

14. Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 2

In our last topic, we talked about creativity and effective ministry in the area of evangelism. We saw that Christ was very creative in the way He shared with the people the fact that they had choices to make which would have either good consequences or bad consequences. Today, we will be focusing on creativity and effective ministry as we follow the example of Christ in our ministry to others.

In Matthew 8:1, we read, “When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.” The crowds had followed Christ up the mountain and listened to Him teach. Now, they followed Christ down the mountain and were going to observe what He did. The first person Christ met, as He came down the mountain, was a leper. Matthew 8:2 says, “And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’” In that day, leprosy was a disease that brought great fear to people. Lepers were forced to live away from the other people and call out “unclean” when others came close to them.

Here, we see that this leper came to Christ and worshiped Him. He recognized that Christ had a choice. Christ could ignore his need, or Christ had the power to meet his need and could choose to heal Him. Christ made the choice to minister to a man with a need. Matthew 8:3 says, “Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Many people would have made it their first concern to protect their own health. No one wanted to touch a leper for fear of catching leprosy. Christ could have just spoken the word and this man would have been healed. Instead, Christ chose to touch him. Christ knew that this man needed the personal touch of Christ in his life as well as healing. Christ chose to have an effective ministry.

As they came to the town of Capernaum, a Roman centurion met Christ. This centurion had heard about Christ. The centurion had come to Christ because he had a servant who was experiencing great suffering from palsy. The centurion showed his concern for his servant by telling Christ about the servant. We read what happened in Matthew 8:7-9. “And Jesus said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’ The centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’”

The centurion felt ashamed to have Christ come to his home to heal his servant. He knew that most Jews would never enter the home of a Roman soldier. However, he also recognized that Christ was God and had the power to heal just by speaking the word. Christ used that opportunity to speak to the crowd of people who were following Him to explain the meaning of faith. Christ also honored the Roman soldier by honoring his request not to go to his home. Instead, Matthew 8:13 says, “Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that same hour.” Christ chose to honor the faith of the centurion by doing exactly what the centurion requested.

The next event happened in the home of Peter. When Christ came to the house of Peter, the mother-in-law of Peter was lying in bed because she was sick with a fever. Matthew 8:15 says, “So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.” Here, we see that Christ chose to have an effective ministry to the family of Peter. First, Christ visited the home of Peter. Second, He saw a need when he entered the home. Third, Christ did what needed to be done to meet that need. Christ went to the mother-in-law, touched her hand, and immediately the fever left her. Fourth, Christ also ministered to this woman in another way. Christ gave this woman an opportunity to show her love by serving Him. Christ realized the importance of both ministering to others and letting them minister to Him.

However, ministry to people is not just meeting needs. We see that Christ had an effective ministry by ministering to people in many different ways. Matthew 8:19 says, “Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.’” Instead of just inviting the man to go with Him, Christ told the man what it would cost him so that the man could make a choice. Matthew 8:20 says, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’” Christ did not just expect people to follow Him blindly. He helped them to understand the cost of following Him, so they could make a choice. In this case, we never read that the man followed Christ.

Christ showed His creativity in ministry, in some very different ways, in Matthew 9. Instead of just focusing on physical needs, Christ showed the importance of focusing on spiritual needs. In Matthew 9:1-8 some men brought their friend to Christ, because he was paralyzed. Christ did heal the man of his physical need. However, Christ chose to focus on his spiritual need. Christ told the man that his sins were forgiven. This caused the scribes to become very upset. However, it showed that Christ was focused on the eternal need of the man, not just his physical needs.

Next, Christ showed His creativity by accepting a dinner invitation to the house of Matthew. Christ invited Matthew to follow Him as Matthew was collecting taxes. The Jews considered tax collectors, and their friends, to be great sinners and wanted nothing to do with them. In contrast, Christ gladly accepted the dinner invitation of Matthew, because Christ knew that would give Him the opportunity to meet the friends of Matthew. Matthew 9:10-11 says, “Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” Christ knew that accepting the dinner invitation of Matthew would be a creative way to meet his friends.

Christ also used creativity to show the religious leaders that He did not come to make their old religion better. In Matthew 9:16-17, Christ said you could not patch old clothes with new material or it would make a worse tear. Then, He said that you do not put new wine in old wineskins, because it would break the wineskins and the wine would be lost. Christ came to give new life. He did not come to patch up the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. Instead of offering a message of forgiveness from sin, their religion was based on works. With these creative illustrations, Christ showed that works could never change the lives of people. Instead, trying to change through their own works will only make people worse.

In Matthew 9, Christ also used several other events to teach about faith. Matthew 9:18 says, “While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.’” Christ chose to show creativity by honoring the faith of this man and raising his daughter from the dead. Christ ministered to this family, even when the people around Him were ridiculing Him.

On the way to raise the daughter from the dead, Christ chose to honor the faith of another woman by calling attention to her faith. The woman showed her faith by touching the garment of Christ. The result was that she was healed. Christ could have said nothing. No one else would have even known, because there were large crowds around Him, and many people were touching Him. Instead, Christ chose to call attention to her faith. Matthew 9:22 says, “But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour.” Christ chose to use a creative statement to honor her faith.

Christ showed creativity by healing two blind men in a very unusual way. The blind men asked Christ to show mercy to them also. Instead of healing them immediately, Christ went into a house and waited until the blind men came to Him. Then, Christ asked them a question. Matthew 9:28-29 says, “And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’” Christ chose to focus on their faith just as he had done in each of the other miracles in this chapter. Christ shows us the importance of meeting physical needs, but helps us see that our main focus should be meeting spiritual needs.

Christ later showed creativity by helping his disciples develop vision for the people around them. Matthew 9:36-38 says, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then, He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” Christ knew that if the disciples were led by vision, they would serve Him regardless of whether He was present or not. We also want to help people learn to be led by vision, because vision inspires people to trust the Lord to work through them.

Because He chose to spend much time with them, Christ was able to use many creative ways to minister to people. In the same way, we will see many opportunities to be creative in our ministry to people if we spend time with them so that we gain an understanding of where they are in their lives at the present moment. May the Lord richly bless you as you continually become more creative in your ministry to others.