

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 35, Chapter 10

Miracles are at the foundation of biblical faith. It begins with Creation itself as a miracle. After all, how does a Universe that never before existed have a definite beginning? Yet beyond simply declaring something a "miracle", we tend not to think much deeper about their essence and cause. Last week, as we opened Matthew chapter 10, we immediately took a detour into the weird world of Quantum Physics for the purpose of rethinking miracles, since miracles would be part of the "tool bag" each of the 12 Disciples Christ sent out would be equipped with. I'm sure it will be a relief for some of you to learn that we won't have too much of a review of last week's material. I do want to reiterate, however, that the purpose of our excursion into this field of science was not as a beginning course in Quantum Mechanics nor was it to suggest the transfer of the realm of miracles from the hand of God into the workings of an autonomous nature; at least not as we have typically thought of nature. Rather it was to demonstrate that despite the bold claims by modern scientists that we have a good handle on the behavior and even origination of the make-up of the natural world that includes the expanse of the Universe..... an orderly structure, inexplicable to the scientific world, which has at its underlying foundation unformed energy waves and bizarre sub-atomic particles..... the field of Quantum Physics is proving much of what was considered settled science to have been a mirage. The bottom line is that scores of experiments since the early 2000's through today are proving that nature is far stranger and more alien than we ever had any idea about, or even anything we might have imagined.

Therefore the idea that miracles are super-natural (that is, miracles do not obey the laws of nature) has always been based on the assumption that we know what the fabric and the boundaries of the natural world are. Therefore when we

observe something happen that doesn't fit within our understanding of that natural fabric and its boundaries (resurrecting the dead for instance) then these things are deemed as **super**-natural... beyond or outside the natural. The secular world has no real answer for the super-natural much more than to either question the veracity of the observer, to deny the happening, or to owe it to chance. The religious world has a different solution: God. Yet, is it that when God commands a miracle that it amounts to a divine intrusion, directed from Heaven, into the physical realm that we earthbound creatures live in? Is God overriding or momentarily altering all the laws of nature that He created? Or might it be that God, for a particular purpose, commands that nature behave in ways that it has always been able to behave, but we have not known that it could? That is, what we call "miracles" were built into the substance of our Universe from the beginning (at the moment that science calls the Big Bang), although only now are we starting to recognize that perhaps only God on High understands the intricacy and capabilities of it in ways that humans may never be able to. And even though we are starting to see deeper into the inner workings of God's Creation, that doesn't mean that we'll ever be able to harness it in the ways that He does.

The Apostle Paul made a comment to the Believers in Corinth that needs to be resurrected from history's dustbin and made the motto for Believers everywhere, in this the early part of the 3rd millennium A.D.... no matter what name we might choose to label ourselves with.

^{CJB} **1 Corinthians 3:19** *For the wisdom of this world is nonsense, as far as God is concerned; inasmuch as the Tanakh says, "He traps the wise in their own cleverness,"*

Quantum Physics is proving the truth of Paul's observation.

Not that long ago miracles were accepted as established fact, even among non-Believers. Then upon the Enlightenment Era in Europe (that began in the early 1700's) the academic elite and science dismissed the notion of miracles, even of God and the spiritual realm, and to this day science looks down its nose upon those of us who believe in the reality of God and of miracles. It was science that has arrogantly told us they alone have the answers for how the Universe..... the natural world..... came into being, operates, and will end. They look at us and demand: who are we going to believe? Them, with all their brain power and knowledge and advanced technology along with the consensus of opinion of experts? Or shall we believe some ancient volume of myth and superstition

called the Bible? Now, as of 2020, the intellectually honest within the scientific community are no longer certain how to describe some of the most basic operations of the Universe that even 10 years ago they took for granted. If one particle can "know" what another particle is doing across the expanse of the Universe, and instantaneously affect its characteristics..... if an energy wave of probability can only become something of tangible substance when a conscious, sentient being observes it.... could not even science humble itself enough to call the observable, but unexplainable, a miracle that has to have a higher source?

Miracles happened. Only a few are recorded for us in the Bible. Miracles continue to happen and especially as Believers we should expect them to happen in our lives as part of our journey with God (I've talked to many people who have miracle stories, and I have experienced a couple myself). We mustn't let those elite few who do not know God, and have no use for God, but value only their own human intellect and the opinions of their peers, to ever convince us otherwise.

So with this concept of miracles in mind, we read that Christ issues the authority for His 12 Disciples to wield this beneficent but inexplicable power over God's created nature for the good of the humanity they will encounter..... Jewish humanity for the time being. Since we only read a few opening verses of Matthew chapter 10, let's begin by reading it all.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 10 all

The listing of the names of the original 12 Disciples isn't particularly remarkable as this kind of register of followers of a Master or Rabbi was customary. What we are meant to notice, however, is the preeminence of Peter. Verse 2 says: "These are the names of the 12 Disciples; first, Peter..." The Greek word typically translated as "first" is **protos**. It means first in the sense of rank; it is a position of honor. Notice how Judas is listed last, as the most dishonored of the 12. The structure that Matthew presents the 12 is in six groups of 2. He says no more about the reason for that structure. However in Mark we read:

^{CJB} **Mark 6:7 *Yeshua summoned the Twelve and started sending them out in pairs, giving them authority over the unclean spirits.***

So Matthew was presenting not only the names of the original 12, but also how Yeshua paired them up as He sent them out in 2-men teams to present the Good

News to their fellow countrymen. When siblings such as Peter and Andrew were part of the mix, they were paired up as a rather obvious decision. It is instructive, though, how Jesus paired up Simon the Zealot with Judas. The Greek word used that is usually translated in English as zealot is **kananites**. Therefore many Bible versions will read "Simon the Canaanite". Not the best translation. The Greek word **kananites** is not trying to translate the word Canaanites (that rather ancient and, even then, a more or less extinct people group) but rather it is the Aramaic word **qanan** that means enthusiast or zealot.

Saying that **Shim'on** (Simon) was a Zealot meant that he belonged to a militant movement of Jews that advocated for resistance, even rebellion, against Rome. Zealot was intended to distinguish a man who was zealous for the Torah; but in fact for them the Torah was used mainly as a disingenuous prop to provide cover for their often violent actions that were nationalistic in intent, and much less so religious. I would compare them to the actions of the Klu Klux Klan that uses the Bible as a prop to practice hate and violence against non-Whites and non-Protestants. I find it a fascinating choice that Christ would choose Simon to be part of His inner circle. Does that mean that this Simon gave up his former relationship with that activist group and no longer pushed for political revolution? We don't know for certain; but my speculation is that to some degree he must have.

Yet even more head-scratching is the choice of **Y'hudah**, better known in Christendom as Judas. The CJB says that he was Judas from Kriot. Other versions simply leave it as Judas Iscariot and sort of leave it up to the reader to decide what that means. Interpreting this to mean a person from a certain village called Kriot is very doubtful. Far more likely Iscariot is an attempt to translate the Hebrew word **Siqariyim**. The **Siqariyim** were a known splinter group of the Zealots, and were the most violent; some were assassins. Typically they assassinated other Jews and only rarely Romans. Their reason for targeting their fellows? Those Jews who were murdered were seen as not being zealous enough to support the resistance movement. It is believed that the group of about 1000 Jews who occupied Herod's desert fortress of Masada following the failed Jewish Rebellion of 70 A.D. were **Siqariyim**. They committed mass suicide hours before the Romans finally broke through their defenses after months of siege. So as they say, Simon and Judas were birds of a feather and made an obvious pairing. Maybe it was so they could not only get along with one another, but also they had the reputation and contacts to be able to approach a rebellious segment of Jewish society that the other 10 Disciples were afraid of or were less likely to

be given an audience.

Perhaps this is a living lesson for us all, but especially for Church leadership. It is more effective ministry when we can send out people of like mind as a team; and when we can employ people of the same culture as those we are trying to reach it is all the better. This means that we may be sending out people that are quite different from the leadership, and don't fit a universal profile. They might enthusiastically embrace some, but not all, of the preferred doctrine and even practice it in ways that aren't entirely familiar or comfortable to us. I can tell you from experience that this approach makes leadership much more difficult. As they say, it can be like herding cats. But, that's the job of leaders. We can make it easier on ourselves by requiring conformity, but I don't see that as something Christ would have us do..... because He certainly didn't. At the same time, it is essential that the congregation accept those into the fold who don't look like them, or perhaps don't think like them in all ways.

Just look at the original 12 Disciples; some fishermen, a government Tax Collector, and a couple of militant political activists. They were all Jews, and so who did Christ send them to? Various segments of Jewish society. In fact, in verse 5 Yeshua directly admonished them NOT to go to the gentiles. They also weren't to go to the Samaritans that were a mix of Jews, non-Jews, and half-Jews. The problem was that the Samaritans were essentially considered as gentiles in that by now they had erected their own Temple, complete with their own separate Priesthood, and practiced a religion that even though it involved some elements of the Torah it had melded with some clearly pagan concepts and practices. Rather, Yeshua instructs, "Go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel". In the prior lesson we exposed what the term "House of Israel" meant. Briefly it mean the 12 tribes of Israel, including the so-called 10 Lost Tribes. However the main thing to take from this is that at this point Yeshua's focus was strictly on the seed of Abraham; gentiles weren't on the radar of Yeshua's outreach ministry right then.

The point at which this changed was after His resurrection. Therefore we can see develop in all the Gospels a kind of before-and-after scenario. Pre-resurrection ministry focus, although of rather short duration, was entirely upon descendants of the 12 tribes. Post-resurrection, the ministry expanded to include gentiles. Naturally at first it was Jews who were sent out to evangelize gentiles, because it was Jews who were trained and instructed in the faith. The Jew Paul on the other hand is representative of the 2nd generation of Believers who took the message

of salvation in Yeshua specifically to the gentile nations, and also made new leaders some of whom were gentile.... but many of whom were Jews. I'm not sure which generation of evangelists had the more difficult task. The 1st generation of Believers were assigned to take the message only to Jews, who had a long history in which manmade traditions had crept in and become deeply rooted in their faith. The message the Disciples brought usually challenged what those Jews had been taught and history tells us that relatively few would accept it. The 2nd generation of Jewish disciples brought the message to gentiles who had no history of worshipping the God of Israel, and so had no concrete preconceived notions. I've often thought that in many ways it might be easier to teach those who are a blank tablet than it is to teach those who must first unlearn wrong beliefs before right ones can replace them. That is why ministry to the youth in any culture is so vital. Getting taught right doctrine from the start of their lives is so much easier on them and on Believing leadership than it is to try to straighten things out later.

And what is it that the 12 Disciples are to teach and proclaim? The same message Yeshua Himself brought: the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Don't take the idea of "near" as meaning "not here yet". My house can be near to my neighbor's house, but that doesn't mean that my neighbor's house doesn't exist. Later as we encounter Christ's several recorded parables we'll find that many were attempting to explain the difficult concept of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews. So get it clear in your minds: this initial sending out of Disciples was NOT to declare that Jesus was the Messiah or that He was God on earth. It was only a preliminary stage of evangelism and it was to announce that the Kingdom of God was near **to the Jewish people**. It was meant in the sense of proximity and maturity, not in the sense of not existing just yet. But as with Christianity, no doubt the Jewish people didn't all think about that message the same way. It is still something that Christianity struggles to understand and so various denominations have formed different doctrines to explain it. We'll not entertain that at the moment, but we will in later lessons. However this brings us to the issue of the process of evangelizing. We'll not get into a multi-step procedure but rather simply talk about it from a more general vantage point.

Just as WHO does the evangelizing matters, so does WHAT the subject matter is and HOW it is presented. For instance: these Torah Class lessons are not meant for non-Believers (although by no means are non-Believers excluded). Rather they are fashioned primarily for those who... in varying degrees... already accept the authority of the Bible, the existence of God, and the forgiveness of sins

offered by Jesus of Nazareth. They are evangelistic in one sense because we always advocate for Christ and for taking His message out to the world. On the other hand these are not Seeker oriented whereby we explain the basics of our faith over and over again each week hoping the Seeker will finally come to trust Christ. Other Churches are more interested in sending out missionaries to cultures who aren't familiar with the God of the Bible and with Christ. Some simply want to do good deeds in the community and don't emphasize it as any more than that. There are many more examples I could cite but that'll do for now. The issue is that there are many motives and means that are perfectly valid in the process of evangelism.

Then we have the matter of suitability as concerns age. A 60 year old who has been a Believer for decades is usually more mature in his or her faith than a 15 year old. If that 60 year old finally came to realize some years earlier just how important focused study on God's Word is, and how important it is to get up every day and choose to be holy, then he knows and understands God, His commandments, and how God operates at a much deeper level than that 15 year old who simply hasn't lived long enough to experience God so fully or to acquire that biblical knowledge. Not only that, but the young person is not yet mature in body or mind. They have so much going on in their young lives, beginning with trying to figure out who they are. And each kind of activity they engage in takes up a portion of their time, energy and focus. The priorities of a 15 year old look nothing like the priorities of a 60 year old. Therefore we must know our audience and always allow for varying degrees of maturity, and accept the many stages of our journey with Christ.

I concede to you that 60 year olds, even 50 year olds, can only understand what matters to that 15 year old at best in an intellectual way but more typically it is nearly impossible to connect with them on the level they need so that they can hear.... their level. It is like the person who has lost a spouse is far more able than one who has not, to be able to connect with and comfort a person that is recently widowed. But to the Lord, that 15 year old who is as yet immature in their faith is every bit as valuable to the Kingdom as the mature-in-faith 60 year old.

Consider this issue of the evangelism process in another way. If Yeshua's target had only been intellectuals, He would have sent out intellectuals. If His target were only the common folk, He would have sent out only common folk and not also a Tax Collector who, by definition, was educated and held a privileged position. If His target was only those who sought peace and stayed away from

the center of political unrest, in Jerusalem, He wouldn't have sent out the political activists Judas and Simon. He also didn't tell the 12 Disciples the exact words to use or the company to keep. So for each segment of Jewish population the message would have to be uniquely tuned for their ears. Christ gave us the model for evangelism and it is anything but rigid in its expression or only for a certain group of people with certain qualifications to carry it out.

Those 12 Disciples were given the authority to do the same things their Master did: heal sick people, raise dead people to life, cleanse people who are unclean with ***Tzara'at***, and to perform exorcisms. What does that mean to be given authority? Authority is something that is granted by another. Yeshua says that it is His Father who gives Him the authority to do what He does. It gives Him not just the right but the power to do things within a certain sphere of influence. It is not His own power; it is, as it were, power given that by definition can be taken away by the highest authority. And now, Yeshua, as His Father's agent on earth, bestows authority on the Disciples to operate within a certain well-defined sphere of influence: the Holy Land.

Going out meant they would be traveling; not as extensively as Paul, but still they would be gone from home and occupation from time to time. As they went out and traveled they were commanded to not ask for money for the giving of the message. They weren't even to take any of their own money with them. The last few words of verse 10 say: "..... a worker should be given what he needs." We need to understand this from a 1st century Middle Eastern context and not a 21st century Western context. Hospitality, the taking in of guests that you don't know and caring for them, was perhaps the number one virtue within Middle Eastern culture. Remember: these 12 were traveling around the Holy Land where this virtue was the norm. It would be different if they, like, Paul were traveling around gentile populated parts of the Roman Empire where this virtue of hospitality wasn't the same. So despite what they might be teaching and preaching, if the Disciples asked a Jewish family for hospitality it would have been rude beyond imagination for a household to refuse them. The reality is that these instructions are only fully operable in a society that is structured like the Disciples were in at that time. We get a look at what this looked like in that era in the next couple of verses.

Verse 11 says that during their travels through the many small towns of Judea and the Galilee the Disciples were to search for someone who looks trustworthy to stay with. So, Yeshua is saying: use your senses and your brain. Be a little

cautious and diligent whom you approach for hospitality and don't just descend upon the first house you see. Doesn't that seem like common sense more than some divinely inspired instruction? Of course it does; and every traveler of that day would have done the same. But sometimes a misguided faith can make us leap before we look. That is, we think that if what we're doing is for the Lord then we can throw caution... and common sense.... to the wind and He'll somehow make things work out OK for us. These 12 Disciples were really fired up and Yeshua didn't want them doing something foolish as they looked for someone to put them up and care for them for a day or perhaps more.

Verse 12 says that when they did choose a household to stay in they were to say "***Shalom aleikhem***", meaning "peace be with you". This was a standard Jewish courtesy. Then the next verse says that if the household doesn't deserve your ***shalom***, take it back and leave. That sounds rather strange until we understand that saying "peace be with you" was more than saying "hello". It was a blessing bestowed. So the idea is that the Disciple, after choosing a household to stay in and being offered hospitality, is to bless the household. Among the Jewish people blessings were thought to have real, actual power in them (and in fact, I think they do). Blessings were very nearly an unseen but living entity. So if after a little while the Disciple sees that his choice turns out not to be a good place to be hosted, for whatever reason, then he can retract His blessing... remove his blessing of Shalom on that household.... and go. This may sound a little weird to us, but that is because it is as much Tradition as Bible. And Jesus is just making clear that all the standard rules of hospitality that are usual and customary still apply for the traveling Disciples.

While the protocol of evangelizing laid out here is steeped in 1st century Jewish tradition, some elements of it can be applied today. Sleeping indoors, safely, and having enough to eat is a given for most people in the modern West. Most modern missionaries going out will have these basic necessities accounted for before they ever depart. But in the 1st century, sleeping on the ground under the stars, and missing meals, was a regular part of travel for the common man. Even then, taking some amount of money, perhaps an extra pair of sandals, was usual as they always needed to buy things along the way or be prepared for unforeseen contingencies. Yeshua told them not to do that; instead to essentially go out with nothing but the shirt on their back. This was to be a true faith ministry. But true faith ministry doesn't mean, as it seems to today, having all your needs and comforts met. It will also involve the very real likelihood of discomfort or even danger.

At the same time, having no money and not asking for money in order to subsidize their journey would have been admired, and it would have alleviated suspicions as to their motives. I think such a notion still may apply in many cultures. I can tell you that a friend who spends more than half the year in England (and has for much of his life) assures me that money and Christianity do not go together there. Christians with money are immediately under suspicion as are Christians who are too forward about asking for donations to go about their work. I don't necessarily think that such a cynical attitude is warranted, but at the same time it must be a balance. This is not the 1st century. Because of the way the world is today, ministry can't be done without a source of funding. The problem is that too often the bulk of the funding is perceived as going for the minister and not the ministry. So ministers have to be aware of this and behave accordingly. No doubt even in Christ's day there were charlatans that fleeced the flock and people were wary. So for the Disciples to be cared for, they had to require very little for themselves.

The instruction we read in verse 14 seems out of character for the forgiving, compassionate, longsuffering and patient Yeshua. He says that if a town or village doesn't welcome the Disciple, the Disciple should "shake the dust off from your feet". That is, the Disciple is to leave and not look back. It is kind of the opposite of try, try again. It is an expression that also involves an element of rejection and disgust by the one shaking the dust off their feet. What kind of town might not welcome the Disciple? Of course: it is the one that doesn't want to hear, or doesn't accept, the Good News the Disciples bring about the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. And so the village gets into a confrontation with the Disciple and doesn't want them there. Put a little more plainly: the townspeople like what they believe, they're comfortable with what they believe, and they don't want to discuss it or have their lives messed with. Is this not what the main problem is with those who reject Christ? They inherently know that if they accept His truth then they are going to have to turn away from things they've believed or liked up to now, and that their lives will indeed be different. But I can also attest to you that it is the same way within Christianity. Those who have accepted wrong teaching and live securely within their own personal spiritual bubble don't want it popped. They don't want anything about their understanding of God or the Bible challenged because it might require some soul searching and change.

The 12 Disciples were going to Jewish towns and talking to Jewish people; no one else. These people of course had a centuries-long Hebrew faith background. They didn't question if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was their God, or if

He was real. So what was the problem that Yeshua says the Disciples would occasionally encounter? While we can't know what each individual the Disciples encountered truly believed or thought about their faith, it certainly wasn't the same for everyone. And whatever it was, exactly, that the Disciples told these folks about what the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven meant, for many Jews it wasn't welcomed. And, says, Jesus, when that welcome mat is pulled up, leave and spend your time and efforts elsewhere.

A word to the wise. If I've received one, I've received a hundred emails and letters from on-fire Believers and followers of Torah Class that tell me they have tried and tried to tell their Pastor or Elders or some of the members of the congregation they attend that they perhaps need to delve deeper into the Bible or to re-examine some of the doctrines they preach and practice. And when they are rejected, even shunned, they tell me they're going to hang in there and win the battle of wills because truth is on their side. They're going to stay and keep fighting to have what they've learned given a proper hearing before their Church leadership even if they don't have a friend left by the time they are done. I've not heard of good and hoped for results from this, although now that I've said it I'm quite sure I'll get an email from someone who was successful! The point is this; while it isn't necessary to have to agree on every nuance of every doctrine of the Church or Synagogue you attend in order for you to stay and enjoy your relationships, beware that you don't stay in a situation where you are wasting your time, being a pebble in the shoe to those around you, and causing conflict. I grant you that going upstream against the current is in some way part of every Believer's experience. But going to a communal worship service, and listening to your Rabbi or Pastor, should be a joy and not a negative experience. It wasn't going to be good for the town or the Disciples if they were expressly not wanted, so Christ told them to leave if that was the case. And equally so, it isn't good for you or the congregation you are part of if there is a serious gulf in what you each strongly believe.

Verse 15 has Yeshua laying out the consequences for that town or village rejecting not only the message but the messenger who brings it. He says it will be even more destructive for them on the Day of Judgment than for what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. When will that consequence He is speaking of arrive? On the Day of Judgment. While I think some amount of hyperbole is involved on Christ's part (because the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was about as thoroughly destructive as it gets), the point is (especially from the vantage point of the 1st century) that the destructive consequence of refusing to hear and

accept the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven wouldn't be that same day, but it would come very soon and at the same time when God judged the entire world.

The Jewish people, Jesus's Disciples, and even the 2nd generation of Apostles like Paul, all believed that the End of Days and the Day of Judgment were to occur at any moment. And generally speaking the Jewish people also believed that it would be a judgment on the gentile world and not them. So whatever Yeshua precisely meant about the consequences for denying His message, the consequence would occur very soon AND, more importantly, the Holy Land and the Jewish people would not be held harmless from it.

We'll continue in Matthew next week.