

Text: Matthew 9

Title: Jesus, the Forgiving and Powerful Shepherd

Truth: Jesus is a merciful miracle worker, forgiver of sins, a brings in a new era of faith

Date/Location: September 29, October 6, 10 2021 at FBC

Introduction

The chapter resists a compact summary statement, at least to this reader. In it, Jesus helps sinners, teaches about the new regime of faith as over against the “old wineskins” of Judaism, demonstrates vast supernatural power, and explains the need for shepherds to give people guidance.

I. Jesus Forgives Sin, 9:1-8

A. Forgiveness of sin declared. The man on the bed was paralyzed, unable to walk on his own. His primary desire likely was to be healed—or at least that was the desire of his friends who were carrying him. Evidently the patient and his friends also keenly understood his sinfulness and had faith to be healed of that as well. Notice the text says, “When Jesus saw **their** faith.”

I have observed that people who are handicapped are often deep thinkers. While the rest of us run around like chickens, folks who are confined to a bed or wheelchair think deeply about things and have a kind of wisdom that we runners do not always match. This man may have been one of those, and he had thought about his soul while he had a lot of time on his bed to think of such things.

In any case, Jesus dealt with his most pressing need, to be forgiven of his sins. That sounds strange to someone not in tune with the things of God, but it is most definitely, and without question, true. Bondage to sin is more serious than slavery; the guilt of sin is worse than paralysis; impending eternal death is far more dire than a physical injury. The most pressing need of any person that we encounter is a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Physical hunger is important; but satisfying the persons’ spiritual starvation is far more important. You should tell them of their spiritual need while you feed them a sandwich!

B. Objection by the Scribes and Pharisees. They believed that Jesus was speaking blasphemy, because he was taking a prerogative to Himself that only God has, namely, to forgive sins. Luke 5:21 adds “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” This was not said aloud, but just in their hearts. And it is true that only God can forgive sin, which is first and foremost against Him. They of course came to the situation with the wrong assumption that Jesus was just a normal man. Had they recognized that He is the divine Son of God and Messiah, they would not have been so quick to condemn him for offering forgiveness to the man.

C. Jesus knows their thoughts. This is amazing omniscience. When you pray in your mind, God “hears” it. Your inmost concerns are known by God. God knows your reproach and shame and dishonor (Psalm 69:19). Before you speak a word, God knows it (Psalm 139:4).

The Lord’s all-knowing nature is unsettling for the sinner, because the text says that Jesus knows the evil thinking they have in their hearts. Nothing is hidden from God. Hebrews 4:13 says that nothing in creation is hidden from the sight of God. Everything is, as it were, naked and open to the eyes of Him to Whom we all will give account. It is far better to be honest now with God, dear friends, and fess up, seek pardon through Jesus Christ, and be saved...than to hold on to your sin and try to deal with God later. *That* would be a big mistake.

D. Notice that Jesus said their thoughts were EVIL. Attributing blasphemy to Jesus is evil. Doubting that He can forgive is evil. By the way, although Christians are not the ultimate or immediate cause of someone being forgiven, we can declare the fact that people are forgiven in Jesus (John 20:23). This is because Christians carry the message of the gospel which has as a central plank the forgiveness of sin in Christ.

E. To prove that He could do the spiritually big but invisible thing of forgiving sin, He did the physically big and visible thing of raising the man up to health. Both take divine power. We might say that the power is exercised in different realms, but it is divine power in both cases. The man was made well and walked home. Even the most modern medical marvels cannot accomplish that. There could

conceivably be a surgery that would fix such a man's problem, but it would take months of physical rehab to get him strong enough to walk safely again.

- F. The crowds were amazed and gave honor to God because God had provided such power in their midst. One translation describes it this way: the crowd was awestruck. This enraged the Pharisees further.

II. Jesus Came to Help Sinners, 9:9-13

- A. Matthew, who bears my favorite apostolic name (!), encountered the Lord Jesus while he was at his job. Jesus invited—no, commanded—him to follow, and Matthew did so. His Hebrew name was Levi, and he was the son of Alphaeus. It is not clear if Matthew was in fact of the tribe of Levi, but he was a tax collector (see 10:3) and as such was educated but despised by the common population because he worked for Rome.
- B. Matthew offered hospitality in his home for Jesus and the other disciples. Many observed what was happening: namely, many other tax collectors and sinner outcasts joined them at the table.
- C. Once again, the Pharisees put in their complaining two cents, this time that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. Not only is it blasphemy for him to forgive sinners, but it is probably about as bad to share a meal with such people. Evidently, the Pharisees did not ever eat with such people because they were *above* spending time with people who need spiritual help. This shows their arrogance yet again.
- D. The Lord wisely responded with two points. First, only those people who are sick need a doctor, not those who are well. The Pharisees saw shortcomings in those who were hanging out around Jesus at the time so they would be forced—if acting logically, to acknowledge that Jesus was spending time with people who needed help.

What the Lord left unsaid was that there are not any truly well people. We all need the spiritual doctoring that God provides in Christ. So the Pharisees did not humbly see that they were truly in the same boat as the people they were criticizing.

The second point the Lord made was that the Pharisees needed to go and learn something. This was a real rebuke. Lord Jesus told them that they needed to figure out what God meant when He said “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). The Pharisees were consumed with external appearance and ceremonial cleanliness, and had neither. The Lord requires inner mercy and lovingkindness and similar character traits. Of course, the Lord wants this *and* the external manifestations of the internal reality, but if there is no internal reality, the external ceremonies are sickening to God. The internal must come first, then the external.

The Pharisees did not have any of the internal qualities. You can see Jesus, however, is full of these traits, being compassionate toward the lost and helpless people. He is teaching His disciples where to find people who need the gospel and whose hearts God may well open to hear and believe.

- E. Suppose you are a person who recognizes you have a spiritual need. You are stuck in sin, and you know it. You realize that you are responsible for the bad desires, thoughts, motivations, actions, words, attitudes, etc. What to do about them, because they separate you from God. Remember this: Jesus came for spiritually sick people such as yourself. He did not come for the elite (compared to God?), or the righteous (there are none!), or the wealthy (cannot take it with them).

III. Jesus Brought a New Era of Faith, 9:14-17

The occasion of this section has to do with the matter of fasting. But the truth taught here is not about fasting.

- A. One notable external religious difference between the disciples of Jesus and the other major groups (disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees) was that Jesus’s disciples did not fast. The rite of fasting was not part of their regular or public expression of worship. The disciples of John raised the obvious question. They were following a well-known religious figure, and they were fasting. Jesus’s disciples were following a well-known religious figure, and they were not fasting. What gives?

- B. First, we must remember that Jesus taught His disciples to fast in private (Matt 6:16-18). If they were fasting, it would not be generally known by other people. So outsiders would not be able to say for sure, “Your disciples do not fast.” It is like giving: “I do not see you give.” But some people give without being seen. “By the way, why are you watching what others give?”
- C. Second, there is no call for fake fasting when the Lord Jesus is present. It is just as out of place to fast while you are with Jesus as it would be to fast while you are with a groom and his new bride at the wedding rehearsal or reception dinners. Those are times of rejoicing, of feasting, of enjoying, of gladness, of celebration, not of fasting.
- D. When the Lord is taken away (when the groom dies or disappears), then it is an appropriate time for fasting. Fasting was done to express mourning, sadness, calamity, etc. That would be appropriate after Jesus was killed, but not while He was triumphantly ministering in their presence.
- E. I have not taught much on fasting throughout my ministry because it is not a New Testament emphasis. It is a personal expression of piety done on your own, in a safe way, to express extra devotion to God at any time you desire, and perhaps at specific times of distress or mourning over sin. It is assumed in Scripture that sometimes Christians will fast from eating for those purposes. But since the Lord Jesus is resurrected, and we have great hope in His return, and our sins are washed away, we can live with rejoicing and confidence instead of sadness and gloom. Therefore, fasting is not automatically called for, and certainly not on an artificial regular basis.¹
- F. The bigger picture reason for the no-fasting regime under Jesus’s ministry is that something brand new is happening in the world of religious faith. He is moving the Jewish faith into the next phase of its existence, from Law to Grace, from letter to Spirit, from constant sacrifice to completed sacrifice. That is the meaning of

¹ Today, people fast for health reasons for a certain number of hours or a day or two or three. This kind of fasting has very little to do with “spiritual” fasting.

the garment and wineskin illustrations. In each case, a new thing cannot be mated up with an old thing, otherwise both will come to ruin and uselessness. You put an old patch on an old garment, a new patch on a new garment, and new wine into new wineskins so that they are preserved properly.

What the Lord is doing cannot be “patched onto” the old garment of Judaism. It cannot be “contained within” the old wineskin of Judaism. It is a new thing. Things are not done the same as they were before. Why? In accordance with God’s sovereign rule of the affairs of mankind, He chooses the terms and conditions. For the Jewish nation prior to the first century, the terms and conditions were as specified in the Law of Moses and by the prophets. After the Lord ordained to send Messiah, He taught them a new and better way, one that in fact fulfilled the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures.

This notion creates a major problem for those who want to mix the Jewish Law with Christianity. Of course there are continuing principles and timeless morals, but take for example the Day of Atonement. Can you really celebrate that today, after the finished work of Christ which is *the* atonement that Jews were looking and hoping for their entire existence as a nation? The repeated Day of Atonement ritual is entirely outmoded by the sacrifice of Christ. As another example, food laws were explicitly set aside by Jesus and by the Father in Mark 7:19 and Acts 10 to clear the way for Gentile participation in the church people of God.

IV. Jesus Demonstrates Supernatural Power, 9:18-34

A. Healing a Woman, 9:20-22.

1. This event is also reported in Mark 5:22-43 and Luke 8:41-56, and in all three gospels, it sits in the middle of the account of the ruler’s daughter who died. Much is made of this arrangement as far as a literary dependence between the gospels. The idea is that one gospel or another anonymous source is the original, from which the other gospel writers copied. That matters little to me, for each gospel is God-breathed and accurate as it is, no matter what sourcing or

research was used by the human authors. The more salient point is that this arrangement reflects that the events actually happened in the order described. Namely, Jesus was attending to a pressing need of a family man and leader in the nation whose daughter had just died. But He was so famous and the demands upon Him were so great that He could not even walk to the man's house without having to attend to another pressing matter of affliction.

2. The text delicately indicates that the woman had a problem with menstrual bleeding that would not stop. She had some kind of hemorrhage or ulcer that simply would not heal. Perhaps she had a thyroid problem, cysts, fibroids, a blood disorder, or even cancer. It had been troubling her for over a decade—12 long years.

This was not only very inconvenient (think of the continual cleaning); not only would it mean physical weakness as her body was continually behind in production of blood cells and probably low on iron so that she was likely anemic and perhaps constantly needing significant hydration; but also she was ceremonially unclean 24x7.

The normal ceremonial uncleanness lasted seven days (Lev. 15:19); but her unclean state was every single day plus seven days beyond the end of the cessation of the flow. Many things she touched would also be unclean, adding to the inconvenience of it. She could not worship at the temple. People who wanted to do so could not sit in her chair or other things. She was effectively sentenced to be a pariah. There was, under the Law of Moses, something impure about the imperfection of unusual bodily secretions that prevented a person from being in the fully clean status.

3. The other passages add these relevant facts: she had suffered tremendously at the hands of physicians who tried to help her; she had spent huge sums of money to try to fix the problem but was not made better; in fact she had become worse; the woman touched Jesus as part of a crowd pressing around him; the woman was initially hiding from Jesus and trying not to be found

out, probably due to the embarrassment of her problem; she feared the Lord and came and told him what had happened (she told the truth!).

4. She had enough faith in what she had heard and seen that she knew if the just touched Jesus's garment, she could be healed. She was healed instantaneously, like the paralytic earlier in the chapter. What a contrast to 12 long years of suffering: an instant fix! No surgery, no medication, no nasty side effects of treatment, no lifting restriction, no driving restrictions, just healing.

The Lord said that her faith had made her well. What a relief for her! And this was all enroute to a death in another family.

B. Raising a Daughter from the Dead, 9:18-19, 23-26 [10/10/2021]

1. The ruler expresses faith that Jesus can raise his daughter to life again. Mark 5:23 says that the daughter lies at the point of death. Matthew cuts to the chase and says that the daughter had just died. Her body was yet warm, and the man pleaded with Jesus, believing that He could raise the girl from the dead. Maybe because she just entered death's doorway, He could do it.

How could the man have such faith, if he had never seen Jesus raise anyone to life? Resurrection is impossible after all—but no more impossible than any of the other miracles Jesus had done. This was just another “level” of the same kind of thing He had been doing all along.

2. The man asked Jesus to lay a hand on the dead girl. But that was unclean! He also asked him to come to the home where she was. He was not a Gentile like the centurion in 8:5-8 and there was no issue about going into this home. By the way, Jesus said to that centurion, “I will come.” It was no issue for him to go into a Gentile home. Uncleaness was not a problem for the Lord Jesus. What He touched became clean. Uncleaness could not transmit to him. There is a change in the basic “operating system” of the world. God's presence in Christ outweighed or canceled out or overwhelmed the impurity.

3. After the woman is healed, 9:23 resumes the case of the ruler's daughter. As the news coming from home was getting worse along the way, Mark's gospel adds that Jesus told the ruler not to be afraid, but to believe (5:36). Often, mourners were hired to play music and wail. Burial happened in less than 24 hours.
4. They came to the home of the ruler and there were tons of people there weeping and wailing for the death of the little girl. I perceive that if the victim is young, the grief is multiplied.
4. Jesus tells them that the girl is actually sleeping—which she may well be doing at that moment, but she was definitely dead earlier. Does this mean that Jesus views death as sleep? That seems highly unlikely. Sleep is a euphemism, not the actual mode of the soul in death. Perhaps it simply indicates that death is not a permanent state. Like sleep comes to an end, death will also. The miracle is about to become evident. But the crowd did not believe it and they ridiculed Jesus. They made fun because they thought that Jesus was out to lunch, so to speak.
5. They ushered everyone outdoors. This was to be a private event, not a public spectacle (R. T. France, *Matthew*, p. 365). and Jesus went in, took her by the hand, and she got up. She was alive! What a joy and relief to her mother and father. Mark 5:42 adds that she was 12 years old. As long as she had been alive, the woman's had been afflicted. Jesus healed both a 12-year-old affliction and a 12-year-old who had died.
6. News spread everywhere. Here is a prophet who not only does all kinds of miraculous healings and casts out demons and stills the storm, but He has power over death also! The news could not be muzzled despite the private resurrection. The results of the private activity were abundantly public. This should have induced awe and belief into the populace, but it did not widely do so. 11:20-24 records Jesus's condemnation of cities like this who did not repent when they saw undeniable miraculous works.

C. Giving Sight to Two Blind Men, 9:27-31

1. Two men recognized that Jesus was a son of David, in fact the only Son of David that truly mattered. They were blind men. How did they know Jesus? They used their other senses to listen and speak to others and learn about Him. They asked for mercy from this unique Son of David.
2. They came to the house where Jesus had entered, and they were greeted with a question by Jesus. When asked directly if they believed He could give them sight, they affirmed that he could. Their faith was that strong. Is our faith that strong? In those areas where the Lord works today, do we believe that He will act?
3. He touched their non-functional eyes and made a declaration: "According to your faith let it be to you." With some healings, Jesus spoke; with others he did not. The woman healed from the flow of blood was healed with a touch. Of course the Lord made a declaration in the moments after the fact. Jesus merely touched Peter's mom-in-law's hand and she was healed. Other times he spoke and did not even go or touch the person, as with the centurion's servant.
4. Immediately they began to see. Another instantaneous miracle.
5. The Lord told them sternly that they were not permitted to tell anyone about it, because it was going to "make his life more difficult" if they stirred up more publicity. This would be true in two ways. First, logistically it would be more difficult to move around with larger crowds. Second, spiritually it would be more difficult to convey His important message of repentance about the kingdom of God because people would be clamoring for more and more physical healing. Humans tend to focus on the "here and now" as opposed to the "hereafter," and thus miss very important things.
6. The men with the newly minted eyes could not help themselves. They went around and told everyone. Certainly their excitement would be hard to contain, but when a Man who can heal blindness tells you not to do something, you might wonder if He would take back His gift at any moment after you disobeyed!

D. Restoring Speech to a Demon-Possessed Man, 9:32-33

1. Here is another short account of a man who was unable to speak *and* demon-possessed, the latter of which was likely the cause of the muteness.
2. When Jesus ordered the demon to come out, the man could suddenly speak. What a marvelous provision.
3. The crowds took note again and said that nothing like this was ever seen in Israel. This was novel.

E. Application. The four miracles that we have just studied, and those from chapters 8 and 4 seem to be healings of what we would call a physical nature. The man whose sins were forgiven is a clear exception to that general statement, as were the men who were saved from the demons that were sent into the pig herd. But we must always remember that the physical and the spiritual are tied together and cannot be entirely separated from one another. This becomes evident when we read about the miracles that have to do with death. Why? Because it is *sin*, a spiritual problem, that causes death with its physical impact. In fact, the departure of man from God is both a spiritual and physical problem, for “in the day you eat of it, you will surely die.” All disease and death are tied to sin. And any real, significant reduction of the effects of sin must have a spiritual connection. The Lord did and could do the fantastic physical healings because He had spiritual power beyond measure.

1. Related to this is the following reasoning: if the Lord has the power to re-create physical life, what stops Him from giving someone spiritual, eternal life? Nothing! The miracles in our realm help us understand the power of Christ and what He can do in the realm that we do not natively understand by sight.
2. If he can heal physical uncleanness like leprosy and a flow of blood, do you believe He can heal spiritual uncleanness by forgiving sin? Certainly!
3. If the Lord can restore sight to the blind, can He give spiritual sight? Of course He can!

4. If He can raise up those who are sick or still the raging seas, can He raise you up out of difficulty or depression?
 5. If the Lord can fix the speech of a mute person, can he help you speak the works of God and testify of God's grace to your family and acquaintances?
- F. Being Criticized by Pharisees, 9:34. This introduces the subject of harsh judgment against Jesus by the self-righteous Pharisees that will appear again in the upcoming chapters. They claimed that Jesus was an agent of Satan, effectively postulating that Satan was divided against himself. See chapter 12 for more on this.

V. Jesus Expresses the Need for Shepherds², 9:35-38

The juxtaposition of the false Pharisaic complaint about Jesus and the Lord's seeing of the crowds and the huge need for shepherds and laborers is stark. The Pharisees really are thinking on a lower spiritual level, missing the big picture of what is going on. Jesus is helping the lost and oppressed, and the Pharisees are complaining about him doing so. It is crazy.

- A. First the pattern of Jesus' ministry: he went to the cities and villages, taught, preached the good news of the kingdom, and healed every malady He found. He traveled, taught, preached, and healed. Healing was not the majority of nor focus of His ministry. It was a side benefit, basically, with the focus being on teaching and preaching. It was also importantly a way to authenticate His ministry. Regarding the number of people affected, no one had ever in world history done what He was doing, even in the periods of miraculous activity during Moses and Elijah and Elisha.

Luke 4:43 records Jesus saying, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

² The NKJV heading for this section is "The Need for Delegation of Power." This reflects a clever connection to 10:1, where Jesus "gave them power..." But it fails on two counts. First, the Lord was speaking of the need more for *laborers*, not more power. And he gave power to the existing disciples in 10:1, *not* to new laborers.

What's the difference between teaching and preaching? An intuitive understanding is easy to achieve. Think of teaching as systematically going through a subject with students to learn about that subject. Think of preaching as a combination of teaching and exhortation to personal change. So preaching is like teaching plus application.

B. As Jesus went along, he saw crowds everywhere. It "got to Him," so to speak to see them in worn out, un-guided, every-man-for-himself, ignorant, wrongly taught by their religious leaders, occupied by Romans because of the previous idolatry and disobedience of the nation, and probably for its ongoing sin as well. They had no one to teach them about the New Covenant provisions that were promised, or the coming kingdom, or anything. All they had were greedy religious leaders that laid upon them burdensome regulations with no end in sight, no hope, etc.

OK, that is the fact. Here is the preaching about that fact. When you see the masses of humanity out there, do you feel similarly as the Lord does? Or do you get angry and upset and call them idiots and complain that they don't make the right political decisions (because they have been kept in the dark, in many cases), or choose sinful things because Christians haven't gotten them the gospel, and so forth. Are you *moved with compassion* for them when you see their pathetic state, the broad road they are on, and their eternal end?

C. Facing this situation, the Lord saw there is a vast need for "faithful priests" (Old Testament vernacular, from 1 Samuel 2:35), which today translates to "faithful pastors and missionaries."

D. Many people think of this passage as a call for missionary workers. They are viewed as the analog to "laborers" in the passage. And that is true, but it is true *as part of* a larger calling: the need for shepherds of all sorts. Those shepherds can be pastors *or* evangelists (missionaries). The world needs faithful shepherds. Every nation needs good shepherds to labor in the Lord's harvest field. Every state, county, and town needs laborers, and not just a few.

E. Proof: Notice what verse 36 says: “they were weary [harassed] and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” The solution to the problem of “no shepherd” is to supply them with shepherds, who can gather them and guard them and guide them. And this is a shepherd’s responsibility: to lead, feed, protect, and nurture the flock. In the church, this is done with skillful administration, teaching, watch-care, and pastoral counsel through all of life’s circumstances.

I’m thinking of this even apart from the harvest of souls. That should definitely be happening all the time, but entire communities, and of course churches, need to have shepherds to guide them. Men who are shepherds need to know the state of their flocks (Prov. 27:23), understand the times in which they live (1 Chronicles 12:32), and most importantly they must hold fast and preach God’s word (2 Tim. 3:14-17). In other words, pastors have to know the word of God, the state of the people entrusted to their care, and the circumstances surrounding their community.

You likely are not able to go to all the cities and villages, like our Lord did. You definitely will not be able to heal every sickness and disease like He did!

But you *are able* to teach and preach the gospel of the kingdom. You *are able* to be moved with compassion when you see the pathetic state of the mass of people who do not know God. You *are able* to see a plentiful harvest and ask God to send more shepherds.

Conclusion

Most of what Jesus does in this chapter, you cannot do. But you can follow Him and provide spiritual guidance to those who are lost!

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