

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 33, Chapter 9 Continued 2

As we continue in Matthew chapter 9, we left off last time with verse 27 that says:

^{CJB} **Matthew 9:27** ²⁷ *As Yeshua went on from there, two blind men began following him, shouting, "Son of David! Take pity on us!"*

RE-READ MATTHEW 9:27 - end

While it can fly right by us, it hasn't been missed by most Bible scholars who flinch a bit when they read the words "Son of David". For them, this term "Son of David" seems out of place, and so it is especially bothersome as to why these 2 blind men would call Yeshua by that title. Son of David is a title, a name, that is quite technical and in none of the Synoptic Gospels has it been used of Christ up to this point in His ministry except by Matthew. So what did the term "Son of David" mean to the Jewish people and to Matthew? Without doubt for Matthew it was directly tied to the Messiah.

Matthew opens his genealogy of Yeshua in his Gospel with:

^{CJB} **Matthew 1:1** *This is the genealogy of Yeshua the Messiah, son of David, son of Avraham:*

The opening words of Matthew's Gospel are meant to place Yeshua directly at the center of messianic hope. It was intended to identify Him as a direct descendant of Abraham, the father of all Hebrews, and also of King David, who was believed to be the royal father of the eternal messianic line. Because Matthew, the believing Jew, is writing decades in hindsight, some years after the

events he was writing about took place, then of course He had already come to the personal conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah and so that is written into his Gospel. It had become a common understanding among the Jewish people that the prophesied Deliverer would be a descendant (a son) of David because David had been promised that a member of his household would rule upon the throne of Israel forever. 2nd Samuel records a prophecy of Nathan, the prophet God provided for King David, as he speaks this to David during the time that he was the king of Israel:

CJB **2 Samuel 7:11-16** ¹¹ "**Moreover, ADONAI tells you that ADONAI will make you a house.** ¹² **When your days come to an end and you sleep with your ancestors, I will establish one of your descendants to succeed you, one of your own flesh and blood; and I will set up his rulership.** ¹³ **He will build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.** ¹⁴ **I will be a father for him, and he will be a son for me. If he does something wrong, I will punish him with a rod and blows, just as everyone gets punished;** ¹⁵ **nevertheless, my grace will not leave him, as I took it away from Sha'ul, whom I removed from before you.** ¹⁶ **Thus your house and your kingdom will be made secure forever before you; your throne will be set up forever.**"

So the idea that the Messiah would be a son of David (a descendant of David) was first established here. Many centuries later that David-Messiah connection was well understood within Jewish theology. But there's more to this in this brief story of the 2 blind men. Hang in there with me because this is going to help you see this episode in color and not just black and white.

In Hebrew, the original language not only of the Old Testament but also of the original Gospel of Matthew, Son of David is **ben-David**. Interestingly, however, in the Old Testament when the term **ben-David** is used it always refers to King Solomon, David's biological son and immediate successor. Knowing this, and knowing that the only Scripture in existence during Yeshua's era was the **Tanakh**, the Old Testament, then what exactly is it that these 2 blind men had in their minds about who or what the Son of David is, and how does this apply to Yeshua such that they shouted it out to Him in hopes He would heal them? Is it that they are saying that unlike any one else so far, they believe Jesus is the prophesied Jewish Messiah? Or.... could it be that they think of this miracle working **Tzadik** that is accomplishing these astounding feats so far beyond any of the previously known **Tzadikkim** (Holy Men), **not** as the Messiah but rather as

a sort of second Solomon (I'll explain that in a moment)? After all, there is simply no sense thus far in Matthew or in any of the Gospels that this early in His ministry had Yeshua of Nazareth become known as the Messiah among the Jewish people; not even among His own disciples. And I remind you that many potential Messiahs had already come and gone, and even more would come after Christ's death on the cross including men such as **Shi'mon Bar Kokhbah** who led the Jewish people in a rebellion against Rome in the 130's A.D. But this idea of the story of the 2 blind men and a possible connection with Solomon really intrigued me. After all, while Yeshua drew people to Him through His stupendous miracles, He also had gained a reputation as a fount of Wisdom that stood above even the Jewish religious authorities; Temple or Synagogue. And who in Israelite history was known most for his wisdom? Solomon.

Let this idea sink in a moment. I suggested in earlier lessons that while Yeshua's miracles were amazing to behold, those miracles were NOT what led the people, Jews or gentiles, to believe He was the Messiah. And I also suggested that especially among those who came in later generations (including ours) that while those mind-bending miracles make for great reading and for faith building it was not that but His Wisdom that drew us towards Him in the first place. It is the depth and truth of what He taught and the compassion and soul-healing that He stood for that has brought countless millions of humanity to Him for Salvation. The Apostle Paul was particularly sensitive to the characteristic of Wisdom being associated with Christ. Here is but one of numerous statements Paul made speaking of Yeshua in terms of Wisdom.

^{CJB} **1 Corinthians 1:21-24** ²¹ *For God's wisdom ordained that the world, using its own wisdom, would not come to know him. Therefore God decided to use the "nonsense" of what we proclaim as his means of saving those who come to trust in it.* ²² *Precisely because Jews ask for signs and Greeks try to find wisdom,* ²³ *we go on proclaiming a Messiah executed on a stake as a criminal! To Jews this is an obstacle, and to Greeks it is nonsense;* ²⁴ *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, this same Messiah is God's power and God's wisdom!*

Here Paul explains Yeshua's very substance as that of "God's Wisdom". No matter which Bible version one might choose to study, the connection between Christ and Wisdom, even Wisdom being organically embodied in Christ (as it was said to be in Solomon) is front and center, and is unmistakable. It helps when we learn that in ancient times, in nearly every society, Wisdom was seen as a living

thing (in some religions it was an entirely separate god or goddess). Wisdom was a tangible entity that was perceived as having actual power of itself.

So I researched the possibility that perhaps Jews of Christ's day thought of the term "Son of David" not how we have typically pictured it, but rather it was a term used in two different and separate ways: the first was meant as an association with the Messiah, but the second was meant as an association with David's son he had with Bathsheba: Solomon. My search led to a Bible scholar, Loren Fisher, who in 1968 pointed out that some ancient incantation bowls with inscriptions written in Aramaic on them, had been discovered in the Holy Land. These writings spoke of King Solomon as a great exorcist (that is, he could order demons out of people). In 1974 Evald Lovestam pointed out that in the ancient extra-biblical work called *The Testament of Solomon*, written perhaps as early as the 1st century, King Solomon was characterized as having been a miracle healer, even a magician of sorts. I'm not saying that in actuality King Solomon was any of these things; but they are solid evidence that in ancient times, and by all accounts in Jesus's time as well, that the acts of miracle healing and exorcism had, among the Jewish people, become something associated more with the qualities of Solomon than with a Messiah. When we add the miracle healings attributed to Solomon to the commonly understood chief characteristic of Solomon as the master of Wisdom on earth, Jesus certainly would have reflected those same attributes to the minds of the Jews who witnessed it. Therefore this might be the reason why these blind men shouted "Son of David" at Him. It was not that they were thinking in terms of a Messiah who was a descendant of David as much as they were thinking of this amazing man having the characteristics of King Solomon, the actual Old Testament Son of David. This scenario fits the story in Matthew far better than assigning to these blind men an inexplicable belief that somehow they were thinking that Jesus was the Messiah even before He had revealed Himself.

For those who might misunderstand what I'm saying, in no way do I mean that Yeshua is not Messiah, and instead is the personification of Wisdom. I'm saying that just as He is both the Lamb and the Lion, He is also both Savior and Wisdom. He bears the characteristics of both David and Solomon (after all, He was descended through David's son Solomon). But to this point in His earthly ministry (the timeline portrayed in the Gospel accounts) it had not yet occurred to the Jews that He might be the Messiah who bore David's characteristics. Rather He was at this point in time more naturally seen as Wisdom and the healer and the exorcist; someone who bore Solomon's characteristics (even though most of

these characteristics were steeped in folklore and Tradition).

Why did I spend so much time exploring this with you? Because this provides much needed additional background for what we're reading. It explains how various Jewish people thought of Jesus of Nazareth quite differently as they struggled to comprehend where, exactly, He fit into their understanding about those mysterious few men in Jewish history who had the power to perform miracles and healings and exorcisms. If we can wrap our minds around this concept then we will gain a more true understanding of the historical and actual Yeshua, the people He interacted with, and what these Gospel accounts reveal about the real people living at that time. If we can apprehend what the words, terms, and actions that we find in the New Testament indicated to members of 1st century Jewish society, and not what they seem to mean as seen through the lens of modern Western and Eastern societies of Christians, 2000 years later, then we will gain a more solid foundation for our own personal faith. Let's move on.

So, the 2 blind men who think of Jesus as possessing the characteristics of the Son of David.... in their minds probably meaning Solomon-like abilities.... they beseech Him to take notice of them. The next verse says that when He entered "the house" these 2 blind men came to Him and pled with Him. Who's house is "the house"? It indicates Yeshua's own personal home in Capernaum, or Peter's, or it is that (as many suspect) Yeshua was residing with Peter and for a time it could be said it was their mutual home. Notice Yeshua's response to their plea. Paraphrased, He asked them if they thought that He had the power to do what they were asking. What did Christ mean by saying this? Clearly these 2 men wouldn't have run after Christ and begged Him to heal them if they didn't already think He could do it. The issue is not just faith but in depth of faith. Do they have enough faith to sincerely believe that Yeshua has the power to heal? Even though in the Jewish culture blindness was thought to have been the result of sin, Yeshua doesn't do with these 2 men what He did with the paralytic; that is, He doesn't forgive their sins, that then results in physical healing. Rather He establishes their faith that He unequivocally does have the extraordinary power to heal their blindness, and then says that as a result of this faith (or trust) they are healed. And behold! Instantly they could see.

And yet if their faith was NOT in Yeshua as the Messiah, then in what was their faith? All Christ asked was if they have the faith to truly, sincerely believe that He had the power to heal them; not if they thought He was the Savior. Obviously

they did possess that level of faith. Notice that once again, as with the dead girl whom Yeshua revived, this miracle was done in private, inside the house. The Church Father Chrysostom in his homily on the Gospel of Matthew says this about this passage:

For what purpose did it happen that, while they are crying out, He delays and questions them further? Here again Jesus is teaching us utterly to resist the glory that comes from the crowds. There was a house nearby. He led them into the house to heal them in private. Then He charged them to tell no one.

I don't mean to be disrespectful, but doesn't it make you a little uneasy or even skeptical at some of these large Christian healing gatherings (especially the televised ones) when in front of a rapt crowd a Pastor will line people up as though they are anxiously waiting in line to board an amusement ride, and dramatically lay a hand on them and miraculously heal them to the shouts and adoration of those present? And an expectation of money for the healer is involved in some way? Isn't this the opposite of Christ's example? Is it not something that He mostly tried to avoid? Apparently such a temptation to do such a thing as to exploit the victims and the crowds came about long before Yeshua's day, existed all during it, and lives on into modern times. When Christ speaks about praying or healing to gain personal adulation and reward, it isn't in positive terms.

Therefore, as typical, in verse 30 Yeshua was said to have admonished the healed blind men "severely" not to tell anyone. Other versions say "sternly warned". These are all good interpretations of the Greek. The point is, Yeshua didn't tell them as an aside, or nicely, to be quiet about this miracle. He was emphatic; He ordered it and the intention was unmistakable. So how did these 2 men who could now see again react? They promptly went out from the house, journeyed across the region (no doubt meaning the Galilee) and talked about what happened to them to everyone they encountered. As Believers we could probably chalk this up to unbridled joy and enthusiasm. Or as so many in the Church teach, these two were out evangelizing. Hardly. They were being disobedient. Even if they meant no harm from it, or if they were so happy they just couldn't contain themselves, they immediately went out and did what they were specifically and forcefully commanded NOT to do! Forget the why of it.

You know, we can read of Christians doing things (or not doing things they

should have done) that Yeshua explicitly taught about, all through the ages and being proud of themselves in the doing. Big things like the Church pushing Jews out. Or like the Inquisition. Or like the Crusades. Or like the Holocaust. Or like declaring the Law of Moses as null and void. Nearly every one of these and scores of other examples were done in the name of enthusiasm, and also in Christ's name. I don't think for a second that these 2 blind men in any way thought of Yeshua as the Messiah. Rather to them He was an extraordinary Holy Man who even bore characteristics of Solomon; therefore obedience to Him played no role. Otherwise we have two men who convert and instantly disobey Yeshua. When later we read of those who truly know Him as Messiah, they will fastidiously obey Him even unto death if necessary.

Christians of all eras seem to have the most annoying proclivity to at once profess unshakable faith and at the same time demonstrate remarkable unfaithfulness. When we come to teaching moments like these in our study, I just can't help but to be reminded of the most terrifying passage in the entire Bible:

CJB Matthew 7:21-22 ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. ²² On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'"

Does this not rather well fit those 2 former blind men who couldn't wait to disobey Christ, even if it was because they were so happy at what He did for them? Our emotions do not trump Jesus's commands.

Verse 32 says "as they were going". Apparently Christ and some of His disciples had left Capernaum. Where ever He was or was going, large crowds were again present. Christ's ministry had progressed such that His feats couldn't help but attract hundreds, perhaps thousands. Clearly not only the curious came but also those who had hopes of healing for themselves or others. Yeshua now meets yet another demon possessed man who had been unable to speak because of it. In the most abrupt, concise way Matthew simply says that the demon was expelled, which allowed the man to talk. Each miracle adds to Jesus's reputation and the crowds cannot get enough of it. We're told that the viewpoint of the people is that there is no precedent among the people of Israel for what Christ is doing. That is, this doesn't mean in all recorded history of the Israelite people that no one has done such things; but rather in recent memory such things have not happened.

The Pharisees (which meant the leadership of the religious party) have a different opinion. In fact, when we read this passage we see that first Matthew has the crowd respond to the exorcising of the demon possessed man by being very impressed, and then immediately we have the Pharisee leadership (the synagogue leadership) responding to the crowds. The Pharisees are not talking to Yeshua but to the people who witnessed the dumb man now speaking, and they are trying to discourage them from thinking what Christ is doing is a good thing. Rather they claim that since Christ expelled a demon that it was only because of His co-operation with the ruler of the demons (Satan). This seems, on its face, to be an absurdity. However when the legitimate and respected leadership of a group or a government claims something, no matter how preposterous, the common folk will often just assume that their leaders must be right for no other reason that they are the leaders.

We don't read of a response from Jesus to this obvious slander; probably because He didn't hear it. One can only wonder if Matthew just let this stand without rebuttal because on its face the Pharisee leaders' accusation is ridiculous. Even so, Matthew will use this rash claim as a foil in later parts of his Gospel. Many Bible scholars are convinced that a passage in Mark is telling this same story and so it adds some information for us.

CJB Mark 3:22-26 ²² *The Torah-teachers who came down from Yerushalayim said, "He has Ba'al-Zibbul in him," and "It is by the ruler of the demons that he expels the demons."* ²³ *But he called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan expel Satan?"* ²⁴ *If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom can't survive;* ²⁵ *and if a household is divided against itself, that household can't survive.* ²⁶ *So if Satan has rebelled against himself and is divided, he can't survive either; and that's the end of him.*

First, I cannot agree that this is the same story at all; but rather another that has some similarities. For one reason the context is entirely different. This goes hand in glove with the insistence among a number of Bible teachers that Luke's Sermon on the Plain is one and the same as Matthew's Sermon on the Mount because the sermons incorporate some common elements and sayings. However the setting and the sermons themselves are more unlike than alike. The agenda behind this claim of Matthew and Mark speaking about the same event about the blind men is because of the scholarly consensus that Mark was the first Gospel writer (without any hard evidence at all) and Matthew the last; and they assume that Matthew takes elements from both Mark's and Luke's

Gospels to fashion his own. So in their estimation Matthew merely took Mark's story and abbreviated it and to some degree changed it to suit himself.

Second, the context for Mark's account of what the Pharisees said to Christ about Him driving out demons is entirely different than Matthew's. In Mark the story takes place on a Sabbath and the Pharisee's bone of contention is that Yeshua should not heal people or exorcise demons on **Shabbat**. Therefore for Christ to do so makes Him wicked, and so the spiritual authority to dispossess demons can only be Satan and not God.

In any case, without further comment, Matthew moves on from the Pharisees' ridiculous accusation towards Yeshua and explains that He spent some time visiting many towns and villages. Since the end of His Sermon on the Mount we've seen that the focus of Christ's ministry has been on healing and exorcising demons from people. Verse 35 returns us to His teaching ministry. Or, the way Jews would have seen it, Yeshua began operating again more in the role of a Wisdom teacher, like Solomon, something that was also attributed to the **Tzadikim**. Yeshua's main topic was proclaiming the Good News. What Good News? The Good News of salvation? No; not yet. It was the Good News of the arrival on earth of "the Kingdom" (short hand for the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God). In Christian terms we might say that Jesus went on a missionary tour of the Holy Land; but unlike Paul's missionary tours that were evangelical in nature, Christ's mission tour was to alert the Jewish people that a new era had begun: the Kingdom of Heaven has appeared. So we need to think of His tour in the context of Him accomplishing 3 things. He taught in the synagogues, preached about the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven, and healed every manner of infirmity for the common masses of Jews. Yet Yeshua is not only on a Good News tour; He is on a fact-finding mission. He wants to know: what is the spiritual condition of the people of Israel? The results are disappointing and what He learned is reported in verse 36.

^{CJB} **Matthew 9:36** ³⁶ ***When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***

It is not difficult even in our modern world where very few of us have been around sheep, to understand the metaphor of a sheep without a shepherd in an abstract sense. However when this illustration is how Matthew says Yeshua viewed the situation of the Jewish people scattered about the Holy Land, it is best to understand it from its historical sense. We find several references in the Old

Testament to sheep without a shepherd. I want to share one in particular with you because I suspect this is most similar to how Jesus felt about His people, and it can apply to modern times as well. In other words I think we need to veer off to application for a few minutes.

Open your Bibles to 2nd Chronicles chapter 18.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 18:1 - 17

This story is about two Hebrew kings that lived at a time long after King Solomon's death when Israel had, through civil war, become divided into two nations or kingdoms: the Kingdom of Israel to the north and the Kingdom of Judah to the south. The Kingdom of Israel was ruled by Ahav and the Kingdom of Judah was ruled by Jehoshaphat; they had become allies. Israel had wandered off more and more into paganism, while Judah had stayed somewhat closer to the God of Israel in worship and in practice, probably because they still had the Temple and Priesthood in their territory. Ahav decided (for whatever reason) that he wanted to attack Ramoth Gilead and of course wanted his ally Jehoshaphat to join him in doing so. As was custom for a king, Ahav called his prophets to the palace to give their predictions and recommendations for doing such a thing. These prophets were pagans or at least they worshipped other gods. Jehoshaphat knew this and asked Ahav if there weren't any Israelite prophets left in his kingdom that they could consult. Ahav said yes there is one; but he doesn't like him very much because he never tells him what he wants to hear.

All of Ahav's pagan prophets, on the other hand, were quick to prophesy a good outcome for whatever the king wanted to have happen. But this one prophet, a God worshipper and true prophet named **Mikhayahu**, had the annoying habit of telling the king what God told him to say instead of going along with the politically correct crowd. So Ahav never wanted to hear from him; but Jehoshaphat did. The prophet was summoned and appeared before both of the kings. Interestingly, probably out of self preservation, this time he just told Ahav what he wanted to hear; that the coalition would easily defeat Ramoth Gilead. But Jehoshaphat smelled a rat and told **Mikhayahu** to tell the truth whereupon he did. He changed his tune and said the campaign would be a disaster. The result would be that Israel would be so defeated that the remaining soldiers would just wander around the hill country like a bunch of sheep without a shepherd. Further, God says, let these soldiers go home in peace because they have no leader to lead them. This elicited the response of a furious and insulted Ahav: "See, I told you so. He never

says good things for me!"

While this is actually pretty humorous, the point is that in God's economy sheep without a shepherd was a metaphor for His people having no legitimate or proper leadership in God's eyes. In Christ's day it had been hundreds of years since there had been a Jewish King over Judah, so the Priests were supposed to fill that leadership role as the spiritual leadership (although not the civil government leadership). But the High Priest and his family were completely illegitimate and not of the biblical line of High Priests. Rather the High Priesthood was run by politically connected aristocrats; the office bought and sold to the high bidder. The Temple had become mostly a place of commerce and profit, simply using the guise of religion to fleece the people of their tithes and offerings as the source of the High Priest's wealth. The Synagogue was also of questionable value, but for different reasons. The Pharisees were the Synagogue leadership; yet they had no biblically ordained position; the entire institution was manmade and doctrinal. The Synagogue operated mostly on Tradition; or as we find Jesus call it, Traditions of the Elders. It's not that there weren't well intentioned leaders and good teachers from time to time that taught the Scriptures at the Synagogue. However as we look at the Mishnah (which admittedly was not created until a couple of hundred years after Christ) we see that Scripture had been, for a long time, interpreted through the lens of Tradition and custom and so what was being taught was sculpted and shaped to suit various Pharisee beliefs. The result was that slowly, surely, nearly imperceptibly, the Hebrew religion had become so weak and powerless without the inspiration of the unfiltered biblical truth that Christ viewed His people, the Jews, like Ahav's sheep without a shepherd... a leaderless flock..... who would be better off to just stay at home and be at peace.

In so many ways modern Christians will take what I just said, and knowingly shake our heads in sad agreement at what had become of God's people in the Bible. We feel bad over how lost they had become and how terrible their leaders were. But what of us, today? If we are honest do not most Christians simply want to hear from their Pastors something that affirms what they want to hear that agrees with whatever it is that they believe? And if not, they leave and search for another Church. The term Church-shopping was coined just for this reason.

Just as Christ demonstrates over and over, it begins with bad leadership that can sink so low that God sees them as no leadership at all. Leadership is biblically likened to being shepherds. The purpose of a shepherd is to care for and guard his flock. He is to stave off the wolves, even with his own life, for the good of the

sheep. Shepherds didn't get rich; money was not the point. The well being of the sheep was the point. Therefore it is generally incompatible for a Christian shepherd-leader to actively seek both riches from his position of leadership and at the same time to devote himself to caring for the members of the congregation. Such a leader is going to fashion for himself a group of elders that will simply agree with him; like Ahav did with his group of prophets. One, like *Mikhayahu*, that comes forward with Godly, biblically sourced advice contrary to what that Church leader wants to hear probably won't last very long.

Am I pointing a finger only at **leadership**? For now, yes, but only because that was the point of Christ's comment after touring towns and villages in the Holy Land. It was also the point of the story when the Godly prophet *Mikhayahu* spoke to Kings Ahav and Jehoshaphat. Christ regularly expresses contempt for bad or corrupt religious leadership; He never concerns Himself with civil government leadership. On the other hand He has compassion for the common people that the leaders are supposed to be properly and selflessly leading, but don't. Because without Godly leadership the sheep will soon wander aimlessly (even if they don't realize it). So dear friends from here forward I'd like you to think about this whenever you hear about sheep and shepherds, and especially sheep without a shepherd. It is a very sad state of affairs in the eyes of Our Lord. But it is also one that some unsuspecting leaders are eventually going to have to answer for because God puts great responsibility upon those whom He bestows the honor of being a leader of His people. Yet, congregation.... Believers.... please; you too have a responsibility. Don't choose where you want to attend to be fed and get fellowship according to hearing what you want to hear. Choose the place and person that you're willing to be led by according to that person's intent to guard the flock and to dispense God's Scriptural truth even if it comes with some discomfort. No one ever said that the sheep have it easy.

The final two verses of chapter 9 are profound and deserve sufficient time to deal with them; so we'll begin the next lesson with that as our first topic.