

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 34, Chapter 9 and 10

We'll conclude Matthew chapter 9 today and get into Matthew chapter 10.

What we've been reading in chapter 9 has all been occurring on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; largely in Yeshua's new hometown of Capernaum, itself a commercial fishing village. When He first moved out of Nazareth and into Capernaum we don't know, because there's a fairly large hole in the Gospels about His life from the time He was 12 or 13 until He was about 30. Up until verse 35 we have been hearing about specific instances of miracle healings, cleansing from uncleanness, and exorcisms of demons from possessed persons. From verse 35 until the end of the chapter Yeshua has decided to venture beyond His village, nearly certainly traveling around the wider region of the Galilee, for the purpose of teaching and speaking in synagogues where He proclaimed the Good News. To be clear: as of that point there's nothing in existence that we could even remotely call a Church. There are also no such things as Messianic Synagogues, but we can read about them in Paul's Epistles because that came at a later date. Let's re-read just a few verses that concludes Matthew 9.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 9:35 - end

Although I covered it last time, I want to reiterate just what this Good News was that Jesus was teaching and instructing about. When a Christian hears the term "Good News" one thought instantly comes to mind: salvation. The Church for centuries has made the Good News one in the same as the message of salvation in Christ. That is not wrong; but it is also not what this Good News of Matthew chapter 9 is speaking about. Rather it is the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Of course, in hindsight, we know that Yeshua, as

Messiah, will be the ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, so certainly He is part and parcel of God's Kingdom. But that idea in no way has yet been taught to the Jewish people..... apparently not even to Christ's closest inner circle of disciples. Why is that? Why is it that Yeshua has flatly avoided revealing His divine self and His full mission, thus far seemingly satisfied with being viewed as but an extraordinary **Tzadik**... a Holy Man?

While some amount of speculation is called for, I feel fairly confident in the answer to that question. Being a teacher of God's Word for a long time, I have personally witnessed the process a person goes through as they.... as you..... hear God's Word in a more un-muffled, un-spun form, with context added. And the thing that instantly becomes apparent is that we all come from different religious backgrounds, therefore believing different things, many of them unspoken. We have all been taught different things about the Bible that inevitably have come from various Pastors, each who is usually beholden to one denomination or another and therefore wed to particular traditions and doctrines. And, I'm afraid, much of it is considerably enough off course such that some amount of course correction is in order BEFORE biblical truth can break through that hardened soil.

Just like in elementary school, the basic fundamentals of subjects must be taught first if ever we're to understand the whole of the matter. We have to know how to add and subtract before we can multiply or do long division. Each grade, representing another step towards deeper understanding of these subjects, has to occur in a logical order such that just like building a house, one always begins with ground preparation, then a foundation, then the skeletal form of the 1st floor, then the 2nd if one is planned, then a roof is put over it, the skeleton is covered over on the outside, later on the inside, and on and on until we have a completed house. Try to do those steps in a different order, or skip one, and the entire structure becomes frail and faulty. Yeshua well knew that the Jewish people He addressed were in no way properly prepared, educated in God's Word, to hear and process the stunning reality that He was the Messiah, He was divine, He would offer up Himself as a sacrifice on a cross for forgiveness of sins, and that He would one day become the ruler on earth of God's Kingdom. Even though the Jewish people, for the most part, believed they were living in the End Times it was almost entirely because of the Roman occupation that they felt was so oppressive and unbearable. The synagogue Torah Teachers were mostly teaching Traditions, manmade doctrines, handed down to them that too often misinterpreted or misused or obscured the actual biblical truth. Social justice was

at the forefront of their sermons because of the detested Roman occupation, which constantly intruded in their lives.

In whatever era, whenever we try to re-shape the biblical truth around a problem we're encountering, too often it is spun and molded to make it fit more to our current way of thinking and to our personal hopes for certain outcomes than it is to the discovery of, and submission to, God's will. Until Yeshua could spend the time to re-teach some of the basic fundamentals of their Hebrew faith (as it appeared in the Torah), and could re-establish what the Jewish people ought to be putting their hope in, they would not be able to hear and accept the bottom line: Yeshua of Nazareth was their Messiah and their King, and that delivering them from the grip of Rome wasn't what He came to do. The proof of what I'm telling you lies in the fact that relatively few of the Jewish people accepted Him for who He was actually was. Instead they chose to cling to the Traditions of their Elders and to what their synagogue leaders had taught them for scores of years, and to keep fighting for social justice in their own way within, and at times against, the Roman system. This kind of human-centered agenda enabled them to stay within the comfort zones of what they aimed for, but at the same time it trapped them in a spiritual fog, unable to clearly see the truth. Yeshua was still to this point in our Matthew study gaining their attention in order to repair a faulty foundation.

Verse 36 explains that as He went about His Good News Holy Land tour, He became quite sad at what He witnessed. To Him the people were like lost sheep; sheep that had no shepherd. People that had no leader. And by leader this is not to say a civic government leader but rather a spiritual leader. Yeshua simply didn't concern Himself with civic government except to say that whatever one exists over us, The Father has allowed it or it wouldn't be there. Therefore, we aren't to rebel against its many rules and regulations but to do all we can to exist peacefully within it. Obviously this is the divine viewpoint because hundreds of Pharisees and Scribes would have vehemently disagreed; they thought themselves as good shepherds of the people. But it also makes the point that just because a religious governing structure is established doesn't make it a good one. And it also doesn't mean that how those leaders lead the flock, and what they teach the flock, is truthful or helpful. What can look so good on the surface can be potentially catastrophic under that thin veneer. Yeshua is meaning to unequivocally point out a general failure of leadership.

Thus the last statement Christ makes to end chapter 9 is that the harvest is rich

(meaning abundant) but the workers to take in the harvest are few. Instead of crumbling in despair, or allowing His followers to do so, He orders His disciples to pray for more workers. Make no mistake; in Jesus's eyes what He was witnessing among the lost sheep of Israel wasn't merely a problem; it was a crisis. So here He is teaching that when God's worshippers are in crisis the answer is to turn in faith towards God.

Biblically, the harvest is a regularly used metaphor that is more often than not associated to the End Times. But notice something easily overlooked. Christ says to pray to the Lord of the harvest. Who is the Lord of the harvest? Most of the Church would instinctively say "Jesus". Not true. Clearly Yeshua is not instructing His disciples to pray to Him, anymore than when in Matthew chapter 6 He taught them what we today call The Lord's Prayer. In every case of prayer, in every Gospel account, Christ says that all prayer is to be directed to The Father. It is The Father who is Lord of the harvest.

But what, exactly, does the harvest represent? First and foremost it points to the end of a cycle; in our case the end of an age. Harvesting is in one sense the final step of the agricultural cycle; but in reality it is the next to the last.

CJB Revelation 14:14-16 ¹⁴ Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud. Sitting on the cloud was someone like a Son of Man with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ Another angel came out of the Temple and shouted to the one sitting on the cloud, "Start using your sickle to reap, because the time to reap has come- the earth's harvest is ripe!" ¹⁶ The one sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The final step is what happens after the harvest is brought in; the winnowing of what has been harvested. From the 1st century perspective, in a typical harvest the good and the bad (like weeds) were taken and afterwards had to be separated. So we must be careful not to read a Western Christian view in Yeshua's words that means "harvesting only Christians". ALL humans will be harvested; only at the winnowing process will the wheat kernels (Believers) will be separated away from the chaff (the non-Believers), each to vastly different eternal destinies. Another metaphor Yeshua will use later for this process is separating the sheep from the goats.

So when Christ was speaking to His disciples, was He speaking to them about a

future event that would come thousands of years later.... only they didn't realize it? Would that have been how His disciples would have understood it? Not at all. In the **P'shat** sense Yeshua was speaking about the here and now for Him and His disciples; after all the Kingdom had already arrived. Remember: the era of Yeshua was the first of two Latter Days scenarios the Bible speaks of; however the Jewish people were only aware of the first. So His disciples would have understood this as an End Times message from Him to them; the End Times they felt was imminent. This was the End Times that Yeshua's disciples, and later Apostles like Paul, were ready to give their lives for to preach. For them it was so imminent that they thought they'd personally endure it....if they weren't already enduring it. Indeed Christ wanted them to go and make more disciples and to spread the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth (this exact instruction begins Matthew chapter 10). But prior to Christ's resurrection, this message was to be spread only to the Jewish people. Thus it was in the **P'shat** context that His disciples understood Him. For them the rich harvest their Master spoke of were Jews, and there needed to be more Jewish workers (disciples of Christ) to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom to the Jewish people.

In the **Remez** sense however, we see the hint of something deeper. From the vantage point of history and the several books of the New Testament we now understand that Yeshua was also speaking of a second Latter Days. He was also speaking of the true and final end of the age, when He returns and sets up His Father's Kingdom to its fullest, on earth, and even at the end of that 1000 year reign when the final judgment occurs. It is when the full and final harvest occurs; a harvest not just of the Jewish people but of all the earth's inhabitants; not only the living but also of those that had ever lived.

CJB **Revelation 20:11-13** ¹¹ *Next I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.* ¹² *And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened; and another book was opened, the Book of Life; and the dead were judged from what was written in the books, according to what they had done.* ¹³ *The sea gave up the dead in it; and Death and Sh'ol gave up the dead in them; and they were judged, each according to what he had done.*

Let's move on to Matthew chapter 10. For today, we'll only read the opening verses.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 10:1 - 10

We're going to take the time to go on a few detours in Chapter 10 because there's a few things that need some special attention. This chapter opens with Matthew explaining that as of that moment Yeshua had formed a core group of 12 disciples. And, He gave them special authority to do several things that Yeshua, Himself, did that we call miracles. They could exorcise demons and they could heal infirmities. From there Matthew goes on to specifically name the 12 Disciples. It might surprise you to know that of all the Gospel writers only Matthew gives this group the title of The 12 Disciples. Why 12 and not some other number? We don't have to guess; clearly it was meant to be symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel that included the so-called 10 Lost Tribes. A few chapters later in the Book of Matthew this is highlighted.

CJB Matthew 19:27-28 ²⁷ Kefa replied, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. So what will we have?" ²⁸ Yeshua said to them, "Yes. I tell you that in the regenerated world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Isra'el.

It is important to notice that there were some privileges and special authority bestowed only upon the 12; but not upon all followers of Christ. It is also important to understand that Israel, and only Israel, was currently on Yeshua's and the disciples' radar. The gentile world played no role as participants or disciples for now (that would come later). Why 12 disciples for 12 tribes if 10 of them were "lost"? Because in Yeshua's day these 10 tribes weren't quite as lost as the Church has historically seen them and their existence wasn't at all questioned. It was well known in Christ's day that identifiable remnants of some of those 10 tribes lived in Samaria, Perea, and a few other areas near the Sea of Galilee. It was also known that still others lived in far away lands (usually described as "multitudes beyond the Euphrates") in much larger numbers.

So; the point of having exactly 12 Disciples had more to do with events of the End Times than anything else because within Judaism and within the Bible, we find that it is prophesied that the 10 Tribes will return to the Holy Land and be reunited with their 2 brother tribes of Judah and Benjamin, thereby reconstituting the 12 tribes of Israel. Thus those 12 disciples as well as most Jews in the Holy Land, it seems, believed this glorious event was on the cusp of happening. Knowing this is critical to properly understanding the New Testament. These

disciples of Christ, and the first couple of generations of Jewish Believers, were certain they were living in the Latter Days and so they felt that every biblical prophecy concerning the End Times was something they were already experiencing or were about to. There was no thought that what their Master was teaching them was about a distant future or for another people.

Two famous passages in Ezekiel that speak of the incredible reconstitution of all 12 Tribes of Israel is something all Believers need to be familiar with; they come from chapters 36 and 37.

READ EZEKIEL 36:22 - 27

Where this passage begins by saying "...tell the house of Israel" this is referring to the 10 tribes. This is because after Israel split into two kingdoms some years after Solomon's death, one kingdom was called Israel and the other Judah. But biblically each kingdom was also called a "house". So the two houses of Israel (one consisting of 10 tribes, the other of 2 tribes) make up the whole house of Israel. Thus our passage is aimed at the legendary 10 Lost Tribes, which God says through Ezekiel will return. We learn of their actual reunification with Judah and Benjamin in Ezekiel 37.

READ EZEKIEL 37:15 - 22

These passages explain why in Yeshua's eyes there needed to be 12 disciples; no more and no less. It was seen by Him as most necessary for preparation for the End Times, which is still ahead of us. How far ahead of us I'm not certain; but recent events make me think sooner than later. The Bible gives us 3 main signals for the entry of mankind into the second and final Latter Days: 1) the rebirth of Israel as a nation; 2) the recapture of Jerusalem by the Jews and put under Jewish control; 3) and the return of the 10 Lost Tribes. The first of the three prophesied events happened in 1948. The second in 1967. The third is underway. Thousands of people from far flung places who identify themselves with one or the other of the 10 tribes have been immigrating to Israel since around 2005. I have personally witnessed the arrival of two batches of them. They have been vetted both by designated Rabbinical scholars and government officials; they really are of the 10 Lost Tribes. In fact, this return started much earlier because one of the largest groups to immigrate to Israel is the Ethiopian Jews who are also known as the Black Jews of Ethiopia. However that name obscures one very important fact; they are of the Tribe of Dan, not of Judah or

Benjamin. They are 1 of the 10 Lost Tribes, and they have returned.

I want to change direction, now, to the authority or power that the 12 Disciples received from Yeshua in order for them to do what we term as miracles, which even includes raising the dead. The Bible is full of miracles, and they are called such; but I'm not sure they are discussed all that much in modern times. Miracles are defined in the dictionary as a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. In other words, it is something that we believe, or science has told us, cannot possibly happen but it does. Therefore something outside of the natural realm and what science can explain occurs.

Because our rational senses tell us that our world including the Universe simply aren't constructed in a way to allow for these events, then most secular folks and many within modern Christianity have become doubtful that miracles actually occurred in Bible times. Or begrudgingly they say that perhaps miracles once did happen but they no longer do. Rather, because of the teaching of the sciences and our skepticism, the so-called miracles both in life today, and in Scripture, are strictly a natural phenomena that the ancients didn't understand so, out of superstition, they could explain them only as miracles caused by one god or another. The parting of the Red Sea, the turning of water to wine, even Yeshua's resurrection, and of course this long list of healings that He did while on earth are today questioned within wide swaths of the Church body. Even those who do believe in actual miracles, then and now, have a tendency to call these events "supernatural" meaning something well outside the bounds of what can normally happen. Put another way, the supernatural is something that happens outside of the ability of the make-up of the Universe to accommodate. But if we don't believe there is something outside of the Universe to cause these strange happenings, then they are simply natural events that are misinterpreted by those who experienced them, and can be explained in scientific or medical terms.

I think this a good spot to pause and discuss the phenomena of miracles because otherwise we are jumping right over what has been the main substance of Christ's work on earth to this point in His life. To try to create a workable context for thinking about it I need you to put down your Bibles, put on your scholar's cap, and focus on what I'm going to tell you. I'll begin this somewhat uncomfortable detour by making this claim: miracles need NOT be looked at as supernatural per se, but rather in a sense as something quite natural within the realm of what is possible for God and perhaps even within the way He created

the Universe to operate. A Universe that we know far less about than we have been led to believe.

If you watch those interesting science shows on TV, or even attend classes in physics, the impression is given that scientists now have a pretty good handle on how the cosmos, and even life, was created and operates.... however that is simply chutzpah. In point of fact, each passing day is casting doubt on, if not in some cases destroying, old assumptions that have been the basis for classic physics and astrophysics and particle physics for decades. Numerous experiments conducted by the best science minds and consortiums on earth are now ready to throw into the trash bin large parts of the current understanding of how the material that makes up the Universe operates. On the one hand that is exciting news; on the other hand these scientists don't know what to replace it with. As of now it is only perplexion and mystery because of the rise of the field of Quantum Mechanics and what it seems to be revealing.

Science, like religion, constantly strives to find firm, unequivocal answers to the really big questions, as well as a host of smaller ones. Uncertainty is uncomfortable. I'll try to make these findings the least science-y that I can and then I think you'll understand where I'm going with it and how it pertains to our faith.

Quantum physics operates on a theoretical level because they're bumping into things that don't seem to behave as rationality and logic and scientific observation have previously dictated. For instance; Quantum physics doesn't deal with what an object actually is, but rather with the probabilities of what something could be. They call this theoretical substance that could become any number of things a probability wave. And the more they delve into this strange something that science has almost feared might prove to be true because it potentially upends and upsets so much that was formerly thought to have been known and settled is that, as irrational as it seems, time does not seem to actually exist as a real entity or even a dimension and time has always played an important role in physics. Enormously expensive and elaborate experiments in Quantum Mechanics are proving this startling development to be true. But even more, these experiments also seem to be proving that space, as we think of it, doesn't actually exist either. Therefore the basic idea of location (that is, our every day understanding of all things being located in a particular place) and the basic concept of distance (the simple idea of how far apart things are) are also in doubt. Rather, these things that seem so real, tangible and logical to us may

actually be mostly or entirely constructs of the mind. Not in the sense of our imagination; but rather in the sense that time and space are constructs of the observer.

What is an observer? It's the person watching something happen. In the case of science it's the person running an experiment, and taking careful notice of what happens. So how weird is the concept that experiment after experiment is revealing that objects may only exist in reality in a specific form at a specific place based on the requirement that an observer must be there to detect it; otherwise these objects do not come into existence at all but merely remain as a probability wave! And no, this is not the old philosophical challenge that many of us faced in our University Philosophy class that if I place a large tablecloth over a table, big enough that I can't see the actual table anymore, can I prove with certainty that the table is still there. My answer has always been: of course I can! Because by means of a rather simple experiment I can walk over to the table cloth, pick up a corner and sneak a peek. And every single time I do, I (as the observer) see that the table is still there! But what Quantum physics is now revealing is that nothing exists without someone being present to observe it; and that's because particles of matter and waves of energy that form everything in the Universe, humans included, don't seem to settle down into that particular state until they are actually observed by a sentient, conscious being.

But even stranger and more mind bending than this is something called particle entanglement. This theory is nothing new... in fact it dates back to Einstein in 1935. But with our recent technological advances, the theory has been put to the test, and very nearly something called "fact" has emerged. The basis of the theory is this: one particle can somehow "know" what another particle that is essentially its twin, which is completely separated from it, is doing and it will react accordingly. Even more, the distance they are apart is irrelevant; they could be as close as a micron or as far apart as from one end of our Galaxy to the other, and the result is the same.

Let me see if I can explain. Identical particles...twins if you would.... can become entangled either in interaction or in proximity. The orbits of their electrons and protons might even overlap. And through advanced detection equipment, entangled particles like Photons (that's what light is made of) can be made to become disentangled in a laboratory. What is being discovered is that the instant we observe the spin characteristics of one of the disentangled particles, its twin particle instantly spins in the opposite direction. Let me emphasize; I am only

talking about watching (observing) these particles and not about doing something to affect their movement. Scientists all over the world have performed this experiment putting the particle twins at greater and greater distances from each other and the outcome doesn't change. But what gets really weird is that when I say the one particle instantly affects the other, I mean instantly. We have devices now that can measure time to within a few parts of a billionth of a second. And when they use these amazing instruments to try to determine how long it takes from the instant we observe the spin of the one particle before the other particle reacts and assumes an equal and opposite spin to its twin, the time is zero. And the distance between the particles doesn't matter at all. How can this be? The thing is this experiment has been done countless times by the physics communities' best minds, in various parts of the world, under different circumstances, using the most costly equipment and technology, achieving the same result each time.

OK. I'm sure some heads are spinning as fast as those crazy particles. So let me approach our issue of what we actually know about the substance and operation of what is typically dubbed the natural world (meaning all the stuff the Universe is made of), versus what it's turning out is true, by means of using a chart that Dr. Robert Lanza, a brilliant scientist of the highest degree, known and respected by some of the most renowned and honored scientists of our time, has contrived to drive home an important point to let us know the truth about just how weak and feeble our knowledge of God's creation actually is.

He entitles it: SCIENCE'S ANSWERS TO BASIC QUESTIONS. That is, as of now in early in the 2000's A.D. , this is an accurate summation of what science actually knows in their search to answer the most fundamental questions about the natural world of the Universe and how it operates.

- 1) How did the Big Bang (creation) happen? Answer: unknown.
- 2) What, exactly, was the Big Bang, and what existed before it? Answer: unknown
- 3) What is the nature of dark energy, the most dominant source of energy in the whole of the Universe? Answer: unknown
- 4) What is the nature of dark matter, the 2nd most prevalent substance in the whole of the Universe: Answer: unknown

5) How did life arise (from dead matter and formless energy)? Answer: unknown

6) How did consciousness (awareness of self) arise? Answer: unknown

7) What is the fate of the Universe? It is expanding right now but will it keep expanding endlessly? Answer: Yes

8) Why are there exactly 4 types of observable forces in the Universe (electromagnetic, gravity, the weak nuclear force and the strong nuclear force)? Answer: Unknown

9) Is life further experienced after one's body dies? Answer: unknown

Here's the point of this detour into modern 21st century science and Quantum physics. Things in our Universe simply don't operate the way classic science and physics once thought they did, and those making these new discoveries don't know how to explain what they're finding. What is normal? What is natural? Frankly some strange new findings about the very ground we stand on are completely irrational to the scientific observer. Simply put, the scientific world can no longer speak of what is normal or natural. And as this concerns our delving into the subject of miracles, since there is no longer a firm standard for the natural, then there is no meaning to the term super-natural.

As Ben Witherington III (an excellent New Testament scholar) once noted about the miracles we read about in the Bible, "there is good reason to be uncomfortable with the suggestion that when God acts or intervenes in God's own Universe, that it amounts to an intrusion; something that violates nature or nature's laws". He is saying that a miracle isn't something we ought view whereby God has decided to break His own laws of nature (He has intruded into our physical world); rather it seems that we don't really know what the laws of God-created nature actually are..... even though the standard group of TV scientists we regularly see on Discovery Channel and others will pretend that they still do. After all, the same God that made earth, made Heaven. The same God that created the spiritual also created the physical. I have no issue at all, nor should any of us have, with calling something like Jesus healing the paralytic or revivifying the dead little girl "miracles". But no longer do I see miracles in terms of God intruding to doing the impossible by canceling out the laws of nature. Rather it is God employing what IS possible based on the dynamics of operation of all the realms He has created. It's just that it is so far over our heads to

contemplate and comprehend the realm we live in that we can only be in fear of what He does, or to deny it as simply a mirage, or to be awestruck and joyful. The limit to what is possible in God's created nature, then, is not currently known (and perhaps not ever knowable) to us. And yet the Bible clearly shows that in some cases this inexplicable power of that nature is accessible if God wills to grant such authority to humans, even if we don't understand why or how it is possible. Perhaps there is no better actual, real definition of faith. We observe; we trust; and we don't demand a satisfying explanation that meets with our preconceived perceptions.

We'll continue with Matthew chapter 10 next time.