

Matthew 8:1-17

The Joy of Divine Interruptions

As we come back to our passage in Matthew this morning, I wanted to tell you that what happened last week was a divine interruption. I had certain plans for a sermon last week but God stopped me and said no, this is what I want to do. So we did it.

God is like that isn't He? He will stop us from time to time and redirect our steps. We will talk about that more here in a minute. This morning though we want to look a little bit more at the healing ministry of Jesus.

Throughout the book of Matthew we will see Jesus heal people time and time again and in many ways. We will not stop and look at each one as we come to it but this morning we are going to do a overarching look at His ministry as a whole. Let me pull out just a couple of verses from our passage this morning to think about.

Matthew 8:3, “ Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him (the leper), saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

Matthew 8:13, “And Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.’ And the servant was healed that very moment.”

Matthew 8:14-15a, “When Jesus came into Peter’s home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her...”

This was Jesus. In His compassion and love for people, He constantly was healing them, ministering to them and teaching them. Healing the masses is why Jesus came to earth. When answering the question from John the Baptist if Jesus was the Expected Messiah, Jesus answered.

Matthew 11:5, "...the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

Jesus came to bring salvation from the people's physical ailments but we know He also came to bring salvation from their sins and to bring them into an eternal life with Him in heaven.

Jesus' ministry of helping people in need was an extension of God His Father's work. In the Old Testament you can read about God's interaction with the people He created and the people He loved. In a great move of compassion and desire to be in relationship with people, God had Moses build something unique. The Ark of the Covenant.

The Ark of the Covenant was the centerpiece of the tabernacle and temple where God would reside on earth and where worship of God would occur.

If you are familiar with the Ark, you know that it contained a couple of items. The commandments Moses was given on Mount Sinai, Aarons' staff which had budded and some manna. All items which were a reminder of God's great power, mercy and covenant relationship with His people. We could spend a couple of sermons talking about the Ark of the Covenant but the one thing it is important for us to remember is, it was a sign of the Covenant God had made with His people.

Now on the top of the box of the ark God asked Moses to design a specific type of lid. You can read about it in Exodus 25. This lid was made of pure gold and had two images of cherubim which were one of the highest of the angelic beings. They were to face each other in a bowed position with their wings spreading across the center of the lid. In this place, the place I have marked in this picture, this was called the mercy seat. It was a place where God would come down from heaven and visit and speak to Moses.

Exodus 25:22, “There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.”

This is also the place where God received the blood offering for the forgiveness of sins for the people of Israel and those who were worshipping God with them.

Leviticus 16:15-16a, “Then he (the residing priest) shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil...and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. He shall make atonement (compensation for a wrong or injury, in this case the sins of the people) for the holy place, because of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins...”

During the days before Jesus, God was making a way where there was no way. He was making a way for an unholy, sinful people to be in saving and ongoing relationship with a holy God. Love was His motivation. He wanted, desperately wanted to be involved in the lives of the people who He created and the only way to do this was to have them offer up a sacrifice and place a portion of that sacrifice on the mercy seat.

Mercy seat. That is quite a descriptive term isn't it? A place where God's mercy could be found.

And this mercy didn't happen just for one or two individuals but for the whole nation of Israel and anyone who identified with Israel and worshipped the God of Israel. It is a powerful, powerful place and event that occurred once a year.

1. The mercy seat, God's love on display

Picture the nation of Israel by the thousands, hundreds of thousand as they would gather around the tabernacle once a year during this great ceremony. I imagine a hush would fall on the crowd as the priest would enter into the holy of holies and offer up the sacrifice on the mercy seat. When the priest would come out of the tabernacle I bet there was a sigh of relief and a great celebration would occur. The people were forgiven and in right standing with their God.

Now I want to shift gears for just a second and we will come back to this.

As you read the account of Jesus' life and ministry, you will see that He was interrupted many, many times. He was heading in a certain direction, had His eyes set on the next town and someone, a demon possessed man, a centurion with a sick servant, a blind or lame person would come before Him, interrupting His journey with a need.

As you have seen in the first few verses of Matthew 8, Jesus was interrupted but He didn't mind. He took time to minister to and heal the person who was in front of Him. If they asked Him to come to their home to see their servant, daughter or someone else, Jesus was willing to journey however far it took to reach that person who needed His touch.

2. In a way, Jesus lived to be interrupted

When we read about all the interruptions Jesus experienced on earth we must not forget the biggest interruption Jesus experienced and that was when He was in heaven and His Father asked Him to leave heaven, to be born of a woman and to be the all-time sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

Read with a me my re-write of **Romans 3:23-25a**. “**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (All are deserving of God's judgement. But God, though His love for us) displayed the blood of His Son Jesus to be the propitiation for us.**”

Definition: Propitiation in Greek means an atoning victim, the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat.

So we see that

3. Jesus became the Mercy Seat of God

Everything God is, everything He wants to do for His people, salvation, growth in holiness, blessings of every kind in this life and the next life, is found in Jesus for He is our Mercy Seat before the God of the universe.

As such, as our Mercy Seat, Jesus continues to lives to be interrupted. He knows we live in fallen world. He knows we will experience trials, temptations and tragedies of many kinds just like He did during His stay of earth. He is in heaven as our mercy seat and He is waiting for us to come to Him, seeking mercy, grace and strength in our times of trouble.

In fact, not only does Jesus wait on us to come to Him, but He even allows certain things to come into your life just so you will come to Him. He creates divine interruptions in your life so you can come and interrupt Him which really isn't an interruption for Him is it?

4. How does Jesus create divine interruptions? Many ways

a. Maybe you are reading His word and all of a sudden a light comes on

You have great insight into what Jesus was teaching. The Holy Spirit grabs you and you know that you know that this is from God. You know what you just read is for you in this moment. I would say to you when this occurs, stick with it, stick with that particular scripture. Exhaust it, memorize it, hang with it and let it hang with you. Put it on a 3x5 card. You have just received a divine interruption into your life from the hand of Jesus, straight from His mercy seat. You are blessed.

b. Maybe you hear something in a sermon

from me or someone else. Same thing, grab ahold of it until Jesus says you can let it go.

c. Maybe it is in a song, a prayer, a devotional

or the many other ways Jesus speaks.

Or maybe,

d. Maybe it is a difficult circumstance you are facing

How many of you are facing or have faced a difficult circumstance that you are not sure what to do with? Guess what? Your mercy seat, Jesus is waiting for you to come to Him so He can guide you. Take advantage of Him. The people during Jesus' day did. It didn't matter what Jesus was doing at the moment they would yell at Him, chase Him down, whatever it took to get the healing or answer they were looking for. I will tell you Jesus loves it when this occurs.

Maybe you are working in your yard like David Herbstman was when he was interrupted by Jesus. David has been dealing with the ever present sandburs and this is what he heard and what he wrote.

Sandburs are a nightmare for your lawn. They disguise as crabgrass so it seems relatively harmless. However, as the summer progresses, they grow tall and produce seedpods that if stepped on or mowed over, transport easily. This leads to more sandburs each and every year. How do you remove sandburs? Weed killer seems to not do the trick. Mowing, no. You need to get in their root system and pull them out. So, what's the point?

We all have sandburs in our life. They could be bad habits, addictions, anxieties, insecurities and more. Sandburs spread and root easily. Mowing over them only temporarily camouflages them. If we don't get into the roots and pull them out, they still exist in our lives. Sometimes getting deep into the roots is difficult, emotional, challenging...but it can also be life-changing.

A healthy, happy lawn is cared for with the removal of sandburs. A healthy, happy life is cared for by digging into the roots and working to remove the toxicity. What are the sandburs in your life? Have you considered digging them out? What supports can you lean on to help find the sandburs in your lawn?

Who would ever thought that Jesus could speak through sandburs? Jesus did and He knew what David needed to hear. The thing was though David was available to be interrupted by Jesus in the moment. For this, David was blessed. He can now go to the mercy seat and ask Jesus, what are my sandburs and how can you remove them from me.

This is one of the ways divine interruptions can take place in our lives. Jesus has an agenda for you life and it is to help you grow into a person like Him. A person who is full of love, compassion, forgiveness, grace and mercy.

Other means of divine interruptions in your life could be

e. Maybe it is a change of circumstances

An unexpected change of a job. A change in your family dynamics. A bout with a sickness.

Jesus interrupted my schedule last week. He slowed me down and put me in a place where I cant run right now. It is frustrating for me, and frustrating for Michal dealing with me, but in reality, I have had more

time to read the Bible and a couple of other spiritual books I wanted to read. Jesus in ministering to me in this time of what I would consider an interruption. But is it? Is it really an interruption or is it a blessing?

How about

f. Maybe when something or someone comes into your life demanding some time, some understanding, some forgiveness?

This can easily be viewed as an interruption right? But might it be Jesus calling?

Michal and I had this happen a couple of weeks ago. A woman traveling in a van ended up in our parking lot and it required a lot of work for a lot of people to help her get back on the road. I was in a time crunch to get moved out of the shop across the street and to help her was difficult but I did.

And you know what? It was amazing to see how God worked through me, Michal and a couple of other people to minister to this young woman. I have no doubt that she will be forever changed by the kindness and generosity of God's people. In fact, Michal has been receiving texts from her, keeping her updated on her journeys.

What can seem like an interruption in our lives by others can easily just be an opportunity for Christ to work like He always has. But now, He is working through you.

5. Jesus uses ME to bring people to the experience the mercy seat which is Jesus

Jesus, the mercy seat of God, healed and touched people in many ways but He didn't keep this ministry to Himself.

Look at these scriptures.

Luke 9:1-2a, “And He (Jesus) called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out...”

Luke 10:1, “Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him...”

Jesus, the mercy seat, gave others the opportunity to be the mercy seat as well. They couldn't forgive the sins of the people like Jesus did but they could bring them into the presence of Jesus so He could minister to them.

This occurs everyday in our lives if we think about it. How many times do we have the opportunity to be in the mercy seat with the people we do life with?

How many times does your spouse, your children, your co-workers do something that interrupts you in some way. They do something that steals your peace, changes the direction of your thinking or maybe even your plans for the rest of the day or week.

This is a great time for you to stop and think what Jesus has done, is doing and will do for you every time you interrupt Him. He is your mercy seat.

Ephesians 2:6, “(God) raised us up and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”

You now, get to be like Jesus in a way and be the mercy seat for others. You can be judge, jury and executioner of people but how much healthier for you and for others if you are the one who shares only mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

Divine interruptions. They are for all of us. They are for us to show the mercy of Jesus to people who are struggling in the moment in their own way. They are opportunities for us to grow and become more like Jesus.

I believe it is important for us today to ask Jesus, our Mercy Seat, to help the noise of the world to be quieted in our hearts and in our minds. To help us to see and respond to all of those divine interruptions that He brings and allows to come into our lives. To help us be merciful like Him.

This world doesn't need more noise, it needs more Jesus.
Let's pray for ourselves to be representatives of the mercy seat of God.