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COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN EXAMINATION OF FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

BY

JAMES C. ABNEY

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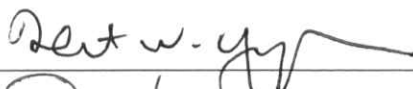
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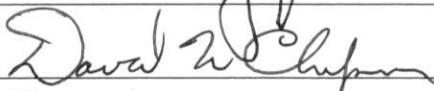
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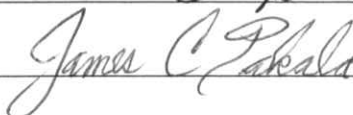
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ABSTRACT OF
AN EXAMINATION OF FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

by James Abney

In several passages in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus appears to teach that believing prayer gets whatever it asks for. What Jesus meant by these statements and how Matthew expected his audience to apply these statements is an important but neglected area of NT scholarship. In this thesis I review several scholarly works on faith in the Synoptic Gospels. Then I use redaction and literary criticism to examine how Matthew presents petitionary faith in his gospel. For those seeking help, faith is coming to those God has authorized to perform miracles trusting that God can work through them. Great faith is a belief for incredible things, an especially deep trust, and perseverance in trial. However, great faith is not required. Any amount of faith is enough, provided no doubt is present. For those authorized to heal, namely Jesus' disciples addressed in Matthew 10, faith is confident trust in God's care for them and his willingness to work through them. To have been authorized to work miracles and yet waver in confidence is called "little faith," which renders faith ineffective. In the conclusion to this thesis I suggest further areas for further study. An important question that is yet unanswered is how faith applies once those authorized to perform miracles are no longer physically present. A key to solving this conundrum is understanding the different ways Matthew and Mark present Jesus' teachings on the power of faith to determine how broadly Jesus' teaching on faith can be applied--the apostles only or to the church to some extent.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE NEED FOR STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This work examines how faith is used in the Gospel of Matthew. Because of the influence the Apostle Paul has had on Christian thought, faith as acceptance of the gospel message is usually emphasized in modern Christian thought. Without wanting to take anything away from Paul's use of faith language, I want to explore the way Jesus used faith terminology as well as how Matthew presents miracle stories demonstrating faith. Of particular interest are Jesus' statements where he appears to teach that believers can get whatever they ask if they have faith. For example, in Matthew 17:20 Jesus says, "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."¹ This is a strong statement when taken at face value, and one that many find too incredible to believe. This thesis considers how Jesus expected his disciples and the early church to understand and apply this teaching and others like it.

1.2 Review of Scholarship on Faith in the Synoptic Gospels

I will begin by reviewing scholarly works that focus on faith in the Synoptic Gospels.² In *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, Christopher D. Marshall seeks to put faith forward as a major theme of Mark's Gospel and to explicate its meaning. He accomplishes this through a combination of redaction and narrative criticism. This method of study appears to be so profitable that it is used in this thesis as well. After analyzing Mark's miracle stories and faith sayings, Marshall concludes that Mark makes

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² As this is a Master's level work, German and French scholarship will not be referenced.

no separation between kerygmatic faith, defined as "believing acceptance of Jesus' proclamation of the dawning kingdom," and petitionary faith, defined as "the concrete act of believing trust required of those who seek the operation of kingdom power."³ Those with kerygmatic faith are to demonstrate petitionary faith, and those demonstrating petitionary faith are said to partake of "the full experience of salvation proffered in the kerygma."⁴ Marshall believes that the ultimate object of this faith is God, specifically God working through Jesus. This faith, combined with repentance, is the condition required for participation in the kingdom of God. In fact, "Mark seems to conceive of God's kingly power as carrying an inherent disposition towards receptive faith, so that saving power is never withheld from those with real faith."⁵ Marshall tempers this a bit by saying that certain faith likely requires an awareness of divine commissioning and a perception of God's will for a given situation.⁶ While Marshall may be correct here, this assertion is unsatisfying as it does not appear to be suggested by Mark's Gospel itself. Also it raises the question of how one could ever have faith unless he or she received a prophetic word about every situation where faith is required.

Graham Twelftree has called Heinz Joachim Held's *Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories* "the bench mark for all subsequent discussion and understanding of the miracles in Matthew."⁷ According to Held, Matthew has retold the story of Jesus' miracles to emphasize the themes of Christology, faith, and discipleship. The two miracles stories in Mark's Gospel left out by Matthew, Mark 7:31-27 and 8:22-26, do not

³ Christopher Marshall, *Faith As a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 228-229.

⁴ Ibid., 230.

⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁶ Ibid., 168.

⁷ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 102.

speak to these themes and so do not advance Matthew's purpose in writing.⁸ These stories serve to instruct the Church "on the nature and the promise of suppliant faith, instruction which a Church in danger of little faith and doubt needed."⁹ This is done "to show the Church by means of the picture of the earthly Jesus who her Lord is and what provision she may expect from him."¹⁰ Concerning faith, Held refers to faith in Matthew as "praying faith," by which he means faith that actively seeks God's help. This kind of faith, provided it is not polluted by doubt, is always answered. Held presents a strong sense of continuity between the ministry of Jesus, the apostles, and the church of Matthew's day. For Held, the example of Peter and the other apostles function, not as historical anecdotes of unrepeatable special cases, but as models for the Church's own ministry.

Graham Twelftree follows a similar approach to Held's work, but with more modest conclusions. In *Jesus: The Miracle Worker*, Graham Twelftree spends a chapter discussing the miracles of Jesus in Matthew. Here he defines faith in Matthew's Gospel as "a practical confidence in Jesus' ability and willingness to heal, expressed in the sufferer's willingness to give practical expression to their confidence."¹¹ In many ways this matches the views of Marshall and Held. His inclusion of "willingness to heal" is likely a sticking point for many scholars. Trust in Jesus' authority and character is one thing, but confidence in his willingness has implications far beyond these, particularly if one understands Matthew to be writing to instruct the church about faith, as Twelftree does.

⁸ Heinz Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, eds. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, Heinz Joachim Held (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 210.

⁹ Ibid., 297.

¹⁰ Ibid., 299.

¹¹ Twelftree, 122.

Although Twelftree believes that Held's work is the benchmark for the study of miracles in Matthew, he believes that Held emphasizes the faith theme too much.¹² Instead, Twelftree prioritizes the teachings of Jesus over his miracles, and believes Matthew reports the miracles primarily out of Christological concerns. A more extensive discussion of Jesus' difficult sayings in Matthew 17:20 and 21:21-22 would have been helpful. While I appreciate how Twelftree presents them at face value, he does not instruct the reader on how Matthew meant his audience to understand these passages. Likewise, because he refers to the apostles primarily as disciples, it is hard to tell how much Twelftree believes Jesus' teaching and example serve as a model for non-apostolic disciples, particularly when he chastises Luz for referring to "little faith" passages as lessons in miracles for the church.¹³

The subtitle of David Crump's book *Knocking on Heaven's Door* is "A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer." The first chapter is particularly relevant to the present study as Crump considers Jesus' teaching that prayer with faith will receive whatever it asks. Unfortunately, he only examines the cursing of the fig tree in Mark 11.¹⁴ Crump spends one paragraph examining the meaning of faith, defining it as the belief that "with him all things are possible," which is different from the definitions quoted above.¹⁵ Likewise he spends little time examining the relationship between faith and doubt and the

¹² This partially appears to be a misunderstanding by Twelftree. On page 141 he claims Held understands faith to be the "only factor determining transmission of any story." This is not the case. In the reference cited by Twelftree, Held says the faith theme determined the transmission of *two* of the miracle reports, and does so within the context of laying out the three themes which he believes determined Matthew's transmission: Christology, faith, and discipleship. See Held, 178.

¹³ Twelftree, 386 n. 180. Matthew, of course, primarily refers to the apostles as disciples as well so I am not faulty his use of that term as much as the lack of explanation of what he means by that term.

¹⁴ Crump initially mentions Matthew 17:19-20/Mark 9:28-29, Luke 17:5-6, and Matthew 21:21-22 also. David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 22-23.

¹⁵ Crump, 34. The passages Crump sites, Mark 10:27 and 14:36, are merely instances where Jesus says that all things are possible for God. In neither case was Jesus speaking about faith.

meaning of little faith. These drawbacks, combined with the limited scope of his analysis, make his conclusion that "there is no blanket promise, no faith formula, to guarantee God's granting any and every petition *if only* the one praying will *believe*" unconvincing.¹⁶ While I appreciate Crump's pastoral approach to the study of petitionary prayer, his conclusion about Jesus' teachings on faith appears to be based more on history and experience than on exegesis.

Rudolph Bultmann in his article on the πιστ- word-group in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* provides an extensive review of faith language from the classical period through the end of the New Testament period. During the classical period, Bultmann defines πίστις as "confidence" and "trust" and πιστεύω as "to trust" and "to rely on."¹⁷ When considering the NT and early Christian writings Bultmann asserts that πίστις and πιστεύω keep the same formal meaning as in the classical period, with the incorporation of the semitically influenced idea of believing in or on.¹⁸ Under the section "As to Trust," Bultmann asserts that faith is confidence in God's help, and later says that πίστις sometimes means "the confident belief of prayer which does not doubt."¹⁹ This agrees with Held's definition discussed above. Bultmann believes, however, that πιστεύω most often means "acceptance of the kerygma about Christ."²⁰ This is a helpful and important study, though further discussion of faith in the Synoptic Gospels would have

¹⁶ Crump, 38.

¹⁷ Rudolph Bultmann, "Πιστεύω κτλ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 6:176-177.

¹⁸ Ibid., 203-204.

¹⁹ Ibid., 206.

²⁰ Ibid., 208

been helpful. Out of the approximately twenty-four pages Bultmann spends on the NT, the majority of the Synoptic references are found in a single paragraph.²¹

While Bultmann gives little space to the discussion of petitionary faith in the Synoptic Gospels, Ceslas Spicq in his entry in the *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* on πίστις gives none.²² While there is varied and rich use of faith language in Paul, John, and Hebrews, it seems unwise to seek to understand faith in the NT and early Christianity without giving a proportionate place to Jesus and the Synoptic authors' teaching on faith.

Barth spends much more time on faith in the Synoptics than Bultmann or Spicq. He agrees with Bultmann that faith in the Synoptic gospels is "trust which one puts into practice."²³ He later adds that faith is the "acceptance of the salvation proclamation of God's action in Christ."²⁴ Like Held, Barth believes faith that receives miracles is praying faith; it is active. Unlike the surrounding culture and later Christian tradition, where miracles led to faith, Barth points out that in the Synoptic gospels faith precedes miraculous activity. He then goes on to consider faith language in the rest of the New Testament, giving appreciable discussion to each section.

1.3 The Way Forward

While there are several excellent studies on the subject of faith in the Synoptic Gospels, and on faith in Matthew in particular, it is clear that more work needs to be done. In this study, the focus will be on faith, not miracles. The model used by

²¹ Ibid., 206.

²² Ceslas Spicq, "Πίστις," in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:110-116.

²³ Gerhard Barth, "Πίστις, εως, ή," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:93.

²⁴ Ibid.

Christopher Marshall in *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* is used in this thesis. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of this study and examine the structure of Matthew's Gospel. This is relevant, because Matthew appears to have arranged his Gospel in a deliberate way that affects how the individual passages are understood. The following two chapters will examine each passage where petitionary faith is recorded by Matthew and summarize what they teach us about faith. In the final chapter I will take this understanding of faith and return to the wider question of how Jesus' seemingly open-ended promises should be understood. Because this requires an understanding of other subjects such as authority, discipleship, prayer, and the will of God, I will not be able to make firm, practical solutions, rather I will be in a position to suggest fruitful areas for further study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW

2.1 Methodology

The approach to this study must fit the goals of this study, which are to understand Matthew's presentation of faith in his gospel, particularly Jesus' statements about faith in chapters 17 and 21. It must provide a faithful reading of the text and not fancifully imagine things that are not there. It also must correspond to my strengths. I have no training in form or tradition criticism; attempting either would likely only introduce confusion and error. As such I will not attempt to get at original sayings or traditions behind Matthew's Gospel. However, I will compare what Matthew reports with Mark's and Luke's accounts. Hopefully, this will highlight patterns that would not be evident otherwise. If Matthew consistently presents events in a different manner from Mark and Luke, that will indicate a likely area of interest. This study will assume Markan priority, not because I have any great conviction on the matter myself, but because that is the scholarly consensus. This will of course lead to different conclusions than if Matthean priority were assumed. Arthur Bellinzoni has said, "Since Markan priority is an assumption of so much of the research of the last century, many of the conclusions of that research would have to be redrawn and much of the literature rewritten if the consensus of scholarship were suddenly to shift."²⁵ The take away for the purposes of this study is that Matthew has intentionally structured his narrative for his own purposes, and comparing his accounts with the other synoptic accounts will allow these purposes to be seen more clearly.

²⁵ Arthur J. Bellinzoni, Joseph B. Tyson, and William O. Walker, *The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1985), 9.

It is also important to respect the Gospel of Matthew as a narrative. Engaging in literary criticism will be useful. While noting McKnight's cautions about pressing literary criticism too far,²⁶ it is true that Matthew has presented a certain point of view in each story when he might have emphasized another. Matthew also ordered events in a certain way, whereas he could have presented them in some other way, as Luke has done, for example. Therefore, noting such things as characterization, setting, and place in narrative will help illuminate what Matthew wanted to communicate, though without forcing every detail to carry deep meaning.

2.2 Structure of Matthew

Questions such as authorship,²⁷ date, and place of origin will not greatly affect my analysis, and therefore will not be touched upon. Attempting to specify the audience and their circumstances would be helpful, but would involve much speculation. Discussing the outline of the gospel will be profitable, however. Seeing the larger framework Matthew presents will prevent this thesis from breaking Matthew into numerous disconnected chunks. As we will see, Matthew has arranged his material, particularly the miracle accounts in chapters eight and nine, in a very deliberate way. Studying the structure will give us some clues to why he has done so.

Three primary factors must be taken into consideration when attempting to discern the structure of the Gospel of Matthew. First, Matthew has a repeated pattern of narrative followed by discourse. Second, Matthew appears to arrange his material in triads. Davies and Allison go into great detail on this point in the introduction to their

²⁶ Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 121f.

²⁷ For those interested in scholarly opinion concerning authorship, William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 1:10-11, contains an helpful table listing whether the scholar thought the author of the Gospel was the apostle Matthew, a Jewish Christian, or a Gentile Christian.

commentary on Matthew. After reviewing the discourse they note "the five major Matthean discourses are largely made up of triads."²⁸ They also note that, where Matthew uses Mark's material, which he often does from 14:1 on, the triads disappear.²⁹ The last factor is that the gospel is largely a chronological narrative. According to Luz, Matthew follows Mark's sequence of events beginning in 12:1, and even before that he mostly follows Mark's order of events.³⁰

There are some clear takeaways that may be gained from studying the structure of Matthew. First of all, it is likely that Matthew put quite a lot of thought into how he was going to present the material. Secondly, when there is a clear structure it ought to be respected. This will be relevant as many of the passages I will examine in this study are found in chapters 8-9, which contain a triad of triads. Last of all, structure does not need to be forced upon the gospel; sometimes Matthew was simply following Mark, and therefore triads or chiasms should not be read into where they are not.

Our study of faith will be divided into two chapters according to structural considerations. The first section runs from Matthew 4:23 to 9:38. Luz suggests the repetition of 4:23 and 9:35 forms an inclusio.³¹ This section begins and ends with nearly identical wording: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Mt. 4:23). Verse 9:35 changes the location and does not include "among the people," but is otherwise identical. This indication is strengthened by the further repetition of terms and concepts in 4:24/8:16, 4:25/8:1, 5:1/8:1, and 5:2/7:29. This

²⁸ Ibid., 1:66.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:70.

³⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 9-10.

³¹ Ibid., 165. Also Held, 249.

frame is interesting because it emphasizes the role 9:36-38 serves as an introduction to the sending of the Twelve in chapter 10. Held notes the clear link between the disciples' ministry and Jesus' own created by 10:1.³² Matthew reports that Jesus summoned the Twelve and gave them authority to cast out evil spirits and θεραπεύειν πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν. This is nearly 4:23 and 9:35 verbatim. There Matthew records that Jesus went about θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν. The only difference is the form of the verb to heal, a participle in 4:23/9:35 while an infinitive in 10:1.

Matthew presents Jesus as teaching and performing miracles with authority in 4:23-9:35. In the segue to the commissioning of the Twelve (9:36-38), Jesus sees the helpless, harassed crowds and asks the disciples to "beg the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (9:38, my translation). Matthew shows the twelve disciples being sent out in chapter 10 to perform exactly the same deeds as Jesus himself performed in 4:23-9:35.³³ Matthew 4:23-9:35 contains two sections: the Sermon on the Mount (setting 4:23-5:1; discourse 5:2-7:28), and the nine miracle accounts of chapters 8 and 9. Davies and Allison break chapters 8 and 9 into three groups of three miracle stories, each group being followed by teaching material.³⁴ The first section contains the healing of a leper (8:1-4), the healing of a centurion's servant (8:5-13), and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:16-22). After the first triad, Jesus orders them across the sea and teaches on the cost of discipleship (8:18-22). The second triad is less obvious, but probably still intentional. While crossing the sea Jesus calms a storm (8:23-27), delivers two demonized men (8:28-34), and heals a paralytic (9:1-7). After this Jesus calls

³² Held, 249.

³³ The following is a list of miracles Jesus commanded the disciples to perform with references to Jesus' own miracles in parentheses--heal the sick (4:24-24; 8:13, 15, 16; 9:6-7, 22, 29), raise the dead (8:25), cleanse lepers (8:3), cast out demons (4:24; 8:16, 32).

³⁴ Davies, 1:69.

Matthew, teaches about the desire for mercy, and teaches about fasting (9:9-17). The final triad in this miracle cycle begins with the healing of a ruler's daughter (9:18-26), the healing of two blind men (9:27-31), and the restoration of speech to a man (9:32-34).

As stated above, starting at chapter 12 Matthew largely follows Mark's account. There is also much less faith material in these chapters as the majority occurs in chapter 8 and 9. Chapters 11 through 20 involve Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee. Verse 16:21 marks the beginning of his journey towards Jerusalem for his final week. In 21:1 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, where our final passage on faith is found. Jesus teaches daily in the temple, while the Jewish leaders plot to kill him.

2.3 Summary and the Way Forward

Matthew appears to have arranged his material with great purpose. In chapters 8 and 9 of his Gospel, the miracle accounts are reported in three sets of triads. These triads seem to serve as models that his disciples, commissioned in chapter 10, are to replicate. It is hoped that by studying these passages in some depth, Matthew's emphases will become clear. In the next two chapters I will employ redaction and literary criticism to Matthew's Gospel in order to understand what Matthew intended to convey about faith. This is a beneficial method of study as there are so many parallels with Mark and Luke that are presented in different ways and in different arrangements. Noting these should provide clues to Matthew's focus that will enrich our study of faith and how Jesus' statements apply to the church.

CHAPTER 3: FAITH IN MATTHEW 4:23-9:35

3.1 Introduction

The study on faith is divided into two chapters, determined by the structure of Matthew's Gospel, because of the large numbers of passages under consideration. Each relevant passage is analyzed separately, and the findings are summarized in the conclusion of the chapter. This chapter includes passages from Matthew 4:23 through 9:35. Passages have been selected either because they include faith language, such as πίστις, πιστεύω, ὀλιγόπιστος, or ὀλιγοπιστία, or because there is a clear demonstration of faith. There are too many instances of faith in this gospel to review them all. For example, there are many instances where crowds bring oppressed persons to Jesus thereby demonstrating faith. There is not space to cover all of these; we only need note that Jesus always delivered those who were brought to him.³⁵ Almost all of the occurrences of faith language are related to miraculous material. I will not be discussing the few non-miraculous uses. The passages that are discussed are presented in the order they appear in Matthew's Gospel.

3.2 Do Not Be Anxious (Matthew 6:25-34)

3.2.1 Introduction

The first occurrence of faith language in Matthew is found in 6:25-34 of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount discourse. This pericope is part of a larger section that follows Jesus' teaching about giving (6:1-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:15-18). In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus discusses earthly treasure. This section subdivides into 6:19-21, 22-23, 24, and 25-34. In 6:19-21, Jesus urges his disciples to lay up their treasure in heaven. Verses 22-23 urge purity of heart and deed. Verse 24 eliminates the possibility of serving both

³⁵ Held, 275.

God and money; the disciples have to choose. After vv. 25-34, which we will consider shortly, Jesus moves into a series of brief statements about various topics, beginning with critical dispositions.

3.2.2 Redaction

This teaching is also found in Luke 12:22-31, but not in Mark. Matthew twice includes "heavenly Father" instead of simply "Father;" appending "heavenly" or "who is in heaven" to "Father" is typical of Matthew in his gospel.³⁶ Most of the differences between Matthew's and Luke's accounts are stylistic rather than substantive. For our purposes, it is noteworthy that both Matthew and Luke record Jesus' rebuke "O you of little faith." This statement is recorded several more times by Matthew, but never again by Luke or Mark.³⁷

3.2.3 Exposition

This pericope begins with διὰ τοῦτο indicating that what follows is to be read in light of what has just been said. Not only are vv. 22-24 in view but also vv. 19-21. Part of the reason people "lay up treasures on earth" (v. 19) is they are concerned about tomorrow. Jesus rejects that inclination. That drive is symptomatic of a lack of trust in the Father's care. Anxiety is clearly an emphasis here; the verb μεριμνάω, meaning to worry or be anxious about, occurs six times in this passage. Instead of fretting over the future, Jesus counsels his disciples not to be anxious about their material needs. Anxiety here is more about mental attitude than activity, "for it is here that the conflict with faith

³⁶ For "heavenly Father": Mt. 5:48; 6:14; 15:13; 18:35. For "Father in heaven": Mt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19; 23:9.

³⁷ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 102, says this term applies to Jesus' inner circle. "While not a positive term in that context, it does at least soften the negative portrayal of Jesus' disciples in Mark."

arises."³⁸ Firstly, they should not be anxious because life is more than satisfying one's material needs (v. 25). Secondly, the disciples should not be anxious because God takes care of his creation.³⁹ The first example Jesus gives is how the Father feeds the birds of the air. They do not plant or store, they simply eat the food the Father feeds them (v. 26). The lilies are clothed more richly than Solomon ever was even though they do not toil or make clothing (vv. 28-29). Both the birds of the air and the lilies of the field are provided for, and they are much less valuable than humanity (vv. 26, 30). If God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies then he will certainly provide for his disciples. To be anxious and worry about things such as food and clothing shows little faith (v. 30). Nolland points out that this word, translated "little faith," is "always used of disciples and always points to their failure to believe that they will be taken care of."⁴⁰ Instead of being anxious they are to seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and God will provide for their needs.

"O you of little faith" translates the Greek adjective ὀλιγόπιστος. It is only used five times in the New Testament, twice in this teaching (Mt. 6:30; Lk. 12:28) and then in three other episodes in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

3.2.4 Faith in Matthew 6:25-34

It is too early in the study to define faith or little faith, but we have learned some clues. In this example little faith, which appears to be a faith that is deficient in some way, manifests itself in a failure to trust in God for provision, in an anxiety over the most basic things that God gives to even birds and flowers.

³⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 139.

³⁹ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), 310, cites Job 38:39-41; Pss. 104:27-28; 157:9; and 145:16 for biblical support that God feeds his creatures.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 313.

3.3 Jesus Cleanses the Leper (Matthew 8:1-4)

3.3.1 Introduction

Even though faith language is not found in Matthew 8:1-4, it is relevant to this thesis because the leper displays faith in coming to Jesus for cleansing. Matthew 8:1-4 is the first of series of nine miracle accounts in chapters 8 and 9, three sets of triads. After presenting Jesus' teaching on the mount (Mt. 5:1-7:29), Matthew picks up where 4:23-25 left off. The symmetry seems to be intentional; great crowds follow him (4:25), Jesus goes up the mountain (5:1), Jesus comes down the mountain (8:1), and great crowds follow him (8:1). This frames Jesus' authoritative teaching in chapters 5 through 7. In Graham Twelftree's opinion, which appears to me to be correct, this framing and early emphasis on teaching portrays Jesus "not as a healer who preaches but as a Moses-like prophet or teacher who heals."⁴¹ Nolland points out, against those who want to separate word and deed in these chapters, that it wrong to set the teaching of chapters 5-7 against the deeds of chapters 8-9 since there are several teachings in the latter chapters as well.⁴²

3.3.2 Redaction and Literary Features

This story is found in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45, and Luke 5:8-16. Matthew 8:1 does not occur in either Mark or Luke. As noted above, this verse frames Matthew's insertion of the Sermon on the Mount. Mark's and Luke's accounts of the coming of the leper are more descriptive than Matthew's; the leper implores Jesus (Mk. 5:40), the leper was full of leprosy (Lk. 5:12), and he fell on his face (Lk 5:12). Matthew does not include Jesus' emotional response of pity (Mk. 1:41). All three writers include Jesus' charge to silence, but Matthew ends the story there, whereas

⁴¹ Twelftree, 103.

⁴² Nolland, 347. Still there is a clear difference: chapters 5-7 contain only teaching, while chapters 8-9 contain mostly miracle accounts with some teaching.

Mark and Luke record how Jesus' fame spread because of this incident so much that he had to withdraw to desolate places. As we will see, this paring down is characteristic of how Matthew casts the narratives in chapters 8 and 9. This allows the focus to be on Jesus and his words.

3.3.3 Exposition

The wording of verse 1 is almost exactly the same as Exodus 34:29 in the LXX in which Moses comes down from Sinai with the two tablets. Instead of Matthew's mountain, Luke says that Jesus "stood on a level place" (Lk. 6:17). Whatever the topography of the location, it may be that Matthew, by writing "mountain" instead of "a level place," is trying to emphasize or create the link between Jesus and Moses.⁴³ This case is further strengthened by the emphasis on cleansing in this account (vv. 1, 2 twice), and Jesus' instruction that the leper present himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded (v. 4).

After setting the scene in verse 1, Matthew begins the episode with a command to look. He often writes καὶ ἰδοὺ when he wants the reader to pay attention to what comes next. What the reader is to pay attention to is a leper coming to Jesus and kneeling before him.⁴⁴ The leper does not ask a question, but instead says, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (v. 2). The combination of worship language and the leper's use of "Lord" may indicate that more is intended here than a show of respect.⁴⁵ The leper expresses absolute faith in Jesus' power; if Jesus chooses, he can accomplish what the leper requests. It is worth noting that the leper says that Jesus is able to cleanse him if

⁴³ Not that Matthew necessarily had access Luke's Gospel. My point is that the topography of the particular area where Jesus stood may have permitted either description, and Matthew chose to report "mountain" instead of "level place."

⁴⁴ Nolland, 349, points out that no one has done obeisance to Jesus since the Magi.

⁴⁵ France, 152.

Jesus wills, not if God or the Father wills. This insight combined with his address to Jesus as "Lord" as well as the fact that he believes Jesus can not only heal him (implied in the request for cleansing), but can also make him ceremonially clean (v. 2), seems to indicate that the leper believed Jesus was more than an ordinary faith healer.

Jesus responds that he does wish to heal the leper. In this instance Jesus stretches out his hand and touches the leper.⁴⁶ By Jewish law contact with a leper would have made Jesus unclean.⁴⁷ Matthew does not discuss this apparent problem; he says, "immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (v. 3). Jesus' cleanness is transferred to the leper instead of the leper's uncleanness coming upon Jesus.

As stated above, the leper is not to tell anyone, but to show himself to the priest as a testimony to them (v. 4). This brings to mind Matthew 5:17-20 where Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Here he honors what Moses commanded, demonstrating that he is not attempting to tear down the law.

3.3.4 Faith in Matthew 8:1-4

Concerning faith, we read that the leper came through a crowd and knelt before Jesus: his faith was active. Again, faith is not mentioned in this passage, but such actions *are* faith. The leper's confession that Jesus could heal him should not be read as an expression of doubt, but as an affirmation of his authority and power.⁴⁸ However it must be said that the leper has not stated his certainty about Jesus' will, only his power. This will be relevant when the relationship between faith and doubt is discussed. Even though

⁴⁶ Interestingly, Jesus almost always touches individuals when healing them--the exceptions being the healing of the paralytic (Mt. 8:6), the restoration of the man's withered hand (12:13), the epileptic boy (17:18), and, of course, the healings from a distance (8:13;15:28).

⁴⁷ Twelftree, 108, asserts that "in doing so Jesus is portrayed as breaking the law." This was not done to contradict the law, but to express "the divine intention of healing."

⁴⁸ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub, 1999), 260.

the leper demonstrated faith by coming to Jesus and in what he said, he was not cleansed until Jesus touched him and said "be clean." Nolland believes that "the reader is expected to draw much more general conclusions about the will and the capability (the authority) of Jesus to heal" from this episode.⁴⁹

3.4 The Centurion's Faith (Matthew 8:5-13)

3.4.1 Introduction

After cleansing the leper, Jesus enters Capernaum. Jesus is met by a centurion who appeals to Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant (Mt. 8:5-13). Here we find the first occurrences of πίστις (v. 10) and πιστεύω (v. 13) in Matthew's Gospel. This is the second healing in the first triad of the three miracle triads.

3.4.2 Redaction and Literary Features

The story of the healing of the centurion's παῖς⁵⁰ is found in Luke 7:1-10 as well as Matthew 8:5-13. There is quite a bit going on here redactionally as Matthew and Luke present the events rather differently. In Luke, the elders of the Jews come to Jesus and ask him to heal the centurion's servant. Jesus goes to the centurion's house, but the centurion sends friends to Jesus confessing his faith in Jesus' authority to heal. Jesus marvels at his faith. The servants return and find the servant well. Matthew does not present any of this narrative.

However, there is substantial agreement between Matthew 8:8-10 and Luke 7:8-9, where the centurion confesses his faith in Jesus and Jesus marvels at the centurion's faith.

⁴⁹ Nolland, 350.

⁵⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 10, notes that Matthew uses δοῦλος, meaning servant, in 8:9 and therefore believes παῖς should be translated as son. However, Davies, 2:21, note that παῖς only once clearly refers to a son in the New Testament, the other instances referring to a servant. Decisive for me, is the fact that Luke uses δοῦλος to refer the sick person. Assuming coreferentiality, servant is the only possible translation.

Luke, though, does not report Jesus' words "let it be done for you as you have believed" (Mt. 8:13), which is an important phrase for Matthew. The eschatological element of Matthew 8:11-12 is not present either. Here Jesus describes many coming from the ends of the earth to dine with the patriarchs in the kingdom of God while the sons of the kingdom, the Jews, are cast out into darkness. Luke does present the same saying in a different order in 13:28-29. Some scholars believe Luke's telling is original; Matthew borrowed and rearranged the material to suit his purposes.⁵¹ This conclusion is not necessary as it is entirely possible Jesus made similar statements more than once in his life.

It is now time to look at Matthew's version in detail. The setting is Capernaum; Jesus has only just entered. The pericope is almost entirely discourse. The centurion speaks in vv. 6, 8-9, while Jesus speaks in vv. 7, 10b-12, and 13b. As a result of this, the pericope should be understood as a pronouncement story instead of a miracle account.⁵² The miracle serves to validate the centurion's faith in Jesus, but it is not the focus in this passage. The centurion is presented rather flatly: remarkable, but one dimensional. He is a Gentile who understands the nature of authority and knows that Jesus has it. Jesus' character is more developed by Matthew. After hearing the centurion, Matthew records that Jesus marveled and commented to those around him about the centurion's great faith. Matthew's narrative seldom lets the audience know the emotional state of the characters, and therefore it is noteworthy whenever it happens.

3.4.3 Exposition

After entering Capernaum a centurion comes and appeals to Jesus to heal his son who is suffering terribly (v. 6). Jesus is again addressed as Lord, which France suggests

⁵¹ According to Harrington, 114, Matthew inserted this saying from Q, because the centurion's faith provides a model for Christians, particularly early Gentile Christians.

⁵² Davies, 2:17.

likely implies an awareness of Jesus' authority, though it does not require that meaning.⁵³ Jesus replies that he will go heal him (v. 7). However, the centurion says this is not necessary for Jesus has the authority to heal by simply speaking the word. Keener notes, "Jewish people considered long-distance miracles especially difficult and rare, the domain of only the most powerful holy men."⁵⁴ Although the centurion was a Roman and not a Jew, it is clear that he has tremendous faith in Jesus' healing authority. The centurion understands authority because he is under authority himself and has been put in a position to command others (v. 9). His statement is confusing because on first glance it seems that Jesus has his own authority, but Nolland points out that Matthew portrays Jesus' authority as derivative (Mt. 11:27; 28:18).⁵⁵ As stated above Jesus marvels at this confession. He has not found anyone in Israel with so much faith (v. 10).⁵⁶ He tells those around him that the Gentiles will enter the kingdom while the heirs will be cast out (vv. 11-12). To the centurion he says, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed" (v. 13). The servant was healed at that moment (v. 14).

3.4.4 Faith in Matthew 8:5-13

"Faith" or "believing" are spoken of twice in this section, once as a noun (v. 10) and once as a verb (v. 13). Here faith appears to be a belief in Jesus' authority to heal. The issue of willingness to heal does not factor into this pericope and so nothing can be said on that score. This episode shows it was not enough for the centurion to have this belief

⁵³ France, 154.

⁵⁴ Keener, 267, cites Virgil's Aenid 1.142 as an example of deities who were said to be able to speak decrees, which would then come to pass. In Jewish literature he finds support in the rarity of accounts (b. Ber. 34b and Rab Kah. 11:16).

⁵⁵ Nolland, 356.

⁵⁶ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1:205, points out "The effect of this statement is not only criticism of the slowness of Israel to believe, a motif that will have increasing prominence as the Gospel proceeds, but also, and more importantly, to call attention to the genuine possibility of gentile faith, and hence participation in the kingdom."

inside himself; he had to express that faith by coming to Jesus and asking him for help. Once he professed his faith to Jesus, his servant was healed at once. The centurion's faith is compared with the lesser faith Jesus has found in Israel. This comparison leads Jesus to draw eschatological comparisons, which entails Gentiles coming into the kingdom while the Jews are cast out. Faith for healing, at least in this episode, is therefore not presented by Matthew as something fundamentally distinct from saving faith.⁵⁷ Coming to Jesus with faith has implications not only for the present physical situation, but also for eternity.

3.5 Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law (8:14-17)

3.5.1 Introduction

Matthew now comes to the final part of the first miracle triad, a short healing account of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-17). After this Matthew pans out to report the deliverance and healing of the masses. This fulfilled Isaiah 53, that Jesus "took our illnesses and bore our diseases" (Mt. 8:17).

3.5.2 Redaction and Exposition

This episode is found in Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 1:29-31, and Luke 4:38-39. The context of Matthew 8 is different than in Mark and Luke. If Mark or Luke is read first, one expects this story to come in chapter 4 of Matthew's Gospel. This may be why Matthew begins simply, "And when Jesus entered" (Mt. 8:14). This time-neutral way of beginning the story allows it to be put anywhere Matthew wishes in his gospel.

Matthew does not report who Jesus entered the house with as Mark does (Mk. 1:29). This places the spotlight on Jesus.⁵⁸ Jesus does not need to be told that the woman

⁵⁷ Held, 196.

⁵⁸ Harrington, 114.

was sick (Mk. 1:30), or appealed to as in Luke's account (Lk. 1:38); Jesus sees her (Mt. 8:14). Instead of taking her hand and lifting her up (Mk. 1:31), Jesus touches her hand, the fever leaves, and she serves Jesus.⁵⁹

3.5.3 Faith in Matthew 8:14-17

In this story Jesus enters Peter's house, sees his mother-in-law sick, touches her, and the fever leaves. In this passage no one comes to Jesus and asks him for help. There is no mention of faith here. As Twelftree puts it, "Seeing her is enough to move him."⁶⁰ Jesus touches her and she is healed. Matthew does not tell us what the woman thought, though she was clearly grateful as she rose and served him after the fever left. This passage has been included to show that Jesus did not always require a demonstration of faith in order to heal. He could act as he willed.

3.6 Jesus Calms a Storm (Matthew 8:23-27)

3.6.1 Introduction

From there Jesus gives orders for the disciples to go to the other side of the sea but before doing so he gives two men a lesson in the cost of discipleship. There the first triad section ends and our second begins: Jesus calming a storm (Mt. 8:23-27), healing two demonized men (Mt. 8:28-34), and healing a paralytic (9:1-8).

3.6.2 Redaction

This episode of Jesus calming a storm is found in all three synoptic gospels: Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. This episode is a great study in redactional changes because the alterations made by Matthew appear so clearly to relate

⁵⁹ Twelftree, 110, believes a discipleship reference can be seen here, since according to Twelftree, Jesus is always the recipient of the service when Matthew uses the verb διακονεω. However, this does not appear to be correct as in Mt. 20:28 says, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Jesus is the one serving here. Still there could be a discipleship reference here, just not because of the specific verb used.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 111.

the story to discipleship concerns. G. Bornkamm wrote an influential redactional work on this episode, concluding "the story becomes a kerygmatic paradigm of the danger and glory of discipleship."⁶¹ The episode has a chiastic structure with the discourse between the disciples and Jesus in vv. 25 and 26 making up the center.⁶² Whether or not this perfect balance was intentional, it is clear that Matthew has crafted his account to make a certain point. As in the story of the centurion's servant, Matthew moves the focus off of the miracle itself and onto Jesus' words concerning faith.

In Mark, Jesus commands the disciples to go to the other side which is followed immediately by them taking Jesus with them in the boat. Similarly in Luke the disciples and Jesus all go together after the command. However, in Matthew's Gospel Matthew includes Jesus' discourse with the scribe and disciple about the cost of following him. Then Matthew resumes the story with the disciples following Jesus into the boat. As mentioned above, in Mark they take Jesus, and in Luke Jesus and the disciples go together. Matthew does two things here; he says "his disciples" instead of "they" and the disciples follow Jesus. These two changes link the storm episode with discipleship. Next, Matthew changes the description of the storm from a *λαίλαψ μεγάλη άνέμου* to a *σεισμός*, or earthquake. This word is used three other times by Matthew, twice to relate earthquakes connected with Jesus' death and resurrection (Mt. 27:54; 28:2) and once to describe events that will happen in the last days (Mt. 24:7). It may lead the reader to "think in terms of the many kinds of disturbance that may threaten their own lives."⁶³

⁶¹ Günther Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, eds. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, Heinz Joachim Held (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 57.

⁶² Davies, 2:68.

⁶³ Nolland, 370.

Harrington sees apocalyptic overtones here, citing Ez. 38:19 "On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel."⁶⁴

Matthew has chosen not to relate most of the details of the flooding of the boat as Mark and Luke have. This was presumably done to create emphasis on what Matthew himself wanted to convey. Once sufficiently concerned, the disciples went and woke Jesus saying "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mk. 4:38) or "Master, Master, we are perishing!" (Lk 8:24). Instead of a question or statement Matthew records a request, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing" (Mt. 8:25).⁶⁵ Note that Matthew records Lord here and not Teacher or Master as Mark and Luke have it. Next, Matthew presents the order of Jesus' actions in reverse of Mark and Luke. This is significant because the chiastic structure noted above would be broken if Matthew had not done this. In Matthew, Jesus first rebukes the disciples for their little faith and then rebukes the winds and sea.⁶⁶ What Jesus says is different, too. Mark records, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mk 4:40). Luke instead has "Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25). Instead Matthew records, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" (Mt. 8:26). Once the disciples see the calm sea, they marvel in Matthew's and Luke's accounts and are filled with fear in Mark's. Instead of asking "who is this" as in Mark and Luke, the disciples in Matthew ask "what sort of man is this."

⁶⁴ Harrington, 120.

⁶⁵ Marshall, 213, points out that this one of the few times Jesus works miracles on behalf of his disciples, and does so even with the absence of "petitionary faith." Jesus' rebuke of the disciples' faithlessness causes Marshall to suggest that a different sort of unbelief may be involved in this account.

⁶⁶ Hagner, 1:222, wonders if the language of rebuke suggests the involvement of evil spirits in the storm, and goes on to note that the sea sometimes used symbolically to represent evil in the Old Testament.

3.6.3 Literary Features

As noted above, Matthew's account is highly structured and stripped to the barest details. Matthew presents Jesus as calm and authoritative. He commands the disciples to go (v. 18) and they follow (v. 23). Jesus has absolute authority over the elements so that he is not afraid even when there are terrible storms at sea. The disciples are presented namelessly and uniformly. They follow Jesus and call him Lord, but they do not understand who he really is, none of them do. Because of this, their emotional state fluctuates from fear to wonder.

3.6.4 Faith in Matthew 8:23-27

The meaning of "little faith" in this passage appears to be very similar to its meaning in chapter 6--lack of trust in Jesus' ability to take care of them. Matthew does not present them as rebellious; he presents them as having defective faith and understanding. Marshall asserts that their faithlessness consists in their "mistaken conviction that they are surely about to die with him (ἀπολλύμεθα) and that he appears not to care (οὐ μέλει σοι)."⁶⁷ They come to Jesus just as others before them have done, but without really believing in his power and authority. The disciples at this point did not understand who Jesus was, though they called him Lord, and therefore did not know they were supposed to trust *him* to take care of them, which serves to compound the negative effects of their feeble faith. France sums up faith in this pericope well, "Jesus' rebuke...further emphasizes that discipleship involves a *faith* which is a practical trust (cf. on vv. 8-10) and which excludes anxiety (cf. 6:25ff.)."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Marshall, 216.

⁶⁸ France, 162.

Due to the clear tie Matthew presents between this episode and the discipleship instruction in the previous verses, it appears that he meant his audience to learn the lessons this episode has to teach. They may follow Jesus and call him Lord, but they must not fear, believing that he is able to save them from any circumstance. The way will not be easy, but it will be glorious.

3.7 Jesus Heals a Paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8)

3.7.1 Introduction

After crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and the disciples come to the country of the Gadarenes, where they are met by two demon-possessed men. Jesus casts the demons out, but for doing so is asked to leave the region. They get back into the boat and return to Capernaum. This brings us to the episode under consideration. This healing is the final triad in the second miracle triad series.

3.7.2 Redaction

The account of the healing of the paralytic is found in Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, and Luke 5:17-26. Matthew puts this episode in a different sequence than Mark and Luke. The calming of the storm and deliverance of the demon-possessed man occur in Mark 4:35-20 and Luke 8:22-39, whereas the healing of the paralytic was reported prior in Mark 2 and Luke 5. Presumably Matthew placed the healing of the paralytic here to play a part in his miracle triad cycle.⁶⁹ Matthew does not report that Jesus was at home (Mk. 2:1) or that he was teaching (Mk 2:2; Lk. 5:17). Neither does Matthew mention that those carrying the paralytic came through the roof (Mk. 2:4; Lk. 5:19). Held cites J. Weiss' words that it belongs "to the greatest riddles of Gospel criticism how Matthew

⁶⁹ Davies, 2:85.

could deny himself the use of these living details."⁷⁰ After seeing their faith, Jesus tells the paralytic to take heart because his sins are forgiven. Neither Mark nor Luke has "take heart." It may be Matthew includes this to acknowledge the faith of the paralytic.⁷¹ Matthew shortens the scribes' response to "this man is blaspheming," leaving out why they believed what he said was blasphemy. The Synoptic authors report Jesus' reply in more or less the same words. The last difference of note is the response of the crowds to the healing of the paralytic. Matthew alone includes that the crowds were "afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men" (Mt. 9:8).

3.7.3 Literary Features

As is typical of Matthew in this section, he strips all material he deems unnecessary to his point, even details that seemingly would be helpful like the removal of the roof in this episode. The setting is Jesus' city, but unlike Mark, he does not tell us the name of the city. Matthew does not record that Jesus was inside, and he does not tell us who was there. We find out certain people are present when their response is mentioned. Matthew even removes the number of men who carried the paralytic. This simplification emphasizes Matthew's point; Jesus has authority to forgive sins in response to faith.

3.7.4 Faith in Matthew 9:1-8

The healing of the paralytic demonstrates Jesus' willingness and ability to heal based on faith, but that does not seem to be Matthew's focus. Matthew homes in on Jesus' authority to forgive sins. The miracle primarily serves to provide confirmation that Jesus in fact had the authority he claimed to forgive sins.⁷²

⁷⁰ Held, 175.

⁷¹ So Twelftree, 116.

⁷² France, 166, appears to say that the act of healing in and of itself is not enough to indicate the power to forgive sins, but I may be misunderstanding him.

Faith in this passage is coming to Jesus for help. It is not clear whether or not the paralytic himself had faith; all passages say Jesus saw "their faith."⁷³ There is no indication that the paralytic was being carried against his will and therefore Jesus was probably referring to the paralytic as well as those who carried him. Again, faith in this passage not only results in healing, but also in salvation of the entire person. Although some scholars marvel that Matthew did not include the men carrying the paralytic digging through the roof, he may have had good reason for doing this. Possibly Matthew wanted to make the point that simply coming to Jesus was enough; it did not require special actions beyond coming in faith.

3.8 Raising of Ruler's Daughter and the Bleeding Woman (Matthew 9:18-26)

3.8.1 Introduction

After completing the second miracle triad, Jesus leaves the house and calls Matthew to follow him, which he immediately does. Jesus is next seen in the house eating with tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees criticize Jesus for this, which gives him an opportunity to teach on God's desire for mercy and not sacrifice (Mt. 9:10-13). The disciples of John the Baptist come to him and ask him about fasting. Jesus says that his disciples will fast later after he is taken away (Mt. 9:14-17). This leads us into the first episode in the final miracle triad. This first element of the triad is actually one story nested within another. Verses 18-19 concern a ruler whose daughter has just died. In verses 20-22 the focus shifts to a woman suffering from bloody discharges. Verse 23 shifts back to the ruler's daughter for the rest of the episode. Faith is only mentioned in the inner story of the woman, but the ruler clearly demonstrates faith and so will be

⁷³ Hagner, 1:232. Hagner asserts that Matthew may have assumed a familiarity with Mark's gospel, because Matthew has not included more information about those who carried the paralytic.

discussed as well. It is worth pointing out that faith is mentioned by Mark in both stories.⁷⁴

3.8.2 Redaction and Literary Features

This episode occurs in all of the synoptic gospels: Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 5:22-43, and Luke 8:40-56. For the sake of clarity, I will treat the stories separately. As in the case of all the stories considered so far, Matthew strips his account to the bare essentials. His account of the ruler's daughter is approximately half as long as Mark's or Luke's. Matthew does not name the ruler or the crowds who were around him (Mk. 5:21-22). While in Mark the ruler says that his daughter is on the point of death (Mk. 5:23), Matthew reports that his daughter has just died (Mt. 9:18). Surprisingly, Matthew changes Mark's "and he went with him" (Mk. 5:24) to "and Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples" (Mt. 9:19). Matthew does not report the messenger that comes to Jesus announcing the death as Mark does, as here the ruler already said that his daughter is dead. Instead, Jesus comes directly to the house and hears the commotion. Instead of commanding the girl to arise as in Mark 5:51, reported in Aramaic, Jesus takes her by the hand and the girl gets up.^{75,76}

The account of the bleeding woman is 30% as long as Mark's and 40% as long as Luke's. Matthew does not report the history of her illness as do Mark and Luke nor Mark's mention that she heard about Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke say she touches the "fringe of his garment" as opposed to Mark's "cloak," perhaps emphasizing that Jesus was

⁷⁴ Hagner, 1:247.

⁷⁵ Twelftree, 119, posits Jesus' words were not reported by Matthew because he wanted "nothing to be seen as effective in healing other than Jesus himself."

⁷⁶ Hagner, 1:249, asserts that this is the only healing by laying on of hands in Matthew, which seems a strange observation as Jesus repeatedly touches individuals when healing them, for example, Peter's mother-in-law in Mt. 8:15.

a faithful Jew. Mark and Luke say that Jesus noticed the woman because he felt power flow out of him; Luke in particular emphasizes this aspect of the story. Matthew, however, does not mention power at all. Jesus feels her touch, turns and sees her, knowing that she needed healing. Matthew presents the healing as if it took place after Jesus' affirmation of her faith whereas in Mark and Luke the woman is healed instantly upon touching Jesus' clothing.⁷⁷ All three are in basic agreement about what Jesus said to the woman. In addition to, "daughter, your faith has saved you," Luke adds "go in peace" (Lk. 8:48), and to that Mark includes "and be whole from your affliction" (Mk. 5:34). Matthew simply adds "take heart."

The main result of Matthew's reduction is to center the spotlight on Jesus in both episodes. Jesus is involved in every verse about the ruler's daughter. In Mark's narrative Jesus is one of many characters, the main character perhaps, but one of many vying for the reader's attention. In Matthew, the crowds and the disciples are not in the story at all, unlike Mark's and Luke's accounts. Mark and Luke name individuals involved while Matthew does not even mention their presence.⁷⁸ Matthew makes Jesus the hub around which every sentence revolves.

3.8.3 Faith in Matthew 9:18-26

Faith in Jesus is at the center of these accounts; the ruler believes Jesus can raise his daughter from the dead, and the woman comes to Jesus with faith and he says that her faith has saved her. According to Nolland, faith in this passage "is that state of awareness,

⁷⁷ France, 171, says "any impression of a 'magical' element in the cure is thus removed."

⁷⁸ Marshall, 98, suggests that Mark's inclusion of Peter, James, and John as witnesses foreshadows their involvement at the Transfiguration and the garden of Gethsemane. The raising of the dead girl may therefore serve as "a symbolic anticipation of the impending fate of Jesus himself." To me, Marshall appears to be reading too much into it. Mark may have noted their presence because they were there; he is not as terse as Matthew in his narrative style.

receptivity, and readiness for appropriate action which opens one to the working of the powers of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus."⁷⁹ Like the cleansing of the leper and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, touch is involved in the healing process. In Matthew's account Jesus does not say anything; he only takes her hand and she revives. Matthew removes the ruler's fear presented in Mark's account; the ruler is presented as having strong faith, but it is not the focus of the story.

The episode of the bleeding woman is interesting because it bypasses the cognitive, willing aspect of healing, at least on Jesus' part. The woman believed that simply touching Jesus would heal her, in fact she expresses certainty that she will be healed if she touches Jesus. He did not have to have any active participation in the healing. He only needed to be touched. While this idea is vindicated in Mark and Luke, Matthew reports the healing only after Jesus notices and affirms her faith. Not recording the power language makes healing more relational. Instead of faith tapping into a power source, faith is directed to a person who responds. Again in this episode, healing faith is not separated from saving faith.⁸⁰ The Greek word σώζω, typically translated "to save," is used instead a healing specific word such as θεραπεύω. Another thing we see in this episode is that faith by itself was not enough; the woman had to come to Jesus with that faith. Her situation made her act risky, in fact unlawful, as an unclean woman was not allowed to touch anyone. It took a certain amount of pluck, and desperation, for her to do what she did. Jesus does not rebuke her; he tells her to take heart.

⁷⁹ Nolland, 397.

⁸⁰ Harrington, 131, "While the primary healing was physical, the spiritual aspect of healing (salvation) is also present."

3.9 The First Healing of Two Blind Men (Matthew 9:27-31)

3.9.1 Introduction

After raising the girl from the dead, Jesus passes on from there and is followed by two blind men. This account is the second miracle of the final miracle triad.

3.9.2 Redaction and Literary Features

This account of the blind men's healing is found only in Matthew 9:27-31. Gundry sums up nicely one school of scholarly thought on this passage when he says, "the stories [blind men and deaf mute] are brought in here to fill out the serialization of Jesus' miracles in a way that will have provided examples for the listing in 11:5."⁸¹ The idea is that Matthew needs material for slots eight and nine of his miracle triad cycle. He also has to verify Jesus' claim that "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Mt. 11:5). Up to this point in Matthew no blind men have been healed and he needs a story to plug the hole. To do this, he reproduces the episode in which Jesus healed two blind men with slight changes to meet his purposes. Held calls this story an "ideal scene," a typical story crafted to fill Matthew's purposes, though he notes that he is not making any historical judgments with this label.⁸² France presents a more evangelical perspective, which I find more convincing, when he says, "Unless we are to credit Matthew with simply duplicating his own story, and there is no obvious motive for his doing so, nor are the stories the same in detail, we must assume that he here relates a separate incident, using standard ideas and terminology."⁸³

⁸¹ Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 176.

⁸² Held, 224.

⁸³ France, 172.

Though one can speculate that this event is only a creation of Matthew's literary imagination, one certainly cannot prove there is no historical referent behind this passage. It is true that Matthew does not record the location or names of the blind men. However, that is typical of Matthew; he often leaves out details that interest the other Synoptic authors. The two blind men in this account call him the Son of David as do the blind men in 20:29-34. It should be noted that Matthew records more Son of David sayings than Mark and Luke combined and so the use of the phrase here is not surprising. At any rate Matthew shows a clear tendency to shape his accounts according to his theological purposes so the similarities and differences between accounts should not surprise us.

Held has a point when he calls this an ideal scene. As in the other passages around this account, all unnecessary details, with the exception of Jesus entering the house, are left out. For example, Matthew does not tell us that the disciples are with Jesus, where this occurred, the names of the blind men, or any of their thoughts and emotions. Matthew does not even tell us, in this passage or the ones before, where Jesus is going. This removes everything that might distract us from Jesus and what he has to teach us.

3.9.3 Exposition

The passage begins with Jesus traveling and two blind men following him. Given how deliberate Matthew has been with his use of "follow" up to this point, he may intend to signal a discipleship reference. The blind men cry to him, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (9:27). As noted above "son of David" occurs frequently in Matthew's Gospel,⁸⁴ and this cry is exactly the same as the cry of the blind men in 20:30. Jesus apparently keeps going as they have to follow Jesus into a house. At this point Jesus asks them if they believe he is able to do this. What "this" refers to is not specified, but Jesus is clearly

⁸⁴ Matthew 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30,31; 21:9, 15; 22:42

referring to the healing of their blindness. Hagner believes this question serves a didactic function concerning the importance of faith as the faith of the blind men has already been displayed.⁸⁵ The blind men confess their faith in his ability by replying, "Yes, Lord" (9:28). Jesus touches their eyes and says, "According to your faith let it be done [γένηθήτω] for you" (9.29, my translation).⁸⁶ Jesus also says "let it be done for you" to the centurion (8:13) and the Canaanite woman (15:28). At this time the blind men's eyes open and they can see. Jesus warns them to tell no one of what he has done, but disobeying him they "spread his fame through all that district" (9:31).

3.9.4 Faith in Matthew 9:27-31

This is the first time Jesus asks those seeking help a question. Up to this point people have either made professions of faith without prodding or Jesus has simply healed them without requiring a confession. This time Jesus asks the two men if they believe Jesus is able heal them. This question is noteworthy, because it appears obvious that they believe as they have been following Jesus seeking help for this very thing. This exchange tells us something about what faith is, here belief in his ability to heal. Notions of willingness or of connection to broader salvation are absent from this account. Healing through active faith continues in this passage; the blind men were only healed after talking with Jesus.

3.10 Faith in the Gospel of Matthew So Far

Analyzing many passages can cause one to lose the forest for the trees. Therefore, I will now summarize what has been learned about faith up to this point before moving to the next section of Matthew's Gospel. There are two distinct but related types of passages

⁸⁵ Hagner, 1:254.

⁸⁶ Nolland, 401, says "Faith is the conduit along which what Jesus is able to bring is channeled to the specific points of need."

under consideration, those concerning faith and those concerning little faith. Faith is active, never passive in these passages. In no passage was anyone delivered by believing in private. Peter's mother was healed without active faith, but that passage does not concern faith, rather it demonstrates Jesus' ability to heal as he wishes. In the cases of the leper, the bleeding woman, and the two blind men, the individuals in need of help come directly. In the case of the centurion's servant, the centurion comes asking for help for his servant. Likewise with the ruler's dead daughter, the ruler comes on his daughter's behalf. Nothing is said about the servant's or daughter's opinion about Jesus. The case of the paralytic falls into both of these categories as the paralytic is brought by men with faith, but it is likely he believed himself. Jesus always responds according to their request, meaning he does what the believing person asks of him.⁸⁷ Faith precedes the miracles, instead of the miracles serving to bolster faith, though they doubtless did. In several passages there is a broader salvific element. The leper is not only healed of his condition, he is made ceremonially clean. The centurion's faith indicates that he is one who will dine in the Jesus' kingdom (Mt. 8:11). The paralytic is not only healed, his sins are forgiven as well. The hemorrhaging woman is saved; whether this means something broader than healed is hard to know, but Jesus certainly could have used a different word.

Belief in Jesus' willingness to heal is never addressed in these passages. The closest Matthew comes is when the leper asserts that Jesus can cleanse him if he chooses. This does not tell us whether or not leper thought Jesus would heal him. The absence of certainty language cautions against making absolute assurance of God's affirmative

⁸⁷ Held, 239, "Where the formula about faith appears in Matthew's miracle stories it always points towards what the suppliant person has spoken (Matt. 8.5 ff.; 9.22 ff., 27 ff.; 15.21 ff.). The faith is expressed in the request; and Jesus acts in a way that corresponds to the suppliant faith."

response a necessary component of all types of faith, at least based on the study up to this point.

However, when we come to passages about "little faith" things change. Doubting God's willingness to help is part of what "little faith" is. "Little faith" in chapter 7 concerns a lack of trust in provision. "Little faith" in chapter 8 concerns a lack of trust in protection. In both of these passages there is some measure of faith, Jesus is talking to his disciples after all, but their faith is mixed with doubt. The passages concern provision for the basic necessities of life so it is not clear how much their doubting language can be extrapolated to faith for things beyond basic necessities.

As this study concerns not faith in and of itself, but faith in the ministry of the early disciples, I would be remiss if I did not relate faith to the practice of the disciples. Graham Twelftree says concerning this section of Matthew's Gospel "the miracles are models for the ministry of his followers."⁸⁸ These miracle accounts are not simply interesting stories about Jesus' powerful ministry. Matthew has clearly crafted them, as we have seen over and over again in this section, as lessons for his disciples to learn from and imitate.

⁸⁸ Twelftree, 102.

CHAPTER 4: FAITH IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: THE FOCUS SHIFTS TOWARDS THE DISCIPLES

4.1 Introduction

After the miracle triads of chapters 8 and 9 the faith language suddenly ceases for several chapters. Chapter 10 records the sending of the twelve apostles. While it later becomes clear in chapter 17 that faith is a crucial part of successful apostolic ministry, there is no explicit faith language in this chapter. Once the miracle cycle of chapters 8 and 9 is ended faith is not mentioned again until Matthew 14. After the healing triad is completed Jesus commissions the Twelve to perform the same acts he performed in chapters 8 and 9. However, Matthew does not in fact follow the disciples on their mission, but instead stays with Jesus. John the Baptist asks if Jesus is in fact the Christ. Jesus responds by citing the deeds Matthew has just shown us as evidence of his Messiahship. Chapters 11 and 12 consist of two triads of rejection of Jesus and invitation by Jesus.⁸⁹ Chapter 13 consists of nine parables and Nazareth's rejection of Jesus, and it is here that Matthew begins to follow Mark more closely, and where faith language resumes. Two of the faith passages in this section, Matthew 17:14-21 and 21:28-22, will be studied in more detail than other passages as understanding what they teach about faith is one of the primary goals of this work.

4.2 Jesus Does Not Heal Many Because of Unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58)

4.2.1 Introduction

After teaching a series of parables to a great crowd near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus traveled to his home town of Nazareth to minister in their synagogue.⁹⁰ This passage is

⁸⁹ Davies, 2:234.

⁹⁰ France, 232, points out that this is Jesus' last recorded visit to a synagogue, and believes this episode show that the pattern of ministry in 4:23 and 9:35 was no longer possible.

unlike other passages included in this study as it is an example of unbelief rather than belief. This teaches us how Jesus responded to a lack of faith as opposed to faith combined with doubt. This is relevant as this is the one place in the Gospel of Matthew where some were not healed. However, because this does not directly address the meaning of faith, I will deal with this passage in less detail than the others.

4.2.2 Redaction Criticism and Literary Features

This story is found in Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:6-13, and Luke 4:16-30. Luke's account is different enough to assume he was using a different source from Matthew and Mark. Matthew's account is close to Mark's. The major difference is in how the authors present Jesus' response to the Nazarene's unbelief. Mark wrote "And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them" (Mk. 6:5). Matthew simply states "And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief" (Mt. 13:58). Though many suggest that Matthew is softening Mark's language, Harrington suggests that Matthew may simply have stated the same idea more economically as both agree that Jesus did do *some* miracles.⁹¹ Matthew also does not record that Jesus marveled at their unbelief as Mark does (Mk. 6:6).

4.2.3 Exposition

Both Luz and Davies and Allison note that Matthew arranges Mark's material so that it forms a chiasm, with the people's questions about his family in the center.⁹² Jesus teaches at the synagogue in Nazareth, astonishing the people (Mt. 13:54). They ask five questions about him. The first and last questions concern how Jesus got this teaching and the source of his mighty deeds (Mt. 13:54, 57). The inner three concern his father,

⁹¹ Harrington, 211.

⁹² Luz, 2:301; Davies, 2:451.

mother, brothers, and sisters (Mt. 13:55-56). To this Jesus responds, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household" (Mt. 13:57). As stated above, Jesus performed fewer mighty acts there, because of their unbelief. Matthew does not write "could not" but "did not." This may indicate that Jesus could have performed more miracles, but chose not to because of their unbelief. "Jesus will not perform miracles in order to counteract unbelief."⁹³

4.2.4 Faith in Matthew 13:53-58

This passage is about ἀπιστία not about πίστις. Unlike the passages about little faith, there is no faith here, only unbelief. Still according to this passage Jesus did do *some* mighty works. He could help people regardless of their response to him, but his normal practice was to respond to faith.⁹⁴ Held commenting on this passage says, "What is here negatively expressed Matthew has positively developed in his retelling and formal shaping of the Synoptic healing miracles, namely that the miracle takes place in accordance with the request of the suppliant."⁹⁵

4.3 Peter Walks on Water (Matthew 14:22-33)

4.3.1 Introduction

In the first episode of chapter 14, Matthew records John the Baptist's death at the hands of Herod the tetrarch. John's disciples bury the body and go and tell Jesus. After hearing of John the Baptist's death, Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place, but the crowds followed him. As the place was deserted and the crowd contained more than five thousand people, Jesus multiplied what food was available, feeding all of them. Once the

⁹³ Hagner, 1:406.

⁹⁴ Nolland, 577, "Jesus' miracle-working power was still evident...but Jesus limits its scope in the face of unbelief."

⁹⁵ Held, 278.

scraps were collected, he commanded the disciples to go to the other side of the sea, which brings us to the episode now under consideration.

4.3.2 Redaction and Literary Features

The account of Jesus walking on water is found in Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, and John 6:16-21. Matthew does not record their destination (Mk. 6:45), Jesus watching the boat struggle in the storm (Mk. 6:48), or Jesus meaning to walk by the boat (Mk. 6:48). After telling them not to be afraid, Matthew tells of Peter getting out of the boat and walking on water. Neither Mark nor John includes this episode. John does not tell us how the disciples reacted once the storm was calmed. Mark records their astonishment, noting that they did not understand because their hearts were hardened (Mk. 6:52). Their reaction in Matthew's Gospel is quite different; they worship him affirming that he is the son of God (Mt. 14:33).

This is the first episode we have come across that is actually longer than Mark's telling. As we have seen, a few small points have been removed but Matthew inserts more than he takes away. Instead of the chiastic structures seen in the miracle triads, this episode feels more like a story heading towards a climax.

4.3.3 Exposition

Fear and faith are at war in this story. Fear terminology is prevalent in this account. When the disciples see Jesus they are terrified and cry out in fear (v. 26). Jesus reassures them saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (v. 27). Jesus also told the paralytic and the bleeding woman to "take heart" before he delivered them (9:2, 22). When Peter saw the wind as he walked on the water, "he was afraid" (v. 30). Interestingly, Jesus rebukes Peter saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v.

31). The word translated doubt $\delta\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\zeta\omega$ is only used one other time in the New Testament, Matthew 28:17. Nolland points out that this link is important because "it suggest that the doubt in view is not swept away by the resurrection but will continue to be an issue in the ongoing life of the church."⁹⁶ $\Delta\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\zeta\omega$ means "to be uncertain, to have second thoughts about a matter," whereas, as France points out, "true faith is single-mindedly focused on Jesus."⁹⁷

For Jesus, Peter's fear was caused by doubt.⁹⁸ Peter trusted Jesus enough to get out of the boat and walk on water for a time--we are not told how long--but he grew afraid when he saw the wind. In fact, Peter was incredibly bold to ask Jesus to command him to come in the first place.⁹⁹ Peter had faith, but it was deficient, as was the faith of the rest of the terrified disciples by implication.

The miracles performed by Jesus in this episode are more spectacular than what we have seen thus far. Jesus walks on water and can command others to do so as well. Most spectacular is the way the storm is calmed. In chapter 8 Jesus calms the storm by rebuking the winds and sea. In chapter 14 Jesus does not need to say anything. He simply gets into the boat and the sea is calmed.

4.3.4 Faith in Matthew 14:22-33

This third occurrence of little faith is very much like the previous two occurrences. In each case, this word is used to rebuke the disciples for doubting God's

⁹⁶ Nolland, 602.

⁹⁷ Definition from Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 239. France, 239.

⁹⁸ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 2:424, says the cause was a lack of concentration, which is a clever way of saying Peter took his eyes off Jesus and therefore allowed circumstances to fill him with fear.

⁹⁹ Twelftree, 132, wonders if Peter is to be imitated by the church: "like Peter, followers of Jesus are called to share in the Lord's power over the storms that threaten the life of the church."

provision and protection. In all three instances faith is present, but is mixed with doubt, in this instance fear of the wind and waves. Peter had more trust in the wind's power to harm him than he had in Jesus' ability to keep him safe. France says that Peter lost his faith.¹⁰⁰ However, I believe it is more accurate to say that Peter had faith, but it was corrupted by his doubt. This passage is instructive because it teaches us "that the disciple does not possess this power of himself but receives it through faith."¹⁰¹

4.4 The Canaanite Woman's Persistence (Matthew 15:21-28)

4.4.1 Introduction

After the boat lands Jesus and the disciples come to Gennesaret where Jesus heals all the sick that were brought to him. Pharisees and scribes come to him from Jerusalem asking him why he broke the commandment of the Jewish elders. Jesus rebukes them for breaking God's law for the sake of their traditions. He corrects their understanding of defilement by instructing them that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a person, not what they consume. After this Jesus departs Gennesaret headed towards the district of Tyre and Sidon, which brings us to the episode under consideration.

4.4.2 Redaction and Literary Features

The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter is found in Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. The structure of Matthew's account is:

- setting (v. 21-22a)
- woman's plea (v. 22b)
- Jesus' lack of answer (v. 23a)
- disciples' plea (v. 23b)
- Jesus' answer (v. 24)
- woman's reply (v. 25)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 239.

¹⁰¹ Adolf Schlatter, *Markus; der Evangelist für die Griechen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1935), 132, quoted in Held, 290.

- Jesus' answer (v. 26)
- woman's reply (v. 27)
- Jesus' answer (v. 28a)
- report of healing (v. 28b)

Clearly discourse is the focus here. Based on how Matthew records stories elsewhere, it is a little surprising that he included the disciples in this episode at all. It may be that Matthew included the plea to show the woman's persistence.

Marks account is more narrative-driven than Matthew's account. Instead of the back and forth dialogue of Matthew, Mark has one statement by Jesus, the woman's reply, and Jesus' confirmation of deliverance. Davies and Allison report, "of 140 words in Matthew and 130 in Mark, fewer than forty are held in common."¹⁰² Matthew may have written his account without reference to Mark. Matthew does not tell the background of the story, that Jesus was in a house, or that the woman went home to find her daughter recovered. By this point in this paper this is to be expected, as Matthew regularly excludes details that do not reinforce his point. Harrington suggests that Matthew presents the account in such a way as to indicate that the daughter was there with the mother.¹⁰³ However, this assumes that the accounts of either Matthew or Mark are incompatible without having strong evidence.

4.4.3 Exposition

Persistent faith is clearly the focus of this passage. Before Matthew records the conversation between Jesus and the woman, he reports that the Canaanite woman "came out and was crying" (Mt. 15:22). "Crying" is in the imperfect tense giving the sense that she was saying this over and over. She pleads with Jesus to have mercy on her demon-oppressed daughter. She addresses him as "Lord, Son of David" (v. 22). Elsewhere in

¹⁰² Davies, 2:542.

¹⁰³ Harrington, 236.

Matthew the Son of David is the Christ (22:42). It is not certain the woman understood what she was saying. By this point it people had began to wonder if Jesus was the Son of David (12:23), and perhaps the woman had heard the stories. Whatever the woman had heard, she displays a dogged determination to obtain deliverance for her daughter from Jesus. After her initial plea, Matthew reports that "Jesus did not answer her a word" (15:23). Despite being told that Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, the woman continues to ask for help, falling to the ground and worshipping him (v. 25).¹⁰⁴ Jesus tells her that is it wrong to take the children's bread, meaning salvation, and throw it to the dogs (v. 25). Although many people would have felt sufficiently insulted to give up by this time the woman persists. She points out, "But even the little dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (v. 27). Jesus had heard enough. At this point Matthew breaks the "and he answered" cycle and instead has τότε ἀποκριθεὶς "then answering." This marks a shift in the narrative from dialog to resolution. Jesus tells her that she has great faith. This is the only time this is said about anyone in the Gospel of Matthew. However, this is very similar to Jesus' statement about the centurion that "with no one in Israel have I found such faith" (8:10). It is noteworthy that in both instances the affirmation is made to Gentiles. Another similarity with the centurion episode is Jesus' next statement. Jesus says to the woman, "as you believed, may it be done for you" (15:28, my translation). Her daughter was healed instantly (v. 29).

4.4.4 Faith in Matthew 15:21-28

Faith in this instance is at least a belief that Jesus was able to heal. Whether or not she felt sure of this is not specified, but her dogged determination appears to have

¹⁰⁴ Hagner, 2:438, translates προσεκύνηε as "began to worship." The imperfect tense is interesting, and does seem to suggest worship as opposed to simply falling down.

impressed Jesus, where her simple faith did not. Though, this might be going too far. It is possible that Jesus saw her faith at first and was simply testing her. At any rate this Canaanite woman showed admirable faith and perseverance in the midst of Jesus' deflections. The Gospel of Mark presents less of the dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, and does not mention the woman's faith, instead focusing on the condition of her daughter and her healing (Mk. 7:24-30).¹⁰⁵

This episode demonstrates active faith. The woman was certain Jesus was able to heal her daughter, but that was not enough for her to be healed. Her daughter is not healed until the woman has repeatedly begged Jesus for help, enduring both his disregard of her cries and then his challenging statements. This is why Jesus commends her for her great faith.

4.5 The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5-12)

4.5.1 Introduction

Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee after the healing the Canaanite girl. Again great crowds come to Jesus and he heals them. However, after three days of ministry to the people the food runs out, and Jesus again multiplies what food they do have feeding more than four thousand people. After sending the crowd away Pharisees and Sadducees come to him demand a sign from heaven of him, which Jesus refuses to give except for the sign of Jonah. As Jesus leaves them we come to the passage this section addresses.

4.5.2 Redaction and Literary Features

Jesus' warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees occurs in both Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:14-21. The main differences between the accounts are found in the dialogue. Instead of Jesus telling the disciples to beware of the yeast of

¹⁰⁵ Held, 199.

Herod as Mark has it (Mk. 8:15), Matthew records Jesus telling them to beware the yeast of the Sadducees.¹⁰⁶ Matthew again records Jesus' reprimand "O you of little faith" whereas Mark does not.¹⁰⁷ Mark's account focuses on the disciples' lack of perception and hardness of heart.¹⁰⁸ The disciples do not perceive or understand and their hearts are hard (Mk. 8:17). Their sensory organs are not functioning correctly (Mk. 8:18). Mark concludes the episode with the question from Jesus to the disciples "do you not yet understand?" (Mk. 8:21). Matthew includes one question about perception instead of three (Mt. 16:9). Here perception is not due to a lack of understanding or hardness of heart, but to little faith (Mt. 16:8). After Jesus finishes speaking the disciples do understand what Jesus was saying, showing that Matthew's emphasis was not on the dullness of the disciples, but their failure to trust Jesus.

The episode is mainly dialogue. Verse 5 sets the scene and verse 6 introduces the misunderstood command, while verse 7 reports the disciples' confusion. The middle portion, which makes up the bulk of the episode, is almost entirely Jesus speaking. This leads to the conclusion that Matthew is primarily concerned with the lessons that may be gained by Jesus correcting the deficient faith of the disciples. Verse 12 resolves the tension. The disciples are treated as a whole, all of them have the same reaction--initial confusion and eventual comprehension.

¹⁰⁶ Harrington, 244.

¹⁰⁷ Nolland, 653, seems to indicate that Matthew has added the little faith statement to provide a link to God's promise of provision of clothing in 6:31, to the disciples' fear in the storm in 8:26, and to Peter's doubt in 14:31.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall, 212, believes this focus is meant "to shock his [Jesus'] disciples (and Mark's audience) into appreciating the existential seriousness of their condition. They are in mortal danger of succumbing to the same resistance to the truth that afflicts the religious leaders and against which he has just warned them (v 15)" See also France, 251.

4.5.3 Exposition

Matthew begins this story by pointing out that the disciples forgot to bring bread with them. Jesus tells them to "Watch out and beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees" (Mt. 16:6). As the disciples forgot to bring bread, they infer Jesus is telling them to avoid bread from the Pharisees and Saducees. Jesus, aware that they are discussing this among themselves, calls them on it, addressing them as "O you of little faith" (v. 8). He reminds them of the two times he has multiplied food in the past and how much food was left each time. In light of these miracles, how can the disciples think that Jesus is concerned about bread? After this question, he reiterates his warning to them. Now the disciples understand that Jesus is talking, not about bread, but about the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

4.5.4 Faith in Matthew 16:5-12

In this story little faith is related to provision. This is the fourth occurrence of this word by Matthew, and each time it has referred to a lack of trust in God's provision or protection. The provision miracles had not shaped the disciples' thinking yet. The feeding of the five thousand and four thousand should have served as testimonies to strengthen the disciples' trust in Jesus' care for them. Instead, the disciples were still thinking in natural categories, which contained the seeds for worry when the supplies ran out. Jesus, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34), is calling them to move beyond the concerns of unbelievers to trust that he will provide for them.

4.6 Jesus Delivers an Epileptic Boy (Matthew 17:14-21)

4.6.1 Introduction

The deliverance of the epileptic boy (Mt. 17:14-21) is immediately preceded by the transfiguration narrative in all three Synoptic Gospels. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain alone. There Jesus is transformed so that his face and clothes shine. To make matters more incredible, Moses and Elijah appear and talk to Jesus. Peter interjects his desire to build tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. However, while Peter is speaking God interrupts him and tells the three disciples that Jesus is his beloved son and they are to listen to him. They, of course, fall to the ground terrified, but Jesus tells them to get up and not be afraid. Then they look up and see only Jesus. After that, while the four of them are coming down the mountain, Jesus explains to them the coming of Elijah and his own suffering. At this point the story of the deliverance of the epileptic boy is told.

4.6.2 Redaction and Literary Features

This episode is found in all three synoptic gospels: Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29, and Luke 9:37-43. Though all three stories are very similar each author tells it largely in his own words. Only when Jesus expresses his exasperation--"O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him here to me."--is there substantial agreement at the word level. As one would expect by this point in this study, Matthew greatly shortens Mark's account. The argument with the scribes is passed over and consequently Jesus' question about the argument. Instead, the father comes and kneels before Jesus straight away. What the father tells Jesus is largely the same. One difference is Mark has οὐκ ἔσχυσαν "they were not able" to cast the demon

out (Mk. 9:18), while Matthew records the disciples οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν αὐτὸν θεραπεῦσαι "were not able to heal him" (Mt 17:16). Nolland suggests that Matthew writes this to emphasize the disciples' failure.¹⁰⁹

Mark's account focuses on the weak faith of the boy's father. Matthew's account of the healing is very brief, one succinct sentence in verse 18. Luke mentions that before the boy gets to Jesus the demon throws him to the ground and causes him to convulse (Lk. 9:42). Mark's account of the deliverance episode is much longer, spanning eight verses (Mk. 9:20-27). Mark includes the father's description of the history of the case and his pleas for Jesus to heal him if he is able. Jesus is put off by this, and tells the Father that all things are possible if one believes. The father tells Jesus he does believe and asks him to help his unbelief. Matthew leaves this conversation out.¹¹⁰ This is highly significant. In Mark, Jesus' says to the father that "all things are possible for one who believes" (Mk. 9:23), which broadens Jesus' teaching on faith to everyone who believes. Matthew presents Jesus' general teaching on faith only to his disciples.¹¹¹

In Matthew the disciples' failure is not presented as a deficiency of faith, but a lack of prayer. Luke presents the story as a basic miracle account that demonstrates Jesus' power. Matthew uses this episode to teach about faith.

As in many other miracle stories in Matthew the episode is presented through mostly dialogue. Descriptions are abbreviated as much as possible. For example, in Mark the condition of the boy is described--muteness, foaming of the mouth, grinding of teeth, and physical rigidity--instead of simply named as Matthew does. The account of the

¹⁰⁹ Nolland, 712.

¹¹⁰ According to Twelftree, 136, this may be because Matthew did not want his readers to conclude that faith of the person was always required.

¹¹¹ Mt. 17:20; 21:21-22.

healing itself is brief: Jesus rebukes the demon, the demon leaves, and the boy is healed. In Mark the report takes three verses (Mk. 9:25-27). This seems to indicate that Matthew wants the focus on what Jesus says instead of what Jesus does.

4.6.3 Exposition

From the glorious heights of the transfiguration on the mountain we descend back to earth through talk of suffering to failure and doubt. Jesus and his inner circle, after coming down the mountain, come upon a crowd of people. A man comes and falls before Jesus. The man refers to Jesus as κύριε. This can mean many things. Louw-Nida offers four primary definitions: Lord, as in God or Christ (12.9); owner (57.12); ruler (37.51); and Sir (87.53). It is hard to choose between Lord and Sir. In the accounts given in Mark and Luke the Father instead says "teacher" (Mk. 9:17; Lk. 9:38). The man clearly has belief in Jesus' power as he comes to him asking for mercy. Probably the term is simply a form of respectful address. The father goes on to describe his son's condition. He is an epileptic and suffers terribly.¹¹² His condition causes him to fall into fire and water. The father points out that the nine disciples, with Peter, James, and John excluded as they were not there at the time, tried, but were unable to heal the child.

Jesus begins his response to the man with an annoyed castigation of the faithless and perverse generation.¹¹³ There is some debate over who exactly Jesus includes in this generation. The failure of the nine disciples has prompted this reaction. However, the term 'generation' seems to indicate a much broader scope than his nine disciples. Probably Jesus believes that the faithlessness of his own disciples is symptomatic of the

¹¹² Harrington, 257, asserts that the condition was understood to be related to the phases of the moon, and is commonly understood today as epilepsy.

¹¹³ France, 265, proposes an interesting link between Jesus and Moses in this passage. "When Moses came down from the mountain he was confronted by Israel's apostasy (Ex. 32); so on Jesus' return from the mountain he enters a scene of spiritual conflict (v. 18) and unbelief (vv. 17, 20)."

faithlessness of Israel in general, hence the sweeping statement. We see something of Jesus' emotional interior in his response. During at least part of his time on earth, he is exasperated at being with this faithless and perverse people.

As mentioned above, Matthew's account of the boy's healing is brief. Jesus rebukes the demon, the demon leaves the boy, and the child is healed. After the child is healed and they are alone, the disciples ask Jesus why they were unable to cast out the demon. Jesus responds that it is because of their ὀλιγοπιστία, their little faith. If their faith were as big as a mustard seed they could say to this mountain "move" and it would move. The concept of moving mountains was discussed in chapter 1. In the cursing of the fig tree episode there seems to be a dual referent of temple mount and impossible circumstance. Here the temple mount is clearly not in view, leaving only the idea of God's help in difficult circumstances. Jesus elaborates on this by saying that nothing will be impossible for them if they have faith.

4.6.4 Faith in Matthew 17:14-21

This episode is the fifth and final time Jesus speaks of little faith in Matthew. The previous four uses have a consistent meaning. In these accounts, little faith was faith in God mixed with doubt about his provision or protection for oneself. In the story of the epileptic boy, little faith is rather different. This time faith concerns someone else, the epileptic boy, rather than oneself. What is hoped for is not provision, as in the Sermon on the Mount (6:25-34) and the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees episode (16:5-12), nor protection, as in the two sea episodes (8:23-27; 14:22-34). Instead it appears to be belief that a demon would leave the boy. As we do not see the disciples successfully helping a demonized individual in Matthew, it is unclear whether the process involved

commanding the demon directly, as Jesus does, or praying that God would remove the demon. Evidence from the book of Acts supports the former option. In Acts 3:6, Peter does not pray for the lame beggar to be healed, he commands him to rise and walk just like Jesus did in the Synoptic gospels. In Acts 16:18, the Apostle Paul commands a spirit to come out in Jesus' name. These indicate that the apostles imitated Jesus' ministry methods.

There was certainly some amount of faith present as the disciples tried to cast the demon out and were surprised at their failure (Mt. 17:16, 19). Therefore, I conclude that little faith in this passage is a belief that God would drive out demons, based on the authority Jesus granted them (Mt. 10:1, 8), combined with some doubt that the demon would leave when commanded. However, France believes the disciples little faith was faithlessness as Jesus says even the smallest amount of faith has accomplish great things.¹¹⁴ My understanding, based on the study above, is that little faith is doubt or anxiety mixed with faith that renders faith inoperative as far as God is concerned, and therefore, faithlessness may be a misleading term.¹¹⁵

Held notes this passage's relation to miracle working of the disciples: "Matthew has succeed in showing that there is no longer any question about whether and how Jesus can heal, but whether and how the disciples can."¹¹⁶ In chapter 3 we saw Matthew present Jesus' pattern of teaching and miracle working and how his disciples were given a share in this ministry. Here we see them failing in that ministry, because of deficient faith.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ France, 266.

¹¹⁵ Also Hagner, 2:505.

¹¹⁶ Held, 191.

¹¹⁷ Marshall, 221, suggests the disciples were unable to deliver the boy because they "failed to recognise the inadequate faith of the petitioner - which Jesus addresses before delivering the boy - but they also failed to grasp the indispensable place of faith in their own use of delegated authority." While his comment regarding the place of faith seems speculative, his assertion that the father's defective faith should have

Faith does not have to be great, like the faith of the centurion (8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (15:21-28), to be effective. Jesus makes this clear by saying nothing will be impossible for the one with faith the size of a mustard seed. Great faith appears to be the ability to continue to believe despite testing or to believe for more seemingly difficult miracles. Faith, however, must not become little faith by being mixed with doubt. If it does it will become ineffective. It is worth pointing out that there is no distinction made between saving faith and miracle working faith in this passage.¹¹⁸

4.7 Jesus Heals Two Blind Men Again (Matthew 20:29-34)

4.7.1 Introduction

By this point in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus has concluded his ministry in Galilee and is making his way to Jerusalem. Matthew 16:21 introduces the transition saying, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." This is the first of four passion predictions (Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2). With the first three passion predictions, Matthew includes travel details. In the first case, they are about to go to Jerusalem, in the second they gathered in Galilee, and the third notes that they were going up to Jerusalem. Just before Jesus and the disciples enter Jerusalem in chapter 21, they leave Jericho, which provides the setting for our passage.

been dealt with before casting the demon out is interesting. Ordinarily, Jesus does require faith when working miracles on behalf of those who are not his disciples, with the possible exceptions of Peter's mother in law (Mt. 8:15) and the few in Nazareth Jesus healed (Mt. 13:5). However, it is not clear that the father's faith was corrected in Mark's account, and Matthew does not mention the Jesus' dialog with the father at all.

¹¹⁸ Hagner, 2:505. Contra Davies and Allison, 2:727.

4.7.2 Redaction and Literary Features

Matthew's second report of the healing of two blind men is found in all three Synoptic gospels: Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, and Luke 18:35-43. There are several rather substantial differences between Matthew's account and Mark's and Luke's. In Matthew, Jesus and the disciples are leaving Jericho, whereas in Mark and Luke they are entering it. Instead of one blind beggar Matthew has two unnamed blind men. Matthew does not mention the blind men's inquiry as does Luke (Lk. 18:36). All three have "Son of David" but instead of "Jesus" Matthew records "Lord" (Mt. 20:30). Matthew and Luke report that Jesus called the beggar(s) instead of having the disciples call as Mark does (Mk. 10:49). Surprisingly, Matthew is the only author to leave out Jesus' statement that their faith has healed them. Instead, Jesus in pity touches their eyes and they immediately receive their sight and follow him (Mt. 20:34).

The two blind men are treated as one, meaning their actions and words are recorded as one. This passage is more narrative-driven than most of the other miracle stories in Matthew's Gospel. There is a sense of motion in the story, which is halted when Jesus stops and talks to them. Again Matthew mentions Jesus' feeling of pity.

4.7.3 Exposition

Once the two blind men heard that it was Jesus who was passing by they cried, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David" (Mt 6:30). By this point in Jesus' ministry, we can assume that by calling Jesus "Lord" and the "Son of David" they were calling Jesus the Messiah. Though the crowd tries to silence them, they repeat the same plea over and over. Jesus heard and stopped. Many miracle stories in the Gospel of Matthew assert

Jesus knew what the person desired, even if it was not obvious to the eye.¹¹⁹ This time, however, Jesus asks them what they want him to do.¹²⁰ They reply that they want him to open their eyes. Jesus feels pity for them and touches their eyes, healing them immediately.¹²¹ They get up and follow him.

4.7.4 Faith in Matthew 20:29-34

Though faith is not mentioned in this passage, it is clear that the blind men were demonstrating persistent faith. In the similar passage in Matthew 9:29, Jesus says, "As you believed let it be done for you" (my translation). In Mark's account Jesus replies to their request "your faith has made you well" (Mk. 10:52). Perhaps Matthew did not feel the need to add his reply as his readers would infer faith was present without being told. The workings of faith are similar to what we have seen before. The blind men have faith in Jesus, but are not healed until they ask Jesus. Marshall asserts, rightly I think, that this episode demonstrates "how a potential or inward condition of faith, founded upon a true 'christological' perception, comes to experience the operation of divine power through a decisive commitment of the will."¹²² After being touched they receive what they requested.

¹¹⁹ For example, the bleeding woman in Matthew 9:22.

¹²⁰ Hagner, 2:587, says the request "is not for information but to provide an opportunity for the blind men to express their faith through their request."

¹²¹ France, 295, points out that the word used for eyes in v. 34 *οφθαλμοι* is a rare word, sometimes used for "eyes of the soul," and suggests that this, combined with the reference to them following Jesus, "suggests that this physical healing points to a greater blindness which Jesus can dispel" portrayed in the ambition of the apostles and the blindness of the leaders. This interpretation seems to be a bit fanciful. It seems better to simply say that there is a connection between physical and spiritual healing that is illustrated in this story.

¹²² Marshall, 131.

4.8 Jesus Curses the Fig Tree (Matthew 21:18-22)

4.8.1 Introduction

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (Mt. 21:18-22) is one of the first events of Holy Week, the week Jesus was crucified. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem riding on a colt (Mt. 21:5), being hailed by the crowds as a prophet and the Son of David as he enters (Mt. 21:9-10). He then goes to the temple, driving all who bought and sold out. After healing some of the blind and lame he moves on to Bethany and stays there. This is where our passage begins. France, in his commentary on Matthew, introduces this passage by saying, "Few readers have been able to find much value in the story in itself, indeed many have been embarrassed by its destructiveness and even apparently petty vindictiveness."¹²³

4.8.2 Redaction and Literary Features

The account of the cursing of the fig tree is found in both Matthew 21:18-22 and Mark 11:12-14, 20-26. Mark's account of the order of events is rather different. In Mark, Jesus enters Jerusalem, goes to the temple, and stays in Bethany on the first day (Mk. 11:1-11). Then he curses the fig tree, cleanses the temple, and returns to Bethany (Mk. 11:12-19). On the third day, while walking back to Jerusalem, his disciples notice the withered fig tree (Mk. 11:20-25). Mark 11:12-14, on the second day, parallels Matthew 21:18-19. While Mark 11:20-25, on the third day, parallels Matthew 21:20-22, where the second and third days are not distinguished. Determining the actual order of events is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that each author appears to have intentionally structured his Gospel a certain way to emphasize aspects of the narrative or Jesus' teaching. The way Mark's account is structured creates a relationship between

¹²³ France, 303.

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and his actions in the temple. By condensing the two days into one, Matthew weakens the association, presumably to emphasize Jesus' teaching about faith. However, the cursing of the fig tree is still surrounded by temple narratives: the cleansing of the temple (Mt. 21:12-17) and his challenge of the Jewish leadership in the temple (Mt. 21:23-23:39). Therefore, it is still possible to see a link between the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree. However, it seems Matthew wants to emphasize the power of faith, possibly because he wants his Christian audience to develop in this area.

Mark's account of the reaction of the disciples and Jesus' response is roughly twice as long as Matthew's. Peter recalls that Jesus cursed the withered tree on the previous day and points the tree out to Jesus. Mark 11:22-25 contains Jesus' response. Verses 22-24 contain essentially the same raw material as Matthew's account. The significant difference is that in Mark's account Jesus says "whoever says" (Mk. 11:23), whereas in Matthew Jesus tells them "if you say" (Mt. 21:21). As chapter 17, Matthew presentation of Jesus' teaching on faith is addressed to the disciples, instead of Mark's more broadly applicable telling. Also in Mark's account, Jesus begins with an extra command to have faith in God that is not found in Matthew's account. Mark does not have Jesus mentioning the fig tree; instead he goes straight to speaking of moving mountains. Here the two conditions, faith and lack of doubt, are interspersed with the mountain discourse instead of preceding it as in Matthew. Mark 11:24 is very similar to Matthew 21:22, "Therefore I say to you, everything whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received, and it will be to you."¹²⁴ "Everything whatever" is exactly the same in Greek in both accounts. Instead of Matthew's subjunctive "ask for in prayer

¹²⁴ Those, intentionally wooden, translations are mine.

believing," Mark has two present tense verbs and an imperative "pray and ask for, believe." Instead of "you will receive," Mark has "believe that you have received, and it will be to you." So we see that Mark has the same conditions as Matthew--faith, prayer, and not doubting. In Mark there is more repetition of faith and the object of faith is spelled out--God and the belief that you have received what you ask for--whereas it is not in Matthew.

4.8.3 Exposition

As Matthew presents the account, the fig tree withers at once in verse 19 and in verse 20 the disciples see the withered tree and marvel. The reader with only Matthew's Gospel would most naturally understand verse 20 to immediately follow verse 19 in time. However, "when" does not demand this reading; "when" can refer to any time following the events of vv. 18-19. Against allowing an extended period of time between vv. 19-20 is the fact that after seeing the withered fig tree the disciples ask Jesus how it withered immediately. If the events of vv. 19-20 did not immediately follow one another in time, how did the disciples know that the fig tree withered immediately after Jesus cursed it?

At any rate, the fig tree did wither at once and the disciples saw it and marveled, quite naturally it must be said. They ask Jesus, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" Jesus begins his response, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν. Jesus indicates that what follows is certainly true and attention must be paid to it.¹²⁵ He continues with two subjunctive phrases ἐὰν ἔχητε πίστιν and μὴ διακριθῆτε.¹²⁶ These are the conditions--possessing faith and not doubting--that must be met for what follows to come to pass. The disciples asked how the

¹²⁵ Marshall, 165, believes this saying gives what follows a "proverbial ring." He adds, "It is a characteristic of proverbial sayings to have their own encapsulated meanings independent of their use in any given circumstance, yet to acquire added poignancy or significance when employed in a particular situation."

¹²⁶ Hagner, 2:606, notes that this combination of words is also found in Romans 4:20 and James 1:6.

fig tree withered so quickly, but Jesus takes his answer well beyond that. He says if the two conditions are met, not only will they do what was done to the fig tree, but they will even be able to command mountains to be thrown into the sea. As stated in chapter 1, mountain here probably refers to both the temple mount, which Jesus may have been looking toward, and seemingly impossible circumstances. However, relative to Mark's Gospel, Matthew has deemphasized the temple mount referent so that it is barely felt. The clear focus is God's help in difficult circumstances.¹²⁷

In verse 22 Jesus broadens the application as widely as possible by saying πάντα ὅσα. Translating this phrase in a wooden fashion yields "all things as many as." This, of course, is not good English but it gets at how widely Jesus is casting the net. In fact, it would be difficult to state the scope more broadly than this. Jesus teaches everything whatever you ask in prayer you will receive, as long as you believe; presumably, "if you do not doubt" from verse 21 is implied.¹²⁸

4.8.4 Faith in Matthew 21:18-22

Instead of focusing on Jesus' ministry like so many of the passages we have looked at, this passage, as in the healing of the epileptic boy, focuses on the ministry of the disciples. In chapters 8 and 9 people came to Jesus believing that he had the power to help them. Now the disciples must go to God, not only with belief in his power to answer them, but also free of doubt. What is not to be doubted? This verse is the only time this verb is used with this sense in the Gospel of Matthew. However, the subject of doubt

¹²⁷ It seems to me that Nolland, 854, draws too heavily on the temple mount, with its allusions to passage such as Zechariah 14:4-5, when he wonders if removing mountains equates to praying for the return of Christ or preaching the gospel.

¹²⁸ An important question that needs to be taken up in another study is who this "you" is. Here he is speaking to disciples who have been authorized to work miracles.

occurs in several passages.¹²⁹ In most of these, doubt has been portrayed as a lack of trust in God's care. The disciples failed to believe that God would provide for them and protect them. Doubt in the story of the epileptic boy was different; above I concluded it was doubt that the demon would leave the boy when commanded. In chapter 21 Jesus has clearly gone beyond belief for basic care; he is talking about cursing fig trees, moving mountains, and receiving answers to everything whatsoever. Therefore, doubt in this passage is more akin to doubt in chapter 17: doubting an answer will be received according to what has been requested. Osborne believes doubt "refers not to a certainty that God will give anything one asks but rather to a 'divided mind' that trusts God only partway and is centered more on self."¹³⁰ While there is something to what Osborne affirms, Jesus has promised that requests made with faith and absence of doubt will receive what is asked for. Therefore, in practice absence of doubt inevitably merges with certainty as trust in God brings certain reward.¹³¹

4.9 Summary of Faith in Matthew's Gospel

Before summarizing what has been learned about faith in this chapter I will briefly note the conclusions arrived at in the last chapter for Matthew 4:23-9:35. There we saw that faith is responded to when it is active. Individuals did not receive by faith alone, but by coming to Jesus with faith. As noted in the review of Marshall's work in chapter 1, faith for miracles and faith in the gospel are interrelated; people with faith in

¹²⁹ Peter is said to doubt when he begins to sink after walking on water (14:31), and some of the eleven disciples are said to doubt just before Jesus gives them the Great Commission (28:17). Doubt is implied by anxiety language used in 6:25-34 and 9:23-27. It is also implied by the use of "little faith" in 17:20 if the understanding of that phrase put forward in this thesis is correct.

¹³⁰ Grant Osborne, *Matthew*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 770.

¹³¹ I appreciate that France, 304, when discussing this passage, reports what Matthew wrote without arbitrarily qualifying or explaining away the promise. Similarly, Twelftree, 139, writes, "Jesus' act--causing the fig tree to wither instantly--is therefore an example to his followers in the exercise of faith."

the gospel are to trust Jesus for miracles, and people with faith in Jesus for miracles are said to receive salvation. In Matthew's Gospel faith is always answered according to the request, though Jesus sometimes did more than was asked for. The request can be for oneself or on behalf of someone else. Faith is at least belief in God's ability to help. It includes trust in God's willingness to provide basic care. As such, lack of trust in God's care for basic needs is defective faith, what Jesus calls "little faith." Matthew appears to present these stories of faith to provide examples for disciples to imitate.

Following chapter 9, Matthew focuses more on the disciples' faith than on peoples' faith in Jesus. Of the six passages concerning faith we have examined in this chapter, four of them concern the disciples' faith. The two passages focusing on faith in Jesus, the Canaanite woman and the two blind men are consistent with what was taught in chapters 8 and 9. However, the scope of faith is greatly expanded in chapters 17 and 21. In chapter 17 the disciples function in the place of Jesus; instead of the father coming to Jesus, he comes to the disciples expecting the same results. The disciples are rebuked by Jesus for not having the faith to duplicate his ministry. We saw in chapter 3 of this work that it is likely that Matthew structured his presentation of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry to serve as a model for the disciples' ministry. In this chapter Matthew shows us how the disciples tried to imitate Jesus' ministry and failed. This was due to a deficient faith. In chapter 21 a question about a miracle becomes a lesson in the working of faith in the disciples' prayer life. Jesus' expands the scope as broadly as possible here. Everything whatsoever they ask for in faith without doubting they will receive.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Faith in Matthew's Gospel

In Matthew, faith is relatively simple--in most of the miracle accounts it is no more than coming to Jesus for help. Held defines the activity of faith well as "an activity of the believer, an energetic, importunate grasping after the help of God."¹³² There are different aspects of faith presented in the miracle accounts of Matthew, but one constant is that it is active, not passive belief. Even ones with great faith did not receive what they desired until they came to Jesus. The method of healing varied. Jesus usually healed by touching, but sometimes without. Sometimes he proclaimed their healing, and sometimes he said nothing. Most of the time the person healed was present, but sometimes they were not. In a few instances it is not even clear that the person healed had faith, as in the cases of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15) and the few who were healed in his hometown (Mt. 13:58). This shows that Jesus was in control of the healing process, in control and willing to help.

Although several called him Lord and even the Son of David, it is doubtful that they would have connected Jesus with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:4 as Matthew does in verse 8:17. In fact, Matthew portrays those close to Jesus, the Twelve, as struggling with their faith, while outsiders such as the centurion and the Canaanite woman are portrayed as ones with great faith. The simplicity of faith becomes complicated when the disciples are expected to live and minister without Jesus' immediate physical help. Before healing the first two blind men, Jesus asks them if they believe he is able to heal them, and heals them according to their positive affirmation (Mt. 9:27-31). There is no mention of certainty. As we saw in the passages where Jesus

¹³² Held, 280.

chastises the disciples for having little faith and in the teaching near the fig tree, the disciples *are* expected to be certain. This assurance was based on their commission in chapter 10.

Insights on faith in Matthew's Gospel by commentators vary in quality. Sometimes the comments are based on careful study of Matthew's use of faith, but other times the comments seem to be the personal opinions of the scholar without reference to scholarship. For example, concerning the disciples' failure to cast the demon out of the boy in Matthew 17, Doriani asserts, "The disciples' surprise at their failure suggests that they assumed they could solve this problem. Why, because they began to trust in themselves, in their gifts, their skills, rather than trusting the Lord. They apparently thought they had the gifts, the training, and the experience to make this work."¹³³ Similarly, Osborne posits, concerning the same passage, "They likely believed their newfound power over illness and the demonic realm gave them status, and they may have been showing off rather than centering on the God who alone has true power."¹³⁴ Hauerwas asserts, "Their faith is small because they have not understood that faithfulness to Jesus is not the faith that gives them power to impress with a sign."¹³⁵ Recalling our study of "little faith" in Matthew's Gospel, what would lead one to make these suggestions? Personally, I can think of no relationship between these assertions and how "little faith" is used in Matthew. In all cases, "little faith" is a failure to trust in God for care or provision, often because fear became stronger than faith. That is very different from arrogant trust in one's own abilities or a failed attempt at showing off. This demonstrates the need for both further study on faith and its application, and the need for

¹³³ Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2008), 1:117.

¹³⁴ Osborne, 657.

¹³⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 158.

scholars to reference existing studies related to petitionary faith when commenting on the Synoptic Gospels.

5.3 Areas for Further Study on Faith and Its Application

In chapter 1, I reviewed several works related to faith and miracles in the Synoptic Gospels. Having produced a more modest study myself, I want to suggest areas for further study on faith, specifically petitionary faith. The works of Marshall, Twelftree, and Held are excellent, but deal with petitionary faith in individual letters. The next step would be to look across the Synoptic Gospels, the rest of the NT canon, and then early Christian letters to get a broader understanding of petitionary faith in the early church. This understanding would then need to be combined with other studies related to the application of faith in the early church and beyond. Then scholarship would be in a better position to understand how Matthew expected his audience to apply the faith material in his Gospel.

This study has suggested that, in Matthew's Gospel, during the earthly ministry of Jesus, active, undoubting faith received the answers it sought. Jesus' disciples, commissioned in Matthew 10, were expected to carry this ministry on. People who came to the apostles were to receive what they requested as if they were coming to Jesus in the flesh. Things become more difficult when we seek to generalize past these specific statements. In Matthew's Gospel, one has to come to a physical, authorized individual to receive answers. There is nothing in Matthew about someone praying privately for healing and receiving an answer. What if no authorized individual is physically available? What if those authorized in Matthew 10 are all dead? Do the examples and teachings on faith in Matthew apply any longer?

Therefore, the question of authority and succession of authority becomes critical.

Ulrich Luz, speaking of the commissioning of the Twelve in Matthew 10, says:

His [Matthew's] concern here is not with its historical constitution, but with the authorization by Jesus that determines the church's entire activity. The disciples share in his own authority; that is made clear by the references back to 4:23, 9:35, and 8:16. As 28:18-20 will underscore, this power is an expression of the power of the Lord who remains with his church...Matthew thus presents the mission of the Twelve as the prototype of the continuing mission of the church.¹³⁶

Similarly, Graham Twelftree says "the miracles are models for the ministry of his followers."¹³⁷ As we saw in chapter two, it appears that Matthew has arranged the miracle accounts in order to provide a template for Jesus' disciples to follow. The question is "what disciples was Matthew thinking of when he did this?" Luz and Twelftree contend that the church is in view. In this reading, it is not the apostles alone who can perform miracles, but other disciples as well. If Luz is correct, one would expect the experience of immediate answered prayer and miraculous activity to continue in the church. If the promises were only for apostles, then why did Matthew present his material in this way? Possibly, he imagined apostles who were struggling with doubt would read this Gospel, and be encouraged to let go of their doubt, but this seems unlikely.

If Matthew was primarily thinking of the original apostles we have an explanation for the disparity between the miraculous accounts in the Gospels and that of the church subsequent to the time of the apostles. John Broadus, commenting on Jesus' teaching that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains, said, "This faith that could remove mountains...was proper only in those to whom it was granted to work miracles. For us to

¹³⁶ Luz, 2:66. Similarly, Hagner, 1:196, says, "The stories of these chapters [Mt. 8-9] thus have a transparency (Luz) or a paradigmatic function (Kingsbury) that makes them directly applicable to the life and discipleship of Matthew's community."

¹³⁷ Twelftree, 102.

attempt such a thing is folly."¹³⁸ Broadus believed that Jesus' teaching on faith applied only to those in the early church granted the authority to see the miraculous results promised.

Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, told his disciples that if they had faith nothing would be impossible for them.¹³⁹ One could, like Broadus, say that these teachings only applied to the authorized apostles. In Mark's account, however, the application appears to be much broader. Jesus tells the father of the epileptic boy that nothing is impossible for "one who believes" (Mk. 9:23). Likewise, Jesus tells his disciples that "whoever" believes and does not doubt will be able to command mountains to move (Mk. 11:23). Our understanding on petitionary faith, and its application, would increase significantly if these different ways of presenting Jesus' teaching could be explained.

¹³⁸ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 376.

¹³⁹ This is my summary of Matthew 17:20 and 21:22.

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