

## **Questions Jesus Asked, Part Nine**

***Matthew 9:27-30***

*Matthew 9:2, 18*

1. What does the first part of Jesus' question mean, "Do you believe?"

2. What is the "this" Jesus is referring to?

- *Leviticus 21:20; Isaiah 35:5-6a*

3. Do you believe Jesus is able to \_\_\_\_\_?

- *Matthew 19:16-22*

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### ***Matthew 9:27-30***

Question Jesus Asked: Do You Believe I am Able to Do This?

Have you ever tried “friend dating?” You know, like “speed dating,” but instead of seeking after that “spark” of chemistry between you and that other person, you seek to gain a friend or at least get to know someone better? It’s quite fun. This is a favorite get to know you game we play with our Young Adults at the beginning of the year when we have our Winter Shindig and welcome the graduating seniors to the group. Each person is given a list of questions (roughly 30) and they are given one minute to see how many questions they can get through in that time (though I sometimes extend the time because it’s just so fun to watch each other get on and see the conversations develop beyond the questions listed on the page). Anyways, once the time is up, those on the outside of the circle rotate and the timer starts again. It’s quite funny to watch those who are siblings in the group question each other, as you’d think they would know everything there is to know about one another, but I think they even had some fun learning something about each other too. The point is, this game fosters communication, but going a bit deeper than that, it starts fostering a relationship between two people as they get to know one another.

As I was thinking about this sermon series, I started to think about this game that we play.

As Pastor Mike mentioned Day 1 of this series, there are about 307 questions Jesus asked in the gospels, and there are 183 questions that people ask of Jesus. While it’s not a 1:1 ratio of questions asked by Jesus and proposed to Jesus, we see there is an exchange that is happening, which is the basis for a relationship. In this we see that Jesus is interested in a relationship with us. Jesus could have waited for people to ask him questions and he could answered them without any follow up or continuation of the conversation, but time and time again, Jesus keeps the conversation going and in turn responds and asks *us* a question. As we will see today, Jesus is inviting us into deeper relationships with him as he asks us these questions, but how we respond will determine whether we keep the conversation and the relationship going.

The question Jesus asked that we will look at and respond to today comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9, verses 27-30. At this time, I’d like to ask you, if you’re able, to honor God’s Word by standing as I read it to you.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you”; and their sight was restored. (Matthew 9:27-30)

This, my friends, is the Word of God for the people of God – thanks be to God! Thanks for standing; you can be seated.

Before we get to the question in question today; I want us to understand what had happened just prior to the question Jesus asked these two blind men.

If we look at the beginning of our passage, at verse 27, we see that it starts with the phrase, “As Jesus went on from there....” What does “there” refer to? Where was Jesus coming from? If we go back several verses in chapter 9 to verse 18, we see Jesus is approached by a synagogue leader who kneels before Jesus and asks Jesus to come and heal his daughter who had just died. Jesus goes with him, puts his hand on her and she lives. The “there” in our passage is referring to this scene. But again, if we go back even further, back to the very beginning of Chapter 9, we see another scene where Jesus heals a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus by friends of the paralyzed man. In Matthew 9:2, we read “Jesus saw their faith [the faith of those who brought him the paralyzed man],” and in Matthew 9:18, we read that the synagogue leader knelt at Jesus’ feet and declared that if Jesus came with him and laid his hand on his daughter, she would live. In both scenarios, people believed in Jesus. Faith was a common denominator in these two situations.

When we get to our passage today, Jesus asks these blind men if they believe. This is a bit different than the other healing passages, as Jesus didn’t ask this question of those who approached him. So, when we hear Jesus asking these men, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” we stop and question what Jesus meant. Why was Jesus asking these men this question? Why didn’t Jesus ask the others the same question? So, the question Jesus asked produces more questions for us to ask and for us to also answer for ourselves.

There are three questions I want us to consider and ask of Jesus, and hopefully come to a better understanding of the depth and significance of the question Jesus is asking, and hopefully produce in us even greater faith, or at least an awareness of where our faith stands and a continuation of the conversation with Jesus.

The first question to ask and consider regarding Jesus’ question is this:

## **1. What does the first part of Jesus’ question mean, “Do you believe?”**

I had some fun the other night as I was thinking about this question Jesus asked:

Do you believe I am able to do this?

The more I looked at the question, and the more I thought about the question Jesus was asking, I started to break it apart, and I came across something pretty cool. Go with me for a moment. Now, I’m not huge on Language Arts, I know how to put sentences together and I can identify what’s wrong with a sentence and fix it (I actually love editing papers), but when you start asking me to identify predicates, adjectives, or anything else other than a noun or a verb, don’t expect much. So, for the purposes of my illustration, I’m going to refer to Jesus’ question in “parts.” If we look at the first part of the question, we see that it could actually be a standalone question.

If we moved the question mark to after the word ‘Believe,’ it would read:

Do you believe?

If we look at Jesus' question like this, we see that Jesus is not only asking if the two blind men believe he is able to do the thing they are asking of Jesus, but he is first and foremost asking them if they believe.

Although we may think that as we hear these men shout and call out, "Son of David, have mercy on me," these men are believers in Jesus, Jesus wasn't too sure. The name, "Son of David," was popular at the time, and it's almost always employed in the gospels among crowds or by those who knew Jesus at a distance and thought Jesus was this militant Messiah who would come to free the Jews and lead them to power and conquest.<sup>1</sup>

I think we remember from sermons past, that when people thought of a Messiah, this is the type of Messiah they were expecting. They weren't expecting a Messiah who was all about loving others and bringing the kingdom here on earth through peace, love, *his own suffering and death*, and employing disciples who were lowly fishermen or maybe (do I dare say it?), tax collectors, the "sinners" of the day, to continue the work. So, when these blind men come to Jesus using this phrase, it's a bit of a red flag. Was this something they were shouting but didn't really mean? Were they just joining in with the rest of the crowd that was shouting the same thing and thought it good fun to join in?

It's really easy to get caught up in the crowd and go with the flow, to do the "popular" thing, but it's important that we often check ourselves and see whether we're just going through the motions (going to church, going to youth group, volunteering at events or serving on ministry teams) because we ought to or because everyone else is or because it's a fun thing to do, or whether we really are seeking after a relationship with Jesus in these things that we are doing and spending our time doing. If we are, that's great, but if not, I encourage us to keep going to these things, because each and every thing we do here at church gives us a chance to encounter God, but put a little more thought and intention into it and see what comes about.

Looking back to our passage now, Jesus takes these men inside the house to inquire of what their shouts mean. Jesus takes them away from the crowd, away from other people, and meets with them in private. Jesus strips away all the commotion, all the noise and emotion and meets them where they are and as they are. Jesus takes away any distraction that gets in the way of them and him and asks them if they believe. What a bold question. I can only imagine being a recipient in that situation, standing face to face with Jesus as he asks me if I believe. I would imagine it being a bit intimidating. But guess what? Jesus is asking me and all of us that same question too.

Jesus has approached me and asked me if I believe at multiple times throughout my life. Many of these times I often do feel blind, as Jesus is asking me to go places or do things that I have no idea how it will all turn out. For instance, all the moves I have made in the last eight years of my life have had to be based on pure trust and faith in God. When I moved from Nampa to Kansas City for seminary, I was moving with the belief that God had called me there, but I went with no job lined up and knowing no one. When Dan and I moved from Kansas City to here, we moved again with the belief God had called us here, but we moved with no job lined up for me and no idea on how we would financially make it work for us. But in both scenarios, God provided more than enough. In Kansas City, I quickly made

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Matthew: Vol 1*, 349.

friends who were best friends with Dan (so that's how we both got connected), and I got a really great job that I still miss today, because I made really great friends there, a month after moving. Here in Yakima, I was able to start working as a parapro substitute in the school district, which worked out nicely as I had weird hours that I had to be online for school (as Dan and I were finishing up seminary at the time we moved), so this job enabled me to work when I could and wanted. Eventually, I was able to be hired on as your Guest Services and Young Adult Pastor, and to this day, it's something that Dan and I look back on and see how faithful God has been to us. I knew none of this would happen, but I (and we, Dan), had to believe and trust that God was calling us to go.

I share this testimony not only because it provides a good example of what we're talking about here with the question of "Do you believe" and what can happen when you trust and say yes, Lord, I believe, but hopefully it acts as an encouragement to you. Our testimonies of how God has worked is so important to share so we can continually be encouraged in our faith. While we do have to answer for ourselves whether we believe, we need that second blind man next to us. We need other brothers and sisters to keep encouraging us on this journey, but we also need time alone to be able to hear Jesus ask us, "Do you believe."

The second question to ask and consider regarding Jesus' question is this:

## **2. What is the "this" Jesus is referring to?**

Looking at the question in full now, Jesus is asking whether the men believe he is able to do "this."

At first glance, it's pretty obvious what the "this" refers to. We have two blind men who are coming to Jesus, and with where this scene appears in this chapter, following two healing occurrences, we assume Jesus is asking if they believe he is able to heal them by restoring their sight.

Back in the day in Palestine, blindness was very common and was a very distressing disease. "It came partly from the glare of the eastern sun on unprotected eyes, and partly because people knew nothing of the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. In particular, the clouds of unclean flies carried infections which led to loss of sight."<sup>2</sup> Because blindness oftentimes came upon people due to a lack of cleanliness, blindness didn't just have physical ramifications for people, but spiritual ones as well.

In the Old Testament, being without sight meant that someone was impure, unclean, defiled. In Leviticus 21:20 when the Lord spoke to Moses about Aaron's offspring and who can/cannot enter the Holy of Holies, those who are blind are listed among those with defects who are not allowed to offer food, approach the curtain or the altar, and thereby desecrate it. But Isaiah has good news for those who are blind, lame, mute, and deaf. We find in Isaiah 35 that God "will establish a highway called "the Way of Holiness" and "the unclean will not journey on it." On this highway Isaiah prophesies:

"The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy." (Isaiah 35:5-6a)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 349.

“Jesus healing these two blind men now fulfills Isaiah’s promise of establishing his holiness now, as opposed to an undefined time in the future, in the lives of what the establishment have written off as ‘unclean.’”<sup>3</sup> Jesus is not just asking, do you believe I can make you physically see, but do you believe I can restore you, make you clean, pure, new?

This is what Jesus came to do. While the physical benefits were nice, Jesus was more concerned about complete, whole, healing and restoration. Namely, restoring us to a right relationship with God by way of the cross. Jesus took the things that we needed healing from, the sin in our lives and died to it, once and for all. Romans 5:8-9 says it well that:

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” (Romans 5:8-9, niv)

This, my friends, is the good news of the gospel. Here we see that even while we were still sinners, even while we were still blind to Christ, we were and are justified by Christ’s death on the cross, and we will be saved through him. But it all goes back to Jesus’ question when he’s alone with those blind men: Do you believe? And, do you believe I am able to do this? Do you believe I am able to heal you? Do you believe I am able to make you new?

The third question to ask and consider regarding Jesus’ question is directed towards us:

### **3. Do you believe Jesus is able to \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the blank)**

Don’t worry. It’s not an “oops” we forgot to insert words moment. KJ wouldn’t let that happen. ☺ I intentionally left this one blank for YOU to fill in.

Pastor Mike mentioned during the first sermon these questions Jesus asked are for us to answer too. We are participants when we read scripture. Scripture is the living, breathing, word of God that speaks to us today. Sure, we may not be blind and need healing physically, but maybe we are blind to something else. Maybe we’re blind to really, truly knowing who Jesus is and what it means for us to follow him. Maybe we’re blind to really knowing that Jesus can take us where we are, right this very moment, despite the past we may have, and make something beautiful out of it.

So, what would you fill in the blank?

What is Jesus asking you? Maybe he’s asking you:

Do you believe I am able to heal you?

Do you believe I love you and you *are* loved?

Do you believe I will be with you?

Do you believe I am enough?

These questions are questions we struggle to answer, and that’s okay. It’s okay to wrestle with our faith, to test our faith and see where perhaps our faith isn’t so strong so that we can grow in our faith. But when we approach Jesus, we need to be ready for what Jesus asks

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<sup>3</sup> NBBC, *Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 150.

of us, which will come about more so when we believe and trust in Jesus. We see an example of what happens when we believe but aren't ready to really be all in with Jesus.

In Matthew 19:16-22, a rich and wealthy man with lots of resources and possessions comes up to Jesus and asks him what good thing he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with a question in verse 17 and the exchange goes like this:

“Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man had heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Matthew 19:16-22)

From the response to Jesus' answer, it's obvious this man was expecting Jesus to give him some sort of task he can do rather than JUST believing and living like Jesus, because he goes away sad after saying he has kept these commandments but doesn't want to sell all his possessions. He's not bought in with Christ, though he's bought in with worldly goods and things. Jesus is just not enough for him. He's not ready to be all in.

Are you ready to be all in?

A few weeks ago, some of our young adults got together and floated the Yakima River. Cindy Hilyard came and brought along her daughter, Kylie. As we were all getting the floats into the river, all of us adults were complaining about how cold the water was. It was pretty cold. Freezing maybe. But Kylie was the only one out of the group who wasn't complaining. I gave her a lot of props. Then, as we barely got on our way floating down the river, Kylie was asking if she could jump in and swim in the freezing cold water. Me, remembering the last time I floated and jumped in and being SUPER cold that my teeth were chattering, I remained quiet as not to burst her excitement or stop her from jumping in, though I for one, was not going to jump in. Once she got the okay from Cindy, she hopped right in.

Kylie was ready to jump in and be all in. She didn't take time to think about all that would happen after jumping in, whereas me, I'm sitting in my floatie asking all sorts of questions: How cold is it really, is it really THAT cold, how cold will I be once I get in, will I be freezing like last time, how fast will I get warm again after getting out, will I regret it or will I enjoy it? All these questions went through my brain and in the meantime, Kylie is having a heyday in the water. Kylie was ready to be all in. I wasn't.

I think this is what can keep us from being all in with Jesus, trusting fully in him and believing in him. We're not ready to be uncomfortable, to give up control of a situation, or give up our possessions, our lifestyle, our reputation with friends, maybe even our friends to be all in. Maybe we're still holding onto our floatie, dipping our feet in the water, but not willing to go all in.

If we look back at my illustration earlier of the breakdown of Jesus' question:

Do you believe I am able to do this?

...we find some hope and reassurance from Jesus himself, letting us know that we can trust him, that he is in fact enough and able to help us be all in and not be scared to be all in.

When we moved the question mark from the end to the middle after “believe,” we had a shorter question of

Do you believe? I am able to do this

However, when we move the question mark, we now need to fix the ending. We can't just leave it without any punctuation, so what would happen if we inserted a period after “this”? The last half would read as a statement:

Do you believe? I am able to do this.

And if we put it altogether, it would read:

Do you believe? I am able to do this.

Jesus is able. Do you believe? Are we truly believing or are we just calling out and not really expecting or believing Jesus to help? Are we still searching for something we have to do to attain the thing we want like the man who asked Jesus what good thing he must do to inherit eternal life because there's a part of us that doesn't believe faith in Him is enough or we're still holding on so tightly to our worldly goods that make us feel good? If we're not, why not? Jesus is asking us if we believe, and if we believe he is able to help us, and we need to answer that for ourselves, just like the blind men did. If our response is yes, then perhaps the next question to ask is whether we're living like we believe it. Does the way I live reflect my faith in God? Does the way I pray reflect my faith in God?

My small group has been going through a devotional in the Bible App, and ironically, it fit well with what I was planning to talk about today. It's called, “Dangerous Prayers.” It talks about praying boldly and praying with faith. It challenges us to pray beyond blessing our burgers and fries and praying more so with gusto and faith. But it also challenges us to pray simply and to be ready for God to respond. I shared with my group that I ended up praying a prayer one night that was pretty simple, but one that I was really trusting God with. Phoebe had been sleeping okay for a newborn. The past few weeks she was doing really well with sometimes five hour stretches, but then all of a sudden, when we would lay her down, a few minutes later she would let out this loud cry that was almost screaming for help. It was distressing and sad and frustrating for us as her parents, because we couldn't seem to do anything to help. At around half past midnight one night, I started praying for God to help her get some sleep and for her to be okay. It may not have seemed like a bold prayer, but I prayed with faith and hope in God to help her feel better, and I realized an hour later as she was settling down that God had used me to help coax her down and get some sleep, even if it meant that I had to stay awake until 2am. Sometimes praying bold prayers often move us to do things we'd not rather do, but we have the reassurance when we believe in God that he is able to help us and will be with us.

As we end today, we're going to practice praying boldly. I'll give us a few moments to pray some things that perhaps God has laid upon your heart. Maybe you ask God to heal you in a way that makes sense to you. Maybe you ask God to restore a relationship in your life. Maybe you ask God to redeem a situation. Whatever it is, may you approach God knowing and believing that he is able. After a few moments, I'll lead us together in the Lord's prayer,



which could arguably be one of the boldest prayers to pray as we pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will, not our will, be done.

Let's pray.

Let us pray together...

Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On Earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom  
and the power  
and the glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.

I'm not sure where your faith is today. I hope that you've been challenged and your faith has been strengthened, or at least helped you see where your faith stands (whether it be little or large). As we go out today, may this word from James 1:2-4 encourage you:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)