

Responding to Jesus' Power

Scripture: Matthew 9:33–35

Code: 2268

INTRODUCTION

In our last chapter, we stopped at verse 33 with the healing of the man who was deaf and dumb because of a demon. Matthew immediately follows that miracle with a statement of response: "...and the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out demons through the prince of the demons. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (vv. 33b-35). Matthew gives us two responses to the miracles that Jesus had done: There was the marveling of the multitude and the rejection of the religionists. Introduction

A. The Dividing Line Prophesied

1. Luke 2

When our Lord was a baby, probably no more than forty days old, He was taken by His mother and Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem. The law required that she make an offering of purification after giving birth to a child. While they were in the Temple, they had occasion to meet a very interesting man by the name of Simeon. He had been waiting a long time for the arrival of the Messiah and now had the privilege of seeing Him. When he saw Jesus he said that mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.... And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary, His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel..." (vv. 30, 34). Simeon stated that Jesus would become the dividing line; He would determine the ultimate destiny of every individual. Some will reject Him and fall; some will receive Him and rise again.

It's always been that way in God's economy. There are those who are planted like a tree by a river that bring forth fruit and there are those who are chaff (Ps. 1). There are the godly and the ungodly, the righteous and the unrighteous. My grandfather used to say, "The only two kinds of people in the world are the saints and the ain'ts."

2. Luke 1

Even Mary in general terms spoke of God's judicial role of separating the faithful and the unfaithful. She praised God after learning of the greatness of the child she would bear: "And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shown strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away" (vv. 50-53). Mary knew that it was characteristic of God to receive some and refuse others, to bless some and curse others, to gather some in and scatter others, to pull down the exalted and lift up the humble, to fill the hungry and send away the full. In other words, there will always be the dividing line between those God blesses and those He curses. Mary knew that because she knew the Old Testament. It was confirmed to her by Simeon that her child would be the very crux of destiny.

B. The Dividing Line Proclaimed

1. Luke 6

Christ Himself affirmed that when He taught: "And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be

filled. Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets" (vv. 20-26). There are the blessed and there are the cursed.

2. Matthew 7

There are those who enter the narrow gate and are blessed, and those who enter the broad gate and are damned (vv. 13-14). There are those who build their house upon a rock that stands in judgment; and there are those who build their house on sand that collapses (vv. 24-27).

3. Matthew 10

There are those who try to hold onto their life and lose it, and there are those who lose their life, and in so doing, find it (v. 39). All the way through the gospel, which records for us the thrust of the preaching of Jesus, we find that He offers Himself as a dividing line. He told those who would be His disciples, "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father, who is in heaven" (v. 32). In other words, if you identify yourself with Jesus Christ, God will identify you as His own. But if you deny Jesus Christ, then Christ will deny you before the Father. Jesus went on to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (vv. 34-36).

4. Matthew 21

Confronting the hypocrisy of the chief priests and the elders, Jesus spoke in a parable: But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in My vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said the same. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not. Which of the two did the will of his father? They say unto Him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you that the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (vv. 28-31). In other words, the first son was disobedient to his father, but later repented and obeyed. The second son pretended to be submissive but he didn't go. The son who said no and repented, represented the tax collectors and the harlots. The son who said He would go but didn't, symbolized the hypocritical religionists. Jesus again presented the dividing line: It isn't the ones who are religious who will enter heaven; it is the ones who obey the will of God. The Father expressed His will when He spoke from heaven and said, "...This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Mt. 17:5b). Christ is the demarcation line for all people.

5. 2 Corinthians 2

The Apostle Paul continued that same concept. The entire human race is divided into believers and unbelievers, into heaven-bound or hell-bound souls, into the blessed and the cursed, and into the rewarded and the damned. The dividing line is their faith or lack of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: "Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place" (v. 14). In other words, there's a certain fragrance that a Christian has, a certain exuding representation of God. We touch the world, as it were, with the fragrance of God. "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other, the savor of life unto life..." (vv. 15-16a).

Paul is saying that Christians, as they preach the gospel, are actually radiating that reality to the saved and the perishing. To the perishing, the message is a fragrance of death unto death. Already

dead in their rejection, the more they hear the gospel, the deeper their lostness becomes. The perishing constantly tread under their feet the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing (Heb. 10:29). That results in an increased deadness. They are compounding their doom, which becomes all the more terrible as they continue to reject the truth. On the other hand, as we preach the gospel to those who are already alive in Christ, we give off a savor of life unto life--an enriched understanding of the fullness of life in Christ.

Jesus is the dividing line, and Matthew makes that abundantly clear in chapters 8 and 9. Matthew wants us to understand that because Christ is the Messiah, a decision must be made. A British school supervisor wrote that the problem with the age we are living in is that we are standing at the crossroads and the signposts have fallen down. But not according to Matthew, because he points them out very clearly and calls us to make the right choice by believing in Christ. In order to help us, he presents irrefutable evidence that Christ is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior. He shows us the narrow way, the way of faith in Christ. To convince us that Christ is who He claims to be, Matthew records nine miracles in chapters 8 and 9 that are beyond the capacity of any human being--not only to do but even to fathom. They are not the full scope of all of His miracles, but are only samples, as John indicates in his gospel: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (20:30). He also said that if His miracles "should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (21:25).

I. THE WORKS OF THE LORD (v. 35)

The verb in the phrase "And Jesus went about" has the idea of a constant, incessant effort. Such an effort would be necessary in order to visit "all the cities and villages" of Galilee, as 4:23 indicates. That area is in the northern part of the country and is relatively fertile. Much of the food was grown there. Josephus tells us that at the time of Jesus there were probably 204 towns and villages. The difference between a city and a village was the existence of a wall in a city. Little villages didn't fortify themselves, but cities did. Galilee was about seventy miles long by forty miles wide. Josephus writes, "The cities are numerous and the multitude of villages everywhere crowded with men, owing to the fertility of the soil, so that the smallest of them contains above 1500 inhabitants." He estimated that there were three million people in just the area of Galilee. For Jesus to have reached them all, He must have moved rapidly through all the villages and towns--healing, preaching, and teaching. Those three ministries would each require a great deal of time to study if taken by themselves, so we will get a brief overview of them. First, let us examine Jesus' ministry of...

A. "Teaching in Their Synagogues"

1. The Place of Teaching

a. The History of Synagogues Wherever there were Jewish people, there was a synagogue. This gathering place was the center of Jewish community life. It was the focal point of religious belief, the town hall, and the local court, among other things. The synagogue was a late addition to Judaism, not appearing until the Babylonian Captivity. Before that time, the worship of the faithful had been focused on the Temple. But when the Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were taken out of their country into Babylon for seventy years, they began to assemble together in synagogues. That practice continues to this day because the Temple has never been rebuilt since its last destruction. Even today, synagogues exist in every city of the world in which there are Jewish people. In the time of our Lord, there were synagogues in all the little towns and villages in Palestine. They were usually built on a hill or the highest spot in the area. If there weren't any high spots, they were built by a river. Very often, their tops were left open as the Temple had been so the people could see God's creation and look up to heaven as part of their worship. The synagogue normally was identified by a tall pole that shot right up into the air, much like the steeple on a New England church marks each little town. Consequently, any Jewish person who was a stranger in town could just follow his way to the pole to

find the synagogue.

b. The Service of Synagogues Every Sabbath, the people would meet together for worship. Services were also held on the second and fifth days of every week, as well as on every festival day. The service was very simple, not unlike the service of the church today. It began with thanksgivings, or "blessings" as they were called, much like a church might begin by singing praises. The people would speak of blessing of the Lord and express thankfulness for what He had done. That was followed by a prayer that was concluded by a responding amen from the congregation. Then a prescribed reader would stand up and read from the law of Moses in the Hebrew, the original language of its writing. He would translate it into Aramaic, the common speech of the day. Next would come a reading of a passage from one of the prophets, which also would be translated. Then there would be a sermon, or an exhortation. The service would close with a benediction and a final amen from the people.

c. The Functions of Synagogues The Jewish people always thought of the synagogue as a place of teaching. In fact, the Yiddish word for synagogue is *schul*, much like our word school. But the synagogue served a variety of purposes. The Jewish people also saw the synagogue as...

- 1) **A Court of Law** The Jewish people resided in occupied countries. They were often granted self-governing jurisdiction by the occupying government. Such authority was exercised in their synagogues. For example, our Lord warned His disciples that the Jewish leaders would scourge them in their synagogues (Mt. 10:17). They would render the verdict and even carry out the punishment in the synagogue.
- 2) **A Theological School** The synagogue was used for training boys in the Talmud, and was, in a sense, a theological school. The affairs of the synagogue were administered by ten of the elders, three of which were identified as rulers. They also acted as judges. A fourth elder was called the messenger of the assembly and served as the leader. One was the interpreter who translated the Hebrew into Aramaic, another ran the theological school, and so forth. In other words, they had divisions of responsibility as elders.
- 3) **A Place for the Exposition of Scripture** Philo said that synagogues were mainly for the detailed reading and exposition of Scripture. We find the same emphasis on the teaching of Scripture in Acts 17. The Apostle Paul found his way to the little town of Berea and "went into the synagogue of the Jews" (v. 10). When he preached to them, "...they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (v. 11). When the sermon was presented on any given day, it could be preached by any leading member of the congregation who was erudite or knowledgeable in Scripture. If there happened to be a visiting dignitary or rabbi, it was customary to let that rabbi preach the sermon. That custom seems almost divinely designed, for it perfectly suited the needs of our Lord and His itinerant preachers as they presented the gospel within the Jewish culture. Jesus, Paul, and others always had access to preaching and teaching in the synagogue.

2. The Pattern of Teaching

The mode of teaching in a synagogue was the exposition of Scripture: they read it, explained it, and applied it. This follows the pattern in Nehemiah when the Levites "read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (8:8). People have asked me why I teach the Bible the way I do, because it is so different from what their church does. But the exposition of Scripture is not anything new. That method has early beginnings and should still be used.

a. Reading the Passage Luke also tells us that Jesus taught in the synagogues (4:15), providing a good illustration of how He did it: "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet, Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (4:16-19). Every person in that synagogue knew that passage referred to the Messiah.

b. Teaching the Passage "And He closed the book, and He

gave it again to the minister, and sat down. [The normal position for teaching] And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (vv. 20-21). In effect, Jesus said, "I am the living fulfillment of that passage. I am the proper interpretation of that text." That was fairly shocking news for them. And after He had said some other shocking remarks, the people in the synagogue were stimulated to respond.c. Responding to the Passage" And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way" (vv.28-30). So Jesus taught in the synagogues by expositing the Word of God. In His case, He was the very application of His teaching. But the people didn't like His interpretation at all, and tried to kill Him. He went through all the villages and cities teaching in the synagogues, although He probably didn't always have to escape for His life. The reason I believe in expository preaching is that it was the method that Jesus used. And I believe that preaching style should still be emphasized when God's people gather together.

The second element to Jesus' ministry was...

B. "Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom"

What does it mean that He was preaching? The Greek word is *kerusso* and means "to herald, to make a public announcement or proclamation." Jesus didn't limit Himself to teaching expositively in the synagogues, He was also out on the street corners, on the hillsides, by the sea, in the houses, along the roadway, and in the fields preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. It was more evangelistic than teaching, and was often directed to those who were outside the religious environment. His message was always the same: good news (which is what gospel means). The good news is that the Kingdom, which the Jewish people had waited so long for, had finally arrived. That was not an exposition of the Old Testament like He was giving in the synagogue. Such preaching was the proclamation of the New Covenant--the unfolding of the mysteries that had been hidden from people in the past. Mention of the Kingdom came up often in His preaching: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God..." (Mt. 6:33). "After this manner, therefore, pray ye:... Thy kingdom come..." (Mt. 6:9-10).

That Kingdom was not just a future one. When He was preaching about the Kingdom, He was calling people to believe in Him. The moment anyone did so, he entered the Kingdom. In the words of Paul, a believer is delivered from the power of darkness, for God has "translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Being born again is an instantaneous transaction. You are in the Kingdom if you're a Christian. Christ is the King who rules the lives of His subjects. He feeds us with the resources of His unlimited riches. So the Kingdom can be entered now through the narrow gate that He spoke of in Matthew 7. He offered entrance into the Kingdom to all who would believe in Him and receive the numerous blessings that accompanied it.

Jesus' exposition of the Old Testament and proclamation of the New Covenant, highlight the importance of having both of those ministries in the church today. We must come together for the exposition of the Word of God, and we must go out into the highways and byways to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom.

Those speaking ministries were verified by the third ministry of...

C. "Healing Every Sickness and Every Disease"

In importance, the use of miracles was third, because it was not the main issue. Jesus' ministry involving miracles merely affirmed the validity of the ministries previously mentioned. B.B. Warfield in *Counterfeit Miracles* said, "When our Lord came down to earth, He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven, which is His home." Miracles proved that the Kingdom was at hand, because they were samples of what the Messiah would do when the Kingdom came. There was no way to refute them. In fact, the Pharisees never denied His miracles; they only denied the source of them. They were literally

overwhelming.

Let's close our thoughts by looking at...

II. THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE (vv. 33b-34)

It doesn't take very long to see what that was. We've already seen some responses: The first three miracles that Matthew recorded in chapter 8 had a response. Three men said they wanted to follow the Lord, but they loved personal comfort, personal riches, and personal relationships more than Christ, so they turned their backs and walked away. They illustrate a superficial interest that never comes to fruition. It is a momentary response of fascination that has no true root to it.

Following the second set of miracles came the responses of Matthew's conversion, the irritation of the Pharisees, and the confusion of the disciples of John the Baptist. There are people like Matthew who really believe in Christ and bring all their friends to Him; there are people like the Pharisees who get irritated at what Jesus says because He confronts the status quo; and there are also people like followers of John the Baptist, who all their lives had been in one religious system and now were confused about the new things that they were hearing.

Now we come to the third set of responses: the multitude marveled at Christ's works, and the religionists rejected them, saying that Jesus did them by the power of Satan. They couldn't deny that He did them; they just denied that their source was God. In Matthew's selection of miracles in chapter 9, he picked out some wonderful miracles. People not only were healed but were also redeemed: the paralytic (v. 2), the publican--Matthew himself (v. 9), the ruler (v. 18), the woman with the issue of blood (vv. 20-21), the blind men (v. 28). So we've seen some with a right response who have really believed along the way. But there will also be those who are fickle, those who are irritated, and those who are confused. In that light, Matthew is calling all of us to make the right decision.

A. The Marveling Multitude (v. 33b)

"...and the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel."

The multitude concluded that the miracles they had seen were, without question, the greatest display of power ever seen by anybody in the history of Israel. They would have remembered Moses, Elijah, and Elisha and the miracles of their times. They could talk about the drowning of the Egyptian Army, the writing of the law in stone at Mount Sinai, the fall of Jericho, and so on. They had heard about wondrous things in the past, but never had anything been seen like Christ's miracles. They were a display of divine power that was unequalled in Jewish history. Is it any wonder they marveled?

1. The Meaning of Their Marveling

The word marvel (Gk. *thaumazo*) is a very comprehensive word. It means that they were amazed or astonished. When accompanied by a prefix (Gk. *ekthaumazo*), the word means "to marvel greatly" as in Mark 12:17. When used with the particle *lian*, it means "to marvel exceedingly." They were amazed beyond amazement at what He did. It was breathtaking and incomprehensible to their human minds to see the things He was doing. They were in awe. The word also includes the idea of terror or fear, as in the case of the disciples who were more afraid when Jesus stopped the storm than they were when the storm was threatening to take their life. They knew they were in a boat with God. When you know that He can see everything in your heart, that has to be terrorizing!

2. The Fickleness of Their Following

Luke 9:43 sums up why Jesus astounded the multitudes: "And they were all astonished at the mighty power of God. But while they marveled every one at all things which Jesus did...." The people were so fascinated with what Jesus was doing that they could make only one conclusion: "And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mt. 21:9). The marveling multitude that threw palm branches at the feet of the One they acknowledged to be the Messiah, is the same multitude that turned against Him when they got word that He was preaching a message

that the establishment didn't want to hear. The same crowd that praised Jesus in Matthew 21 turned around in Matthew 27 and screamed for Him to be crucified and Barabbas to be released (vv. 20-25). But that's how it is with fickle mobs with a superficial fascination. They are like those in John 6 who followed Christ for free food--they really weren't interested in what He had to say. They liked Him at a distance; they were fascinated enough to follow, but afraid of close contact.

Fickle Fascination

I'm amazed how people today are so eager to see movies that scare them to death, even if it means that they have to run out into the lobby during the scary scenes. Why would people line up for blocks to see such movies as *The Exorcist*? There's a certain fascination, I guess, as long as you're sitting in a soft seat, shoving popcorn in your mouth, and can leave when it's over. People don't want to actually experience terror; but it's all right to watch somebody else in it.

In a similar way, I believe there was something of that fascination in people who were terrified of Christ, but were also astounded and amazed at the supernatural. Like those who watch horror movies, they wanted to make sure Jesus remained at an arm's length, but when He challenged the status quo, their fascination ended and they wanted Him dead.

Many people, such as the following, have been in awe of Jesus, but didn't know Him as their Lord, as far as we know. Consequently, they will spend an eternity in hell in spite of the favorable things that they said about Jesus.

Pontius Pilate said He was a man without fault.

Diderot (the French philosopher) said He was the Unsurpassed.

Napoleon (the French emperor) said He was the Emperor of Love.

Strauss (the German theologian and philosopher) said He was the highest model of religion.

John Stuart Mill (the English philosopher and economist) said He was the Guide of Humanity.

Lecky (the Irish historian and essayist) said He was the highest pattern of virtue.

Martineau (the English theologian and philosopher) said He was the Divine Flower of humanity.

Renan (the French philologist and historian) said He was the greatest among the sons of men.

Theodore Parker (an American Unitarian clergyman) said He was the youth with God in His heart.

Robert Owen (the Welsh social reformer) said He was the Irreproachable.

Broadway said He was a Superstar.

People have always thrown kind epithets at Him. In His own day, many said, "What manner of man is this...?" (Mt. 8:27). They didn't have a category for Him. Even in contemporary Christianity there is a fascination with Jesus. People applaud Him. They like Him as long as He's sort of warm and fuzzy, without being confrontive. As long as He is identified with love and sweetness and kept at arm's length, He is a fascinating personality. You can talk about Jesus all you want if you don't confront people with the fact that He condemns men who commit immorality, who cheat or lie, who are homosexuals, adulterers, or fornicators, or who fail to live by God's law. When the fickle find out that Jesus sends those kinds of people to an eternal hell, they're not so thrilled about it all.

As a case in point, I was told by a pastor about some Christian students who were holding a meeting at California State University, Long Beach to affirm the Biblical standards of morality. They had been received fairly well until, at one session on homosexuality, a homosexual faculty member marched down the aisle screaming profanity while the speaker was talking. Afterwards, some of the gay community at that school were spitting on the Christian students. Jesus is okay as long as you don't confront sin.

As soon as the multitude got close enough to find out what Jesus was really saying, their tune changed fast. They discovered that it was not safe to deal with a holy person-- except at an arm's length. Such an attitude was typical of the Pharisees who were always honoring the prophets, but were no better than their forefathers who killed them (Mt. 23:29-35). The only prophet that was alive in Jesus' time was John the Baptist and Herodias had him killed. Similarly, when Jesus became a

threat to the religious leaders, they had Him killed. The crowd kept their distance in a strange fascination, but when they got too close to Him towards the end of Jesus ministry, they joined the category of...B. The Rejecting Religionists (v. 34)

"But the Pharisees said, He casteth out demons through the prince of the demons."

They saw that He had cast a demon out of a man who couldn't hear or speak. They couldn't deny that He had done that; however they attributed His power to the prince of demons. Jesus showed how illogical their conclusion was when He said to them if Satan cast out his own demons, he would be defeating his own purpose (Mt. 12:25-27). Because of their refusal to believe the truth, the Pharisees committed themselves to eliminating Jesus. It is no wonder that Jesus said if they didn't believe Moses and the prophets, they wouldn't believe if somebody miraculously came back from the dead (Lk. 16:31). They sunk to such a tragic depth in their rejection that they made the very opposite conclusion that the miracles were designed to produce.

Both of those kinds of responses are wrong--both will cause those who hold them to end up in hell forever, whether they belong to the hating rejectors who blasphemed and said Jesus was of Satan, or to the multitude that marveled and followed Him in mere fascination. The proper response is to believe and receive Christ, not merely to be fascinated by Him--that's inadequate for salvation.

CONCLUSION

So Matthew has given us a good picture of possible responses to Christ. There are people who say, "I want to be Your disciple. I'm going to follow you, but I've got personal comforts, riches, and relationships now, so I don't think I'd better come yet." Then there are those like Matthew who come immediately and bring friends who are burdened with their sins. There are also angry religionists who start out being irritated, become blasphemers, and ultimately end up as murderers. There are confused people, like the disciples of John the Baptist, who just can't figure out why Jesus did what He did. Maybe they've been raised in a different religion, and they're trying to make sense out of Christianity. Finally, there's a great mass of humanity, that doesn't fit into any of those categories. They are what I call "the marveling multitude." They say, "Jesus is so nice. Christmas and Easter are wonderful. I listen to Jesus pop music all the time." Those superficial followers are content to stand at arm's length and watch Jesus do His thing. But ultimately, they stand with crucifiers screaming for His blood. So mark carefully, beloved, where you make your choice, for Jesus is set for the rise and the fall of many.

Focusing on the Facts

1. When Jesus was brought into the Temple as a baby, what did Simeon declare that Jesus would become (Lk. 2:34)?
2. From a biblical perspective, what are the only two types of people in the world?
3. Although someone has written that we are standing at the crossroads where the signposts have fallen down, Matthew put them up again. How did he do that?
4. Give a brief history of the synagogue.
5. What were some of the functions of the synagogue?
6. Primarily, what were the synagogues used for?
7. Who would normally preach in the synagogues? Who else would be allowed to preach? How does that custom seem divinely designed?
8. Identify and explain the mode of teaching in Nehemiah 8:8.
9. How did Jesus interpret the reading of Isaiah in Luke 4:15-21?
10. How did Jesus' preaching differ from His teaching with regard to place, audience, and content?
11. In what sense is the Kingdom that Jesus was preaching about a present reality?
12. In importance, where do the miracles of Christ stand in relation to His teaching and preaching? Why?

13. Although the Pharisees couldn't deny that Jesus had done miracles, what did they deny?
14. What did the multitudes conclude about the miracles they had seen?
15. What was the crowd's response when Jesus entered Jerusalem in Matthew 21:9? How did they respond a week later in Matthew 27:20-25?
16. Why did the crowd follow Jesus? Why did they, for the most part, avoid close contact?
17. In spite of the favorable things that many people have said about Jesus, why will some of them spend an eternity in hell?
18. Many people think of Jesus as a fascinating personality. But what don't they want to hear?
19. Who did the Pharisees attribute Jesus' power to? Why was this illogical, according to Jesus?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read through the parable from Matthew 21:28-31 on page 3. Which son most closely represents your life? Do you find yourself initially resisting but ultimately obeying, or outwardly agreeing while inwardly refusing to obey? Which response is clearly more pleasing to God, according to the parable? Are you currently living out God's will on a regular basis? Read James 1:21-27. How are you proving yourself to be a doer of the Word? Make a personal commitment to apply the Scripture you receive. Find someone that will hold you accountable to be "an effectual doer" (v. 25; NASB).
2. Sometimes we think that the destiny of those we share Christ with lies solely in our hands. Keep in mind that Christ said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34). Can knowing that He--not us--is the dividing line of people's destiny make our jobs as ambassadors any easier? Why? Are you intimidated to share your faith with others because you fear being personally rejected? Consider yourself to be a tourist who has found the right road and is merely pointing out the signs that show the way to eternal life.
3. If you are truly committed to Christ, then you must realize that you cannot necessarily expect to be a popular person--in spite of what Christianity in the media may lead you to believe. Jesus told the first leaders of Christianity (His disciples) that the world would hate them (Jn. 15:18-19) and even try to kill them, thinking they were doing God a favor (Jn. 16:1-2). Paul told the Corinthians that serving Christ meant that one had to be willing to make sacrifices and suffer persecution (1 Cor. 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 3:12). When was the last time you told someone about the reality of sin and hell and their need for forgiveness? Did you tell him in a spirit of loving concern? Do you think he sensed it? What was his reaction? How would you approach someone who was fascinated with Jesus as opposed to someone who was hostile toward Him? If a person continued to reject the gospel and you therefore chose not to cast your pearls before swine (Mt. 7:6), that doesn't necessarily mean that you have to reject that person as a friend. God may soften his heart. Consistently pray for that individual and be willing to interact with him so that your life can reflect the love of Christ to him.

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