

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Matthew
(Lesson SB-MT9)
Matthew 9

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic (9:1-8)

In this pericope, Jesus returns from the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee to his own town, Capernaum. Earlier in Matthew 3, Jesus had emerged from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan. After His baptism, Matthew records that Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan. In Matthew 4:12ff, Jesus returns to Galilee, passes through Nazareth, and takes up temporary residence in Capernaum. During this period of time, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Jesus was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (4:23) and he healed a great multitude of people (4:23-25). Then He taught the Beatitudes recorded by Matthew in Chapter 5:1-12 and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13 to the end of Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, Jesus provides that region with a evidence that He was Who He claimed to be by performing miracles in which a leper was cleansed, the Centurion's servant was healed, Peter's mother-in-law was healed, and many demon-possessed people were exorcised and healed. As he left Capernaum with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore area, Jesus calmed the Sea to the amazement of His disciples. He then cast out the demons from two men that resulted in the herd of swine being destroyed (8:28-34). The people in this region then asked Jesus to depart, so Jesus returned to Capernaum in a boat. This is where we find Jesus in Matthew 9.

Some people of faith brought to Him a paralytic to be healed. The phrase "their faith" includes the faith of the paralytic. Jesus uses the occasion to distinguish between those who were of faith and those who had come to be entertained with another miracle. (Entertainment mechanisms were not as ubiquitous then as they are today, so no doubt the news about Jesus got around faster than the news about a good movie today). The scribes fell into the second category.

When Jesus pronounced that the sins of the paralytic were forgiven, it exposed the true colors of the unbelievers. They accuse Him of blasphemy since only God can forgive sins (Mk 2:7; Lu 5:21). This is the first opposition from religious leaders towards Jesus.

It is easier to say "your sins are forgiven" than to say "arise and walk" since anyone can say the former because there is no way of empirically verifying whether they have been forgiven or not. However, one can easily determine whether a paralytic has been healed.

The reaction by the crowds was one of marvel or awe and is translated from the Greek word $\epsilon\phi\omicron\beta\eta\eta\sigma\alpha\nu$ (ephobēthēsan) which implies a recognition of the authority behind His actions. There is a close connection between Jesus' acts of healing, His forgiveness of sins, and the offering of the Messianic Kingdom. The Kingdom is made possible by the death of Christ, the Messiah. Therefore, the blessings of the Kingdom, which include health, are related to Christ's payment for the sin of man (see Matt 8:16-17 where Matthew makes this connection by alluding to Isa 53:4).

Matthew the Tax Collector (9:9-13)

In 9:9, Jesus calls Matthew to be a disciple and Matthew's response is immediate and decisive in contrast to the scribe in 8:19-20 (see Jesus' response in verse 20) and the other disciple in 8:21-22 (see Jesus' response in verse 22). Matthew was a tax collector in Capernaum. Tax collectors sat in something similar to a toll booth alongside the highway to levy taxes on merchandise transported on the road. Tax collectors were considered to be traitors by the Jews since they collected taxes for the Romans. They were despised because they generally collected more than necessary and pocketed the difference. Since they were a despised lot, they could only socialize with the wrong crowd (9:10-11) instead of the more acceptable crowd that included the religious of Jesus' day.

Notice the contrast here between the response of Matthew toward Jesus and the response of the religious crowd toward Jesus. Matthew invites Jesus into his home and hosts a dinner. Many of Matthew's associates were present. The Pharisees never manifested such any openness to Jesus. The Pharisees would have never opened their door to anyone they considered to be sinners. Expecting a Messiah who would crush the sinful and support the righteous, they had little place for one who accepted and transformed the sinner and dismissed the righteous as hypocrites.

Jesus' response demonstrated that His ministry was directed toward those who realized that they had a need. Sick people need a doctor. The religious leaders did not think they were sinners. The Pharisees always brought the proper sacrifice, but they were totally lacking in any type of compassion toward sinners.

Principle: When mercy is lacking, then religious formalities are meaningless (Hosea 6:6 – “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings”). True mercy only originates from the spiritual believer.

Jesus is Questioned About Fasting (9:14-17)

Question for the group: To which two dispensations are the contrasts that Jesus presents in this passage related? Age of Israel versus Church? Age of Israel versus Kingdom (Millennium, New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34)?

It was right for John and his disciples to fast, for they were calling people to repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom. In contrast, Jesus was the King presenting His kingdom. Jesus describes His kingdom as a great feast similar to a wedding banquet. A feast is often used in Scripture to portray God's kingdom on earth (see 8:11; 25:10; Is 25:6; Lk 14:15-24; Jn 2:1-11; Rev 19:7-9). Since the King was present, it was not appropriate that He or His disciples fast. At a wedding banquet, people are happy, not mourning or fasting.

However, Jesus anticipated His rejection for He added that a time would come when the bridegroom would be taken away. Then He pictured the relationship between His ministry and that of John the Baptist. John was a reformer who was attempting to inspire repentance among those steeped in the traditions of Judaism.

In contrast, Jesus did not come to patch up an old system like sewing a new unshrunk cloth on an old garment which would then tear. He did not bring the wine of a new kingdom to be poured into the law of another age (the Mosaic Law of the Age of Israel). Jesus had come to lead a group out of Judaism into the kingdom that was based upon His righteousness and not the self-righteousness that had become so commonplace in Judaism. The righteousness of the Kingdom offered by Jesus was not built upon the Law or upon Pharisaic tradition.

Jesus Demonstrates His Power Over Death (9:18-26)

A ruler of the synagogue (per Mark 5:22) came to Jesus to request healing for his daughter. Luke 8:42 records that she was 12 years of age and the ruler's name was Jairus according to Mark and Luke. In Matthew's account, she is said to have just died. In Mark and Luke's accounts, the father said she was dying. Evidently, while Jesus was speaking to Jairus, someone came from his house to tell him the girl had died. No mention is made of the faith of Jairus or his daughter; however, there is mention of the unbelief that was present in the minds of those who were at Jairus' house, i.e. “they ridiculed Him” (verse 24). This may have been the factor that motivated Jesus to make the trip to Jairus' home in contrast to the Centurion in chapter 8. He knew that unbelievers would need to see this event for themselves. Such people (if they remained unbelievers after having seen this event) will be among those who prove a certain point in the greater context of the Angelic Conflict, i.e. that some will not believe even if they see with their physical eyes. Jesus' statement that she was not dead, but sleeping is designed to indicate that her death was only temporary.

Once again Jesus comes into contact with a person who was ceremonially unclean (Lev 15:19-30) and He is not made unclean, but the sick person is healed. The term “daughter” is a term of affection. Jesus probably used this term in recognition of her faith.

Two Blind Men Healed (9:27-31)

Jesus probably gave the warning that He did to the blind men who were healed out of a desire to keep the multitudes from thronging to Him solely for the purpose of physical healing. The acts of physical healing were designed to authenticate His claims to be Israel’s Messiah.

A Mute Man Speaks (9:32-34)

The arrogant person has no capacity to appreciate and respect the character of the humble person. The arrogant person will only react toward the humble person because the arrogant person is threatened by the humble person. In this passage, the arrogant persons are the Pharisees and the humble person is Jesus Christ. As the believer today begins to take on the character of Christ and function in ministry, he/she can expect reaction from the religious person. The arrogant religious person will question the motives and intentions of the spiritual man/woman in ministry to the point of ridicule. In the majority of cases, the arrogant person has not attempted any type of objective analysis of the facts concerning the humble person.

The Compassion of Jesus (9:35-38)

Jesus looked upon the multitudes and saw them lack any true spiritual guidance. The religious leaders who should have been their shepherds, were keeping the sheep from following the true Shepherd. This prompted Jesus to encourage His disciples to beseech the Lord to send additional workers.