

27.11.16 - MATTHEW 9:18-38 HOW JESUS REALLY SEES US

How do you see yourself as a person? Perhaps as useless, awkward, worthless failures - our self-esteem is chronically low. Perhaps as basically OK - talented, successful, confident, well-liked, not perfect but not bad either. But what if we're better, or worse, than we think? The only way to know what we really look like is to see ourselves as God sees us. That's the self-esteem question that matters more than any other. Matthew's Gospel has been showing us what we look like. In this final passage in this section of Matthew, the image becomes even clearer.

1. We're all desperately sick

Each of these four people are in horrible situations, are completely desperate, and Jesus is their last hope. A synagogue ruler with a dead daughter, abandoning all his pride and throwing himself at Jesus' feet. A woman who has been bleeding for twelve years who doesn't even dare show herself openly to Jesus. Two blind men who cry repeatedly for mercy. A demon-oppressed man who can't even speak. And each of these people were ceremonially unclean, cut off from religious and social life. In 8:1-17 we saw some pretty nasty diseases. But these things are on a different level. Bleeding and blindness, demons and death - a catalogue of horror. But in verse 35 we find that the whole population is in a desperate situation. But they're not just in need of healing. Jesus is also *preaching* to them (see also 4:17). 9:12-13 shows us that sickness is a picture of a much worse disease - sin. So when we see these four people, we are supposed to see how horrible, unclean and desperate our own sin-sickness is. That's how Jesus sees us.

Sin is infinitely offensive because it is a rebellion against an infinitely holy God. It affects every part of our lives and we are totally helpless against its power. As Christians we can make progress in fighting sin, but the disease will always be there, tainting every part of our lives. We see this in the way we disobey God, the way we treat others, the way we love other things more than God, and many other ways. We have to see ourselves as sin-sick. The only alternative is the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, which led them to calling Jesus satanic (verse 34).

2. We're all desperately loved

In verse 36 we read that Jesus also looked on the sin-sick crowds with compassion. We are like sheep who have run from God, the great Shepherd, and we've got ourselves into a total mess. Sin makes us miserable in so many ways, and ultimately we are facing an eternity under God's anger. It's our own fault, but Jesus still pities us in our distress. And his compassion moves him to act. He didn't hesitate to bring healing to each of the four people in our passage. And he shows us compassion by dying on the cross to take the penalty that our sins deserve and to bring us back to God. We are desperately sick, but also desperately loved. This is extraordinary compassion!

If you have a naturally low view of yourself, you may find it hard to believe that Jesus could show you that much compassion, especially if you struggle with a past sin or an ongoing sin, or a feeling of unworthiness. But remember you're actually much worse than you realise! But you're also no worse than anyone else and Jesus sees past your sin and pities you in your distress. If you're not a Christian, he calls you to come in faith (trust), like the people in this passage, and to hear his tender words of acceptance. As Christians we can know that our ugliness is gone forever and he sees us only with love. If you naturally feel OK about yourself, make sure that your pride doesn't stop you seeing the desperation of your situation. Whether you are a Christian or not, you need to "despair of yourself" and find all your sense of worth in Jesus' compassion alone.

3. Will you show love to the sick?

In verse 37-38, Jesus' compassion for all humanity naturally leads to him wanting to send people out to reach out to all those lost souls. If we've learned to see ourselves as desperately sick yet desperately loved, we'll see all other people as equally desperate and desire to extend Jesus' compassion to them. He asks us first to pray for God to raise up "workers" who will spread the good news. But in chapter 10 he also wants Christians to go out themselves (into their workplaces, families and neighbourhoods) to tell desperately sin-sick people of the compassion of Jesus.