

Bible Studies on

A Confounded World

(Matthew 8-10)

6 studies

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A Confounded World – Matthew 8-10

Introduction

Jesus is confounding. Reading through the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus do some extraordinary things and the result is that some follow and some turn their backs on him. That is not so different to what we see today. We often expect the extraordinary before we allow ourselves to believe something. As such we settle for the normal and mundane, all the while wishing for the extraordinary. Jesus came into the normal and mundane, but he did that which was extraordinary. He does what we hope by doing what we find hard to believe! How confounding.

The purpose of these studies (and the associated Bible Talk Series) is to see and understand that Jesus confronts the world – and by implication us. He came to save, not necessarily to soothe. In coming to save, he challenged the accepted norms by what he taught and did. In doing so, many came to him: those whose eyes were opened as they discovered what a new life of faith looked like. Yet, there were many who found that challenge too hard to accept.

Being a disciple today comes with its own challenges. For those who *have not met* Jesus, that will first be to see Jesus as the one who came to save. May these studies help you meet Jesus.

For those *who have met* Jesus, that challenge will be to stand with him and for him as the world pushes back. This experience, while in a different age, is very similar to what Jesus prepared his disciples for in Matthew 8-10. May these studies help to equip you to stand with Jesus.

Our prayer is that this series of studies will put Jesus before those who have not met him – and call them to faith. And that those who know and follow Jesus - will be better prepared to live as his disciples before a confounded world.

How to get the most out of these studies

As with most prepared studies, these are only guides to help you explore the Bible. For that reason, the most important activity you can be involved in here is to seek to read and understand the Bible passage itself. The passage may raise questions for you that these studies do not, and that is a good outcome. Do business first and foremost with the Word of God. And we hope that these questions may prompt some further exploration.

Study 1

Jesus' Authority – Matthew 8:1-17

1. In Australia those who are in authority tend to be regarded with a degree of suspicion. Why?
2. What important statement are we told at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Ch 7:28-29)? It sets the scene for what we are about to read.

Read Matthew 8:1-17

Verses 1-4

3. Does the man with leprosy doubt Jesus' ability to heal?
4. Why do you think the man with leprosy approaches Jesus in the manner in which he does – kneeling and asking: 'if you are willing...'? Do we see this kind of approach today?
5. What is significant and strange about Jesus' response since he is the Son of God?

Verses 5 – 13

6. This centurion is a person who is familiar with giving orders (c.f. v9). What do you think about the way he approaches Jesus?

7. From verse 8, what strikes you about the attitude of the centurion? Is this a common attitude (from believers or not-yet believers) toward Jesus today?

8. By praising the faith of this Gentile centurion, what contrast is Jesus making? Given that Jesus was in the Jewish city of Capernaum (c.f. v5), what warning is Jesus giving the Jews (descendants of Israel) here?

Verses 14 - 17

9. With the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, we have the third healing miracle in this chapter. Compare the three. What is different with this one? What is the same?

10. Notice who was brought to Jesus 'after sunset' or 'when evening came'. Why is this significant? How conclusive are the healings that Jesus performed?

11. How do these miracles support the statement at the end of the Sermon on the Mount? (See question 2)

12. Jesus has been called 'a great miracle worker'. Is it his ability to heal that is in sharpest focus in verses 1-17? Discuss.

13. Should we be expecting miracles from those who have authority today? What about from religious figures? Why/Why not?

14. Do you think our/your church respects the authority of Jesus? How do we show/not show that?

15. Do you think you respect the authority of Jesus? How do you demonstrate that?

Spend some time praying

Study 2

Jesus' Authenticity – Matthew 8:18-34

1. Fear is an emotion which often drives our responses and actions – fight, flight and freeze. What causes fear? What drives our fears?

Read Matthew 8:18-34

Verses 18 – 22

2. A teacher of the law said to Jesus: 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' That is a strong assertion. Why do you think Jesus responded the way that he did?

Note: In verse 20, we find the first use of the phrase 'Son of Man' in this Gospel. It is used over 80 times in the New Testament, nearly always on the lips of Jesus. In the Old Testament, there is the reference to a heavenly being, 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7:13 – 14. Why did Jesus use this phrase? Leon Morris writes: '... firstly it was a rare term and one without nationalistic associations. It would lead to no political complications. Secondly, because it had overtones of divinity. Thirdly, because of its societal implications. The Son of man implies the redeemed people of God. Fourthly, because it had undertones of humanity. He took upon Him our weakness.' (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Pillar. Leicester: IVP,1992, 202)

3. For such a compassionate person as Jesus, his response (in verse 22) to the grieving disciple sounds pretty harsh. Why do you think Jesus came down so heavy?
4. Taken together, what do these reactions to Jesus teach us about discipleship?
5. Are there times when you have been quick to promise or slow to respond to Jesus? Discuss.

Verses 23 – 27

6. What do verses 18 & 23 teach us about Jesus' attitude to popularity?

7. A furious storm threatens to overtake the boat. The disciples are understandably fearful. Why does Jesus question their faith?

8. How does this miracle highlight Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' authority?

9. What is interesting about the disciple's response in verse 27?

Verses 28 – 34

10. Jesus is confronted by two demon-possessed men. What do you notice about their questions in verse 29?

11. Why do you think these evil spirits begged to be sent into the pigs?

12. The demons (and pigs) are destroyed, their carers flee, and the demon-possessed men are restored. The whole town comes out to meet Jesus. Why do you they plead with him to leave this region?

13. In these three scenarios taken together, we see Jesus with authentic authority over the earth (those who follow), over the heavens (the wind and waves), and over the underworld (the demons). Why fear someone so good? What does this mean for how you follow Jesus?

14. Do you think our/your church has a healthy fear of the Lord?

Spend some time praying

Study 3

Jesus' Mission - Matthew 9:1-17

1. What is different about being a disciple of Jesus as he walked and taught on earth as opposed to being a disciple of Jesus today?

Read Matthew 9:1-17

Verses 1 – 8 (c.f. Mark 2:1-12)

2. Jesus steps back into the boat to recross the lake (turned out to be a short stay on the 'other side of the lake' c.f. 8:18) and returns to his home village. There some men bring a man who was paralysed to him. What do you notice about faith in this interaction?
3. What is strange about what Jesus says to the man who was paralysed?
4. Why do the teachers of the law object?
5. What does Jesus mean when he says: "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or, 'Get up and walk'"? Why frame the question this way?
6. How does this episode conclude (verses 7 – 8)? What do we learn from this?

Note: From Chapter 8:1 to this point, we have seen Jesus' authority on display in numerous ways: over sickness (8:2-3, 13, 14-15, 16, 9:5-7); over demons (8:16, 32); over nature (8:26); and now over sin (9:5). These are not incidental occurrences. This is a conclusive display and with each one we are learning more and more of what Jesus can do.

Verses 9 – 13

7. Why does Jesus allow himself to be in this inflammatory situation?
8. What do you know about the Pharisees? Can you think of a similar group today?
9. Jesus' mission is stated 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (v13). Who are 'the righteous' here?
10. What confidence can we take from verse 13?

Verses 14 – 17

11. John the Baptist's disciples ask about fasting. What was the point of fasting? Benefits? How could religious fasting (or other religious traditions) become a stumbling block?
12. Jesus uses three short illustrations to answer the disciples.
 - a. Why use the bridegroom? What was his point?
 - b. Why use the patch of unshrunk cloth story? What was his point?
 - c. Why use the old and new wineskins story? What was his point?
13. What does Jesus consider the most important for his disciples? What about for our/your church today? What about for you today?

Spend some time praying

Study 4

Jesus' Compassion - Matthew 9:18-34

1. When it comes to believing something, what is more important: seeing, touching or hearing?

Read Matthew 9:18-34

Verses 18 – 26

2. A desperate request from a desperate father is recognised by Jesus. Why is this request surprising (hint: it came from a synagogue leader)? What does this father expect Jesus to do?
3. Jesus is willing to go with this distraught father straight to his daughter. What does this tell us about Jesus?
4. Along the way, Jesus is delayed because someone touches him in the crowd. How do you think the synagogue leader would have felt?
5. What do we learn about the faith of woman who was bleeding?
6. The synagogue leader wanted Jesus to touch his dying daughter and the woman who was bleeding felt the need to touch the garment of Jesus – why is touch so important?

7. Jesus finally arrives at the synagogue leader's house. From a human perspective, it is too late. The girl has died. Yet Jesus brings her back to life. What does Jesus demonstrate in these two miracles?

8. How is this helpful for us today?

Verses 27 – 34

9. As Jesus heads out, two blind men follow (How is it that they know how to follow?). They cry out: 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' Why choose that title?

10. Jesus appears to want more from the blind men – why?

11. By faith, they are healed, their sight is restored. Why does Jesus ask them not to share such great news? (c.f. 8:4)

12. Read back over Matthew 9:18 – 34. How do the different people respond to what Jesus does: the crowds at the synagogue leaders' home, the two now-seeing men, the crowd who saw him heal a demon-possessed mute man, and the Pharisees?

13. Many different people hear about Jesus in our/your church. How do we help people believe in Jesus?

14. How would you encounter Jesus? How do you respond to what you see, hear and know about Jesus?

Spend some time praying

Study 5

Jesus' Directive - Matt 9:35-10:15

1. What is most effective in evangelism: words or actions? Under God, can you be effective as an evangelist using either alone?

Read Matthew 9:35-10:15

Verses 35 – 38

2. What aspects of Jesus' ministry are described in 9:35? Compare with 4:23. Consistent?
3. Why do you think that Jesus was keen to teach as well as heal? How could this inform the mission statement of a charitable organisation of the church such as Anglicare?
4. What is meant by 'proclaiming the good news of the kingdom' (v35)?
5. In Matthew's gospel, a recurring theme in the ministry of Jesus is compassion (c.f. 9:36 with 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). Why does Jesus feel compassion when he sees the crowds?
6. As a result of this compassion, what does Jesus say to his disciples and what does he tell them to pray?
7. How should this kind of compassion drive our/your church mission and ministry today? How should it drive your mission or ministry efforts?

Verses 10:1 – 15

8. What is incredible about the directive that Jesus gives to his disciples? (verses 1 & 8)
Is it a pattern of ministry and mission which sounds familiar? Why?

9. In verses 2-4, all the disciples are named, even Judas. Their job is to do what Jesus had first shown them. Their ability to do the job is only possible because Jesus gives them his authority. What is their message? (v 7 c.f. 9:35)

10. What is significant about the phrase 'the lost sheep of Israel'? (c.f. 9:36). Why does Jesus insist that they only go to the Israelites?

Note: The need for good spiritual leadership is not a new idea for Israel. Consider these Old Testament passages: Numbers 27:16-17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:4-5.

11. Why does Jesus command them not to receive gold, silver or copper in payment for their ministry? What can they expect to receive? Compare Paul's teaching that a labourer is worthy of a wage? (1 Timothy 5:18)

12. Look at the pattern. Enter into each town or village, search for a worthy person, enter the home, give your greeting, stay put until you move to the next town and, if deserving, leave your greeting. Why this pattern?

13. Why does Jesus speak so strongly about those who reject his messengers?

14. Jesus was clearly aware of differing responses to his good news message. How should this shape the mission of our/your church?

15. What encouragement should this give us as we each reach out to family and friends?

Spend some time praying

Study 6

Jesus' Divisiveness - Matthew 10:16-42

1. Being a follower of Jesus comes with rewards and costs. What do you enjoy most about being a disciple of Jesus? What do you find hardest?

Read Matthew 10:16-42

Verses 16 – 25

1. Jesus recognises the mission will not be easy. His instruction is the often quoted phrase, 'be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves'. What does he mean? How is this meant to be helpful for the disciples?
2. How should the disciples approach the difficult times ahead? What help will they receive? What is relevant or helpful for disciples today?
3. The message of Jesus is so counter-cultural and theologically distinctive that it will divide families (v. 21). While there are parts of the world where this kind of life-threatening persecution is experienced by followers of Jesus, this is not often the case in the western world. Are there pressures you have experienced or observed in your family because of faith matters? Has this affected your faith? How?
4. Martyrdom or faith-based pressure may indeed be the reality. Does that mean Jesus is suggesting that his followers should seek it? (v. 23)

Note: It is difficult to be certain about the precise details and timing of verse 23. Some scholars suggest that it means the gospel will continue to be preached to the Jews until Christ returns. And as a result, persecution/pressure will continue to be experienced until Christ returns.

5. Students/servants/disciples are often linked closely with their teacher/master/Lord. How do you react to Jesus (and by association, you) being described as Beelzebub? (v. 25)

Verses 26 – 42

6. In sending the disciples out, Jesus says that there are some things to fear and other things not to fear. How do his words strengthen, comfort or encourage the follower of Jesus?
7. What does it mean to acknowledge Jesus before others?
8. Jesus is referred to as the 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6). Yet this passage says that Jesus didn't come to bring peace (v. 34). What is his point?
9. The cost of discipleship appears to be a high one. In verses 35-37, the most valuable and significant relationships we know seem to be on the chopping board. Why this possible division?
10. What reassurances and rewards does Jesus give his followers?
11. In the context of persecution and division, why does Jesus introduce the reward for those who 'gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little one who is my disciple'? (v. 42)

Chapters 8-10

12. Look back and think over these three chapters of Matthew's gospel. What has Jesus taught you about being his disciple? How has this been most challenging? What has been most helpful?

13. What lessons should our/your church learn from those that Jesus taught his disciples?

Spend some time praying

Commentaries

For further study or reference:

- *Understanding the Times – Living in the Light of the Arrival of the King* by William Taylor (London: Christian Focus Pub., 2009)
- *Matthew – A Great Light Dawns* by Peter G Bolt (RBT series. Sydney South: Aquila Press, 2014)
- *The Gospel According to Matthew* by Leon Morris (Pillar. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1992)
- *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and his Confrontation with the World – A study of Matthew 5-10* by D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018 (repack Ed)) – and there is also a version of this under the title: *When Jesus Confronts the World – an exposition of Matthew 8-10* (Milton Keys: Authentic Media, 2010)
- *Matthew* by R.T. France (Tyndale. Leicester: IVP Press, 1985)
- *Matthew – Chapters 1 through 12* by D.A. Carson (Expositors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)