon-possessed men, and all we know about them is that they are in Gentile territory, that they come from the tombs to 'confront' Jesus, that they are very fierce, and that they recognize Jesus as the one who will come with authority to torture and destroy them. And they think the time for their destruction has not yet come.

8.28-29. The drama of the story lies in what Matthew announces at the very start: The demoniacs are so fierce that 'no one could *come* (*par-erchomai*, παρ-έρχομαι) that way' (8.28) *and yet* they acknowledge that Jesus has 'come (*erchomai*, έρχομαι) to torture' them (8.29).

The Gadarenes, people of the nations, have had to accommodate themselves to the fierce power of these two demoniac men. They've lost control over part of their territory; their movements are limited by the power of the demons (who by the way don't seem to mind that unclean pigs are grazing 'afar off' but close enough to see, 8.30). But the demons who stop the Gadarenes from passing by have no way of stopping Jesus, even though they come from the tombs to 'confront' him (*hypēntēsan autōi*, υπήντησαν αὐτῷ— not just 'meet him'; Matthew retains Mark's military term here).

The entire dialogue between Jesus and the demons underscores his authority over them. This becomes all the

more clear when we compare Matthew's version of what they say with Mark's. Mark has, 'What to me and to you, Jesus, Son of God the Most High? I put you on oath— by God, do not torment me!' (Mk 5.7). Matthew doesn't even leave them this speech. They say only, 'What business do you have with us, O Son of God? Have you come before the time to torture us?' (8.28). They do not know that a 'great earthquake' (8.24) has already signaled the arrival of 'the time'.

This is the fifth time that someone Jesus is referred to in one way or another as God's 'Son'. The first was when Israel's new king (cf 2.2) recapitulated Israel's exodus: 'Out of Egypt have I brought my son' (2.15).

The second was when the Voice from the sky proclaimed, 'This is my beloved son' (3.17). In Mark and Luke, the Voice addresses Jesus alone— '*You are my beloved son*' (Mk 1.11 and Lk 3.22). Nobody else hears this. But in Matthew, somebody does hear it. The Voice proclaims, '*This is my beloved son*' (3.17). The recipients of this royal proclamation can't be John or the crowds, because John will later have to send messengers to ask, 'Are you the one?' (11.13). But very quickly we find that the spiritual powers have heard, because immediately we hear Satan saying, 'If you are the Son of God...'— and he says it twice (4.3,6). The devil challenged Jesus precisely as the Son of God, but Jesus showed by his obedience to God that he had authority to say, 'Begone, Satan!'— and the devil obeyed him (4.10-11). Thus the demons address Jesus for the fifth time as 'God's son', and they fear that his appearance in Gentile territory means that he has 'come here to torture us before the time' (8.29). Not only did the Voice proclaim Jesus' royal authority to *them*; but also, when their general is forced to obey Jesus, the soldiers must fall in line.

Like 'earthquake' (8.24), 'torture' (*basanizo*, βασανίζω) is an eschatological word (see Rv 9.5; 11.10; 12.2; 14.10; 20.10). The centurion said his boy was 'terribly tortured' (*deinos basanizomenos*, δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος, 8.6), which was one of the reasons we read the episode as an exorcism, and not just a healing. When God acts to re-establish everything as it should be, though, the demons who torture his creation will themselves be tortured and destroyed.

For us, 'Son of God' means that Jesus is one of the Holy Trinity. Jesus is that, but the Council of Nicea was still a long way off in Matthew's day, and he is thinking more in Old Testament terms. 'Son of God' in the Old Testament means either Israel itself or, more particularly, Israel's representative and king. In line especially with the latter usage, the 'Son of God' is an eschatological figure who will be given authority to 'come' to 'torture' the

demons and destroy their regime at the appointed 'time' (8.29). But from their point of view, Jesus should not torture them yet, because they think it is still 'before the time'.

However, they're wrong. *The time has come*, and Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, Israel's true king, has come with authority, power, and desire ('want'), to torture and destroy the demons, just as they have been torturing and destroying people. And he has come, not just to Israel, but precisely to 'Galilee of the nations' (4.15), showing that he has not come to destroy the nations but to rescue them *with* Israel from the demons. 'Seeing the crowd' (8.18), he has come to throw the demons out of the nations' territory.

But there is still room for the people in the story to question the nature of Jesus' authority. The issue first raised by the centurion still persists— 'I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me' (8.9). Because they don't have the whole picture, there will still be room even at the end of ch 9 for the Pharisees to say, 'By the prince of demons he casts out the demons' (9.34). But there is no room for the demons to think that Jesus is working for Beelzebul. And hearing them, the disciples might guess the score somewhat, but they don't see the whole picture. They haven't seen the Beelzebul defeated (12.25-29), but here on the 'other side', they are about to find out that Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, has great authority even over the fiercest of demons, even on Gentile territory.

8.30-32. Acknowledging Jesus as the 'Son of God', the demons 'beg' him to send them into a herd of pigs that are grazing afar off (8.30-31). In granting their request, Jesus addresses them directly.

Jesus casts demons out of people on six occasions in Matthew's gospel,⁵ but this is the only time that Matthew shows him speaking to them. A few verses earlier, Mat-

thew told us that 'he cast out the spirits with a word' (8.16). So, on this one occasion that Jesus addresses any demons directly, he uses exactly one word: 'Go' (8.32). No histrionics; just 'Go'. As the centurion put it, 'I say to this one, "Go," and he goes' (8.9).

'And the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and [they] perished in the waters' (8.32). 'Herd' is singular, but 'they perished' is plural. 'The herd rushed... and *they* perished' suggests that the demons perished as well, not just the herd of pigs.

But those on the ground can still ask, What kind of man is this? He's got power, but what's his authority?

8.33-34. Matthew says nothing about what happened to the demoniacs. He simply mentions that the swineherds fled to town and told the Gadarenes what happened (8.33). The townspeople *come* out (*ex-erchomai*, ἐξ-έρχομαι) to meet him (8.34), as they would any great authority. But they ask him to leave their country (8.34). Given their polytheistic worldview (discussed above in the context of the centurion's refusal), this is understandable. Will the nations ever be able to accept him or his disciples? What will it take?

9.1. In the concluding verse, Jesus, the Son of God / Son of Man who has shown his authority over sickness, nature, and demons, submits to the wish of the Gadarenes by getting into a boat and crossing back over to his own city. As he will say in 15.24, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. He will enjoin the journey to the Gentiles upon the disciples *after* his resurrection. But even then, some will 'doubt' (28.17). He will confirm to them at that time that 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given' to him (28.18-20). But he is the 'Son of Man' who 'came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (20.28). And until they get that, they will not understand Jesus' authority. Jesus has to teach them much more about it.

Healing/Forgiving a Paralytic

This story is Matthew's version of the paralytic let down through the roof in Mk 2.1-12, but Matthew omits the whole project of the roof and focuses only on the healing itself.

9.2. Having left the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus— Matthew hasn't mentioned the disciples since they asked, 'What kind of man is this?' (8.27)— arrives in 'his own city' (9.1), and some suppliants bring a paralytic to him for healing. As with the centurion, he responds to the faithfulness of the caregivers— 'when Jesus saw their faithfulness...' (9.2), which we have learned is their faithfulness to the paralytic— their concern for the weak and needy— not just their 'belief' in his power.

⁵ Of the four exorcism stories in Mark, Matthew omits Mk 1.21-28, the demoniac in the synagogue, which is the first of Mark's initial series of healings, and adds three (two, if you don't count the centurion's boy).

The three taken from Mark, and their parallels in Mark and Luke, are

8.28-34	Mk 5.1-20	Lk 8.26-39
17.14-21	Mk 9.14-29	Lk 9.37-43a
15.21-28	Mk 7.24-30	

Those that Matthew adds are

8.5-13	Lk 7.1-10
9.32-34	
12.22-23	Lk 11.14

I include the centurion's boy because of the association of paralysis and 'torture' (*basanizō*, βασανίζω) with demons and because of the chiasmatic relationship to 9.32-34, as I discuss at both episodes.

See Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (WUNT ser. 2, vol. 185): Mohr-Siebeck / Coronet, 2004).

In Mark's parallel, Jesus responds to the caregivers' faithfulness by saying to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven' (Mk 2.5; Lk 5.20). He says the same in Matthew, but Matthew inserts, 'Take courage' or 'have confidence'— that is, 'be firm or resolute in the face of adversity' (BDAG). He will use this expression twice more— once in the very next healing story, when he says to the woman with the hemorrhage, 'Courage, daughter; your trust has made you well' (9.22), and later when the disciples are terrified at seeing him walking on the water while their boat is being beaten by the waves: 'Take heart; I AM. Do not be afraid' (14.24-27). Here, after extending this encouragement, he declares, 'your sins are forgiven' (9.2).

As usual in Scripture, the passive voice bespeaks divine action. In saying 'your sins *are forgiven*' (9.2), Jesus is saying, 'God has forgiven your sins'. The paralytic should take courage *because* God has forgiven his sins. The Lord's Prayer asks for God's forgiveness of debts and asserts the necessary condition that we forgive our debtors too (6.12,14). Human beings can forgive debts, but they can't forgive sins. But here, Jesus refers to 'sins', because the action is purely from God's side.

Unlike the centurion's boy, Matthew does not describe this paralytic as 'tortured'. The present story is not about Jesus' authority over demons, but about his authority regarding sin.

9.3-6. 'Some of the scribes said to themselves, "This one blasphemes"' (9.3). That is, he insults God by pretending to speak for him. What authority does a man have to declare that God has forgiven sins?

We might well sympathize with the scribes. They've seen or heard of Jesus doing many acts of power, but they still don't know 'what kind of man this is' (8.27). So the question they ask in Mark— 'Who can forgive sins, but the One God?' (Mk 2.7)— is the right one. Matthew, however, does not specify their rationale. He simply focuses on the fact that they 'say to themselves, "This one blasphemes"' (9.3). Their inner dialogue is only judgment and condemnation (cf 7.1-5).

They say 'to themselves' (9.3), but Jesus 'knows their thoughts' anyway (9.4). They should not be so hasty. Jesus really *has* done many acts of power and shown his authority in many ways. If in fact they could take a wait-and-see attitude, they might learn something about 'what kind of man he is' and about the authority with which he does things. Jesus is not unsympathetic with their doubt, and he addresses it: 'For which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Arise and walk"?' (9.4). If it's just a question of loose talk, then 'to say, "Your sins are forgiven"' would indeed *be* arrogant and

presumptuous— but then he could do nothing about healing the paralytic either, and they'd be right to condemn him. So the test is right before them! Everything we know up to this point tells us that Jesus can and wants to heal him. But Jesus himself has upped the ante. Before healing, he has declared God's forgiveness! They're right to want proof! And if he's blaspheming, God won't honor him. But if he speaks the truth, he will also be able to heal the paralytic. So why the evil thoughts?

They think they know Jesus, but they don't. Yet Jesus directs their attention to something they do know: 'Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Arise and walk"?' (9.5). And with this question, Matthew brings us to the climax of the three inner miracles of chs 8-9: 'But that you may know that the *Son of Man* has *authority* to forgive sins on earth' (9.6).

In saying this, he doesn't just up the ante; he bets the farm. He claims not only the authority to declare that God has forgiven someone's sins, but to forgive them *himself!*

Not surprisingly, Matthew switches to the dramatic present tense at this point— 'He says to the paralytic, "Arise... and go home."' (9.6).

And 'having arisen, he went home' (9.7).

9.8. 'When the crowds saw it, they were afraid,⁶ and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men' (9.8).

Jesus has shown that he has authority to declare the forgiveness of sins— indeed, to forgive them himself! Declaring sins forgiven is something that only the high priest can do, on the Day of Atonement— and then only after sacrifice. But he doesn't forgive sins; he merely obtains it and declares it. The crowds' fear and praise are *liturgical* responses to the *theophany* that has just taken place far away from the Temple, in the little town of Capernaum. But what does Jesus' declaration mean for the priests, the Temple, for Israel, for the world?

Jesus has mightily provoked the scribes. He could have just healed the paralytic and said nothing about forgiveness. But he is intent on teaching 'what sort of man' the Son of Man is. His authority is not just that of a healer. He wants them to know that 'the Son of Man has authority on earth' (9.6), to do what God alone can do. This is a God-given authority, as the crowds acknowledge (9.8). After the resurrection, he will claim that God has given him 'all authority both *in heaven* and on earth' (28.18). But he has not been exalted yet, so for

⁶ KJV wrongly has 'marvelled'.

now, he asserts his authority only 'on earth', that is, in human affairs; or (another translation) 'in the land', that is in Israel; or 'on the ground'. For this is where he has come to proclaim that God's regime has come, and that his will is to be done 'as in heaven' (6.9-13).

The crowds 'glorify God' for 'giving *such* authority 'to men' (9.8). All along, we have been reading about the authority of Jesus, the Son of man. But Matthew points now to the *character* of his authority— '*such* (*toiautēn, τοιαύτην*)'— that is, 'this kind'— 'of authority'. He is interested in the authority itself— what it accomplishes and how it accomplishes it. As for giving it to 'men', Jesus has already taught to forgive as a condition for being forgiven (6.12-14). God has given such authority not only to Jesus, the Son of man, but also to those who follow him, who do not take refuge in the lairs and nests of family and tribal loyalty, and in religious learning, but who have learned from him to say, 'forgive us... as we forgive' (6.12).

In this first clear demonstration of divine authority, Jesus displays divine authority as authority not only to judge but to *forgive*. He does not seek to condemn but to heal. Even to the scribes he has spoken gently, seeking their accord— 'Which is easier to say?' (9.5). But they can close their hearts.

This is the authority, according to Matthew, that the crowds recognize and express.

Call of a Sinner, and Controversies

Matthew has shown that Jesus' authority includes the ability to forgive sins outside the Temple framework. After this climax, he closes the envelope of material on discipleship that he opened in 8.18-23.

9.9. Matthew is said by tradition to be the writer of this book, and we have regarded him as such, although the book itself nowhere says that Matthew is its writer. For Matthew, the writer, 'Matthew' is only a man 'sitting at the toll booth',⁷ to whom Jesus says, 'Follow me' (9.9). He calls Matthew just as he called Peter, Andrew, James, and John earlier, and Matthew 'follows him' just as they did (4.18-22).

After all the healings of the first part of this section (8.1-16), the three miracles of the central part (8.24-9.8) demonstrated Jesus' power and authority in the three realms of existence (the natural, the demonic, and the human). Even though Matthew the toll-collector wasn't present at all of these, we aren't as surprised as we might have

been with the first disciples, that at just two words from Jesus ('Follow me'), Matthew follows him (9.9). But Matthew's call leads immediately to two controversies, in response to each of which, Jesus answers with two sayings (9.10-13; 9.14-17). Thus the structure is the same as that of the opening part of the envelope on following Jesus (8.18-23).

9.10-11. Matthew immediately tells us that 'Jesus was reclining at table in the house' (9.10).

Jesus has just called Matthew the toll-collector to follow him, and is having dinner, and 'many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples' (9.10). Because of the parallel construction, 'tax collectors and sinners', we now recognize the call of Matthew as the call of a sinner.

The text doesn't specify whether the house is Matthew's or Jesus' own. Yet we can assume that 'the house' is the one where Jesus is staying, not only because Matthew is now following him— he is not following Matthew— but also because the Pharisees who complain (9.11) when 'sinners and tax collectors come', would not be reclining at table with Matthew, let alone with a large group of his associates.

In fact Rabbinic traditions state that, 'if tax gatherers entered a house, (all that is within it) becomes unclean' (*Mishnah, Tohoroth* 7.6). For a Jew, every meal should be like participating in a sacrificial offering, that is, sharing a table with God. That is why blessings and washing and purity were so important (cf 15.1ff).

'Purity' in the ancient world was never about hygiene, it was always about the integrity of the community. To eat with sinners was to introduce not just their food, but their *ways* into the life of Israel, which ought to be clean before God. But Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God, who has authority to forgive sins, is at table with 'many tax collectors and sinners' (9.10). But there are Pharisees there too, and now these people who are impure— that is, whose lives and practices disqualify them from eating the sacrificial offerings— are eating with Jesus and with *them!*

So the Pharisees are not asking an idle question about why Jesus eats with people who, in effect, haven't 'properly prepared themselves for communion' and whom they tend to judge as morally corrupt; they are demanding an answer as to why he seems unconcerned about the integrity of Israel as such, and in fact would dare to allow these people to defile *himself and them*. As the host of the meal, Jesus has the authority to invite or disinvite whom he will. So the question is, how, and on whose behalf, then, will Jesus exercise his authority? And since 'Jesus *and his disciples*' are reclining (9.10), this is

⁷ The Greek of this passage is fun to say out loud: *eiden ánthrōpon kathēmenon epí tò telōnion, Maththaíon legόμενον* (εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, Μαθθαῖον λεγόμενον...).

also a question of what kind of community *they* will form— that is, what kind of community the church will be. This in fact is very much the Judaizing controversy that Paul writes about in Galatians (see also Ac 15 etc)— whether the church needs to observe the laws that were aimed at separating Israel from Gentiles and sinners.

Matthew answers this question by way of two controversies which arise out of Jesus' association with sinners.

Jesus has the authority to forgive sins and to call tax collectors and sinners with a word. But apparently it's not enough just call sinners; he invites them to recline with him at table in his own house in a relaxed and friendly manner, where he eats and talks with them and, if we may generalize from what he said to the paralytic, even addresses them in terms of endearment (9.2,10). He also makes himself impure by doing so.

So the Pharisees complain, not directly to Jesus but to his disciples— 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' (9.11). What does he think he's doing??

9.12-13. The Pharisees have addressed the disciples, but Jesus himself responds to them. He first points out that 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (9.12). In saying this, he compares himself to a physician, whose work is to heal. Taking upon himself their sinfulness/uncleanness (8.3,17), he calls sinners (9.9,13), discerns their faithfulness, encourages them, and declares their sins forgiven (9.2).

Then, just as he did with the scribes (9.4), he points to something that the Pharisees already know, or should: they need to learn what God meant when he said, 'I want mercy, and not sacrifice' (9.13a; quoting Ho 6.6). 'Mercy', and not participating in sacrifices in a state of purity, is what God 'wants'. And for this reason, Jesus, who 'wants' (8.3) what God 'wants' to 'be done as in the sky, even on the ground' (6.10), 'did not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (9.13b). That is why he 'wanted' to heal the leper (8.2-3), even if by touching him he made himself unclean.

In exercising his authority, he is fulfilling not just God's 'will', but God's 'desire' (6.10, 9.13), for the word means both. Jesus, the Son of God, came to torture and destroy the demons (8.29), but as Son of Man, he did not come to torture and destroy sinners. Rather, he came to 'call' them (9.13).

We should not take his attitude for granted. The Book of Enoch, more or less contemporary with Christ, starts out, 'The words of blessing, according to which Enoch the righteous blessed the chosen who, on the day of tribulation, are to *destroy all the godless*' (1En 1.1). The Phari-

sees are expecting him to take something more like that approach with 'sinners and tax-collectors'.

But their understanding is faulty. He has come with God's authority as a physician (9.12), to heal sinners just like he's been healing 'healing every disease and every weakness' (9.35). He 'wants' the unclean to come to him (8.2-3; cf 11.28). Righteous people partake of sacrifices in a state of purity. But Jesus has come to show mercy, not to partake of sacrifices, for that is what God 'wants' (9.13). Jesus therefore wants to be associated with sinners, he wants their contact, even if it makes him unclean— even *because* it makes him unclean— for he has come to take their diseases and infirmities upon himself (8.17), and to heal them.

To understand Jesus' authority, we have to understand *why* he came. As Son of God and Son of Man, he could 'destroy the godless' and remove all evil and impurity. But he *wants* (8.4-5) to transgress the distinction between pure and impure and to make God present precisely to the impure, to those on the other side, to Gentiles, tax-collectors, and sinners, to those troubled by demons and to those who have every kind of disease. The *newness* of this manifestation of divine authority becomes the main point of the controversy that follows.

9.14-15. The sudden appearance of John's disciples makes us remember John and his ministry (3.1-17). In fact, the points that Matthew will make in 9.14-17 are not unrelated to those he made when he spoke of John.

John's disciples address Jesus directly. As disciples of John, they understand that sinners must be brought back into Israel. But they don't understand what Jesus is teaching— 'we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast' (9.14). For fasting as an expression of mourning— in particular of mourning over Israel's long exile and occupation by pagan powers, see our discussion at 6.16ff. John taught that they should do as the Pharisees and mourn over Israel's fallen state, and pray for her renewal. Shouldn't Jesus' disciples be doing as they and the Pharisees do?

Jesus compares his disciples to wedding guests (9.15). Fasting is not bad (cf 4.2; 6.16-18), and indeed 'the days will come' when the disciples will fast (9.15c), but John's disciples' and the Pharisees' *timing* is off (cf 3.7-8 and 3.14-15). A wedding feast with the bridegroom present is not the time for mourning. John's disciples and the Pharisees do not recognize that God's regime has arrived, that they're in the presence of Israel's [divine!] bridegroom, and that the wedding feast is in progress. They're mourning when they should be rejoicing. But Jesus' disciples are with the bridegroom, even if they're still won-

dering ‘what sort of man this is’ (8.27). So they’re not mourning.

This point is directly related to the other eschatological themes of 8.17–9.13. While Jesus, the Son of God, brings condemnation and torment to demons, as Son of Man he comes to men as Israel’s bridegroom, bringing forgiveness (9.2,6), mercy (9.13) and joy instead of mourning.

Ominously, though, he contrasts the present time of the wedding feast with a time when the bridegroom will be taken away (9.15).

9.16-17. Recognizing what is fitting for the present time also involves recognizing that the present includes something ‘new’ by contrast with what is ‘old.’ The call of sinners (9.13) tears apart and bursts the old way of being Israel, just as a patch of new cloth would shrink and tear an old garment (9.16), or like new wine would cause old wineskins to burst (9.17). God’s mercy tears apart and breaks not only the old teachings on purity but the form of Israel itself.

Disciples are those who follow Jesus, the Son of Man who is God’s Son, even though he has nowhere to lay his head. Like Peter’s mother, they respond to his invitation and healing by serving him. Like him, they forgive and even associate with sinners. They do not discriminate between Jews and Gentiles, pure and impure, righteous and sinners. They offer mercy to the world, more than sacrifices to God.

The Final Group of Stories

Raising a Dead Girl and Healing a Woman

This twofold story is closely tied to the preceding dinner party by its opening phrase. ‘While he was thus speaking to them, behold, a ruler came...’ (9.18). We therefore expect Matthew to develop the points that he’s just made. And indeed, it turns out that he will show why mourning is inappropriate (‘let the dead bury their dead’, 8.21-22; ‘can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?’, 9.14-17) by actually giving life to the dead.

This story is similar to the healing of the centurion’s boy (8.5-13). Someone with authority comes to Jesus— a ‘ruler’ this time, although Matthew doesn’t name him (‘Jairus’, Mk 5.22; Lk 8.41) and doesn’t connect him with a synagogue, as Mark and Luke do. Both by his attitude (kneeling) and by his words, he expresses both his need and his confidence in Jesus’ power (9.18)— if Jesus will come to his house and lay his hand on his daughter, who has just died, she will live (9.18). That the girl is already

dead is different from Mark’s and Luke’s account, where she’s dying, but not yet dead.

Interestingly, the Greek of 9.19— ‘Having risen, Jesus followed him, his disciples too’— almost repeats that of 8.23, ‘having gotten into the boat, his disciples followed him’.⁸ There, the disciples follow Jesus who has ordered a trip to the ‘other side’; here, in a strange reversal of the disciples’ action, Jesus ‘follows’ this ‘authority’ to his house (9.19, 23), accompanied by his disciples. Are they going again to the ‘other side’?

On the way, a woman with a hemorrhage comes and touches him. Her confidence in Jesus’ power is such that she thinks all she has to do is touch his garment, to be ‘made well’ (or: ‘saved’; *sōthēsomai*, σωθήσομαι, 9.21). This is the same verb as the girl’s father used. When she touches his garment, Jesus turns to her. He does not ask ‘Who touched my garments?’ as in Mk 5.30, so that the woman has to come forward and confess; nor is she healed the moment she touches him. For Matthew, Jesus first turns to her, sees her, and acknowledges her faithfulness. Hers was a deficient faithfulness, because she approached Jesus’ power as quasi-magical. But he encourages her by saying, ‘Take heart’, which we discussed above when he said this to the paralytic (9.2; 14.24-27). Then he says, using her word, ‘your faithfulness has made you well / saved you’. Only then, and ‘instantly’, was ‘the woman made well / saved’ (9.22). His power is not communicated by the fringe of his garment (9.20), but by Jesus’ will (9.22). Healing is not automatic, but only upon encountering him.

9.18-34

As in Mark, it’s important to the story that the woman touch Jesus before he arrives at the girl’s house. She is unclean because of her hemorrhage, and remains unclean by touching him. A rabbi ought not to deliberately make himself unclean by touching a corpse, though Jesus doesn’t seem to be concerned by such things up to this point. But she has made him unclean, so it doesn’t matter if he does. However, it’s one thing to become unclean by performing the healing; another to be unclean *before* performing it. Someone unclean shouldn’t be able to heal.

But once again, Jesus does something outside the purity system of the Temple. He arrives at the ruler’s house, sees the mourners with their plaintive instruments (9.23), and puts them out saying, ‘Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping’ (9.24). Of course they laugh at him. But for him, death is not death, it is sleep. And as he did

⁸ 9.19: ἐγερευθείς ὁ Ἰησοῦς
ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ
8.23 καὶ ἐμβάντι αὐτῷ εἰς τὸ πλοῖον
ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ

with Peter's mother-in-law (8.14-15), 'he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose' (9.25; cf 8.15). For us, the only thing new in this story is the magnitude of Jesus' authority. The girl is dead, but he has authority even over that, even when he's unclean.

After the miracle, people do of course recognize his power, and 'the report of this went through all that district' (9.26), but there is no hint that they recognize what his presence as bridegroom means.

Healing Two Blind Men

9.27. Two blind men are 'following' Jesus, just as disciples do (9.27; cf 4.18-22; 8.23; 9.9). Because they address Jesus with the title that Matthew gives in the first verse of his Gospel— 'Have mercy on us, *Son of David*' (9.27)— it seems they recognize Jesus' authority as Israel's true king. At last, even blind men properly acknowledge Jesus' authority!

9.28. Though the episode starts in public, Jesus interviews them and grants their request in private. They are following him; they go to where he is. So 'as he was entering the house, the blind men came to him' (9.28a). Jesus' response shows that their trust is about his *power* to heal them. 'Do you trust that I am able (*or*: that I *have the power*; the Greek means either) to do this?' (9.28). And they affirm: 'Yes, Lord' (9.28b).

9.29. 'Then he touched their eyes saying, "According to your faithfulness be it done to you (*kata tēn pistin hymōn, κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν*)"' (9.29). He touches their eyes, as he touched the leper (8.3), and speaks to them like he did to the centurion, 'As you have been faithful (*hōs episteusas, ὡς ἐπίστευσας*), let it be done to you' (8.13).

9.30. Also as in the case of the leper to whom Jesus said, 'See that you say nothing to anyone' (8.4), he commands the healed blind men, 'See that no one knows it' (9.30). But unlike his command to the leper, he speaks to these men 'indignantly' (*enebrimēthē, ἐνεβριμήθη*). This is more than just emphasis. It asserts not only authority, but displeasure. In 8.4, he only 'said' the leper was not to talk with anyone. Moreover, we have no reason to think the former leper didn't do as he said. Jesus wanted one result from the healing, and that was the witness that the offering would be. But there have been numerous miracles in the meanwhile, in which Jesus has not tried to prevent people from speaking about what happened. So, why should he utter this command now? What is it about the blind men that has made Jesus 'indignant'? It can't be that they have called him 'Son of David', for that is what Matthew called Jesus (1.1). But Jesus seems to know that they won't obey (9.31). They spread the

news— Jesus was *able* to heal them! He has extraordinary *power!*— but *they do not acknowledge his authority*, for they disobey him. Thus their report of his *power*, positive as it is, fails to represent his *authority* as it is.

Healing a Dumb Man

This second-last story (9.32-34) is the chiasmic reflection of the second story— that of the centurion and his boy (8.5-13)— of this portion of Matthew:

9.27-31

comment by centurion ('under authority')
amazement of Jesus ('from none in **Israel**')
healing of tortured paralytic

healing of dumb demoniac
amazement of crowd ('never in **Israel**')
comment by Pharisees ('prince of demons')

This story is reduced to a schematic minimum because its function is to complement the story that has already been told.

9.32-33. 'A dumb demoniac was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke' (9.32-33). Nothing is said about Jesus' interaction with the dumb man. Matthew himself doesn't even mention Jesus' name!

'The crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel"' (9.33). What the crowds said when they 'marveled' (*ethaumasān, ἐθαύμασαν*) is almost identical to what Jesus said when he 'marveled' (*ethaumasēn, ἐθαύμασεν*) at the centurion: 'with no one in Israel have I found such faith' (8.10).

9.34. This episode follows the order of the story of the centurion and his boy, only in reverse. Thus where the centurion expresses his notion of Jesus 'authority', the Pharisees here express theirs. They judge that 'he casts out demons by the prince of demons' (9.34). *They too think Jesus is a centurion of demons!*

Like the blind men, they can see only Jesus' power, but they do not see his authority. They can see that his authority is outside the Torah, even though he acts in accord with the Torah. Everyone must be under some authority, so if he acts outside the Torah, then he must be working under the prince of demons. Certainly, Jesus would have the power to come as a judge and to condemn and destroy the sinners that sick people and demoniacs are, as is demonstrated by his stilling of the storm and his destruction of demons. In so doing, he would remain ritually pure and fit to partake in sacrifices.

But Jesus has told the Pharisees that this is not what God 'wants' (9.13). By showing mercy, he makes what God 'wants' (6.10, 9.13) what he 'wants' (8.3), as in the forty days of his temptation (4.1-11). And by having no desire but God's will, and no will but God's, he 'comes' with God's authority to heal (8.7,14), to cast out demons (8.29), and to call sinners (9.13). He brings a *new* manifestation of 'God with us' (9.8,17; cf 1.23).

The centurion of 8.5-13 and the Pharisees of 9.32-34 have the same view of Jesus' authority. For now, that doesn't matter. Jesus can even work with people's misperceptions, as long as they are open to him. But while the centurion shows more 'faithfulness' to his boy than anyone in Israel, the Pharisees have closed their hearts and don't think that he should be casting out demons like he does. They are faithful only to the evil thoughts that they say within themselves (9.4).

Healing Disease and Proclaiming Heaven's Regime to a People Who Are Like Sheep Without a Shepherd

9.35. Like the first set of stories (8.1-17), the final one (9.18-36) ends with a general statement that 'Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the regime's good news and healing every disease and every affliction' (9.35). Coming at the end of this section (chs 8-9), this tells us that Jesus continued his ministry despite the opposition he faced, that he taught in the synagogues, that is, in accordance with the Torah and the Prophets, and that he continued to proclaim that God was at last fulfilling his long-awaited promise.

9.36. Like the summary at the end of the first group of stories (8.16-17), this one also ends with an allusion to a passage from Old Testament: 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, *because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*'.

This phrase is not just a bit of poetry. Matthew will cite Jesus' 'compassion' just before the feeding of the five thousand (14.14) and of the four thousand (15.32), both times after summaries of healings very similar to those in this section. But the expression, 'they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' points in four Old Testament passages Israel's need for a faithful king. The first and original use of this expression occurs when Moses asks Yhwh to appoint a man over the congregation of Israel 'who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of Yhwh may not be as sheep that have no shepherd' (Nm 27.17). In response, Yhwh appoints Joshua (whose name in Greek is 'Jesus') to be

Moses' successor. But Joshua was an ideal leader; later kings had trouble living up to the standard he set. At the other end of the Old Testament, Micaiah ben Imlah will speak to Ahab, king of Israel, and to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, saying, 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And Yhwh said, "These have no master; let each return to his home in peace"' (1 Kgs 22.17 || 2Ch 18.16). Ezekiel likewise prophesies against the 'shepherds of Judah'—

Ez 34.2-5 2 Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Shouldn't shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you don't feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought out, and you have ruled them with force and harshness, 5 so they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.

And finally, for Zechariah, 'the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd' (Zc 10.2) because everyone is relying on oracles and dreams and visions and prophecies, but not on Yhwh.

This section of Matthew (chs 8-9) has depicted Jesus' authority and the various responses with which it met. It has also shown what following Jesus, the Son of Man, means. And it has exposed the nature of the opposition he will meet from the leadership of his people. It has raised the question, 'What kind of man is this' (8.27), and let us see the trouble that people had answering it, because everything Jesus was doing was so new (9.17)!