

Bible Study August 13, 2025

MATTHEW 9 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

¹ And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

“His own town” was Capernaum, a good choice for Jesus’ base of operations. It was a bustling city due to fishing and trade. Situated on the Sea of Galilee in a densely populated area, Capernaum housed the Roman garrison that kept peace in the region. The city was a cultural melting pot, greatly influenced by Greek and Roman manners, dress, architecture, and politics. It had a well-organized synagogue as well.

² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Before healing this man, either spiritually or physically, Jesus began by offering him words of encouragement. Disease and immobility had worn the man down. He knew he couldn’t heal or save himself. But Jesus’ words went deeper than “Get well soon.” After encouraging him, Jesus’ next words to the paralyzed man were “Your sins are forgiven.” Then he healed the man. We must be careful not to focus more on God’s power to heal physical sickness than on his power to forgive spiritual sickness in the form of sin. Jesus saw that even more than physical healing, this man needed spiritual restoration. Jesus’ touch heals both our bodies and our souls.

Jesus saw the faith of the friends who brought this man to him. Many people who are desperately ill need other believers to pray and seek Jesus for them. Both the man’s body and his spirit were disabled—he could not walk, and he had a limited understanding of what Jesus could do. Jesus still heals people. We don’t understand why he doesn’t heal everyone in this life, but we know that he has the power to heal our bodies as well as our hearts and minds. If God does not physically heal us or someone we love, we should be encouraged that Jesus’ concern goes beyond the state of our bodies in this life. We will all be completely healed in Christ’s coming Kingdom.

³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.”

Blaspheming is claiming to be God and applying his characteristics to yourself. The religious leaders rightly saw that Jesus was claiming to be God. What they did not understand was that he is God and thus has the rightful authority to both heal and to forgive sins.

⁴ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”

The crowd who witnessed this salvation moment praised God because they were amazed by Jesus (9:8). The teachers of religious law thought that he was blaspheming God. They did not think that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins.

⁵ For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? ⁶ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

It’s easy to tell someone his or her sins are forgiven; it’s a lot more difficult to reverse a case of paralysis! Unless you are God. Jesus backed up his words by healing the man’s legs. Jesus’ action proved that his words were true; he had the power to forgive as well as to heal. Jesus always backed up his words with action. We may claim to love God or others, but are we taking practical steps to demonstrate that love? Do you know someone who is hurting deeply or suffering from chronic illness? What can you do to show Jesus’ real love to them?

⁷ And he rose and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Jesus Calls Matthew

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

Matthew was a Jew who was appointed by the Romans to be the area’s tax collector. He collected taxes from the citizens as well as from merchants passing through town. Tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected, but most of them would overcharge and keep the profits. Thus, tax collectors were hated by the Jews because of their reputation for cheating and because of their alliance with Rome.

When Jesus called Matthew to be one of his disciples, Matthew got up and followed him, leaving a lucrative career. When God calls you to follow or obey him, do you do it with as much abandon as Matthew? Sometimes the decision to follow where Jesus leads requires difficult or painful choices. Like Matthew, we must decide to leave behind the things that would keep us from following Jesus.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

The Pharisees constantly tried to trap Jesus, and they thought his association with these “lowlives” was the perfect opportunity to bring him down. They were more concerned with maintaining their own appearance of holiness than with helping people, and more concerned with criticizing Jesus than encouraging people suffering from disabilities to find God’s love. But

Jesus shows concern for all people, including those who sin and those who suffer. Following Jesus' example, we should share the Good News with those who are poor, immoral, lonely, or outcast, not just those who are rich, moral, popular, or powerful.

¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'

When he visited Matthew, Jesus scorned his own reputation among the religious elites in order to reach out to those who were lost. Matthew's former position was well known, and people did not yet know of his new life as a disciple. Because of his past, he became a bridge for Jesus' message to his former associates. We should reach out to all kinds of people who haven't heard Jesus' message. The Good News can change all kinds of people!

Those who are sure that they are good enough to be acceptable to God can't be saved, because the first step in following Jesus is acknowledging that we aren't good enough and cannot save ourselves. We may not feel we are worth saving, but Jesus does. He wants to pour out his mercy on us.

A Question About Fasting

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

John the Baptist's message was harsh, and it focused on repentance that would result in obedience to God's law. When people look at God's law and compare themselves to it, they realize how far they fall short and how badly they need to repent. Jesus' message focused on life, the result of turning from sin and turning to him. John's disciples had the right start, but they needed to take the next step and trust in Jesus. Where is your focus—on your obedience to God's law or on the saving work of Jesus Christ?

¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

John's disciples fasted (went without food) as a sign of mourning for sin and preparation for the Messiah's coming. Jesus' disciples did not need to fast because he is the Messiah and was with them! Jesus did not condemn fasting—he himself fasted (4:2). Rather, he emphasized that fasting must be done for the right reasons. The arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven was like a wedding feast with Jesus as the groom. His disciples, therefore, were filled with joy. It would not be right to mourn or fast while the groom was present.

¹⁶ No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.'

In biblical times, wine was not kept in glass bottles but in goatskins sewn around the edges to form watertight bags. New wine expanded as it fermented, stretching its wineskin. After the wine had aged, the stretched skin would burst if more new wine was poured into it. New wine, therefore, was always put into new wineskins.

Jesus used this description to explain that he had not come to patch up the old religious system of Judaism with its rules and traditions. His purpose was to bring in something new, though it had been prophesied for centuries. This new message, the Good News, said that Jesus Christ, God's Son, had come to earth to offer all people forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

The Good News did not fit into the old, rigid legalistic system of religion that the Jewish leaders were promoting. Jesus' message brought a fresh start that would expand, stretch, and change people. This message will always remain new in a sense because it must be accepted and applied in every generation. When we follow Jesus, we must be prepared for new ways to live, new ways to look at people, and new ways to serve.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Mark and Luke say this man's name was Jairus (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). As leader of the synagogue, Jairus was responsible for administration—looking after the building, supervising worship, running the school on weekdays, and finding rabbis to teach on the Sabbath. (For more information on synagogues, see the note on Mark 1:21-22.)

¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

This woman had suffered for 12 years with a hemorrhage, perhaps a menstrual disorder. In our times of desperation, we may feel we've suffered too long to find help or are too damaged to be repaired. But God knows each of us. We don't have to worry about the correct way to reach out to God. After this woman courageously reached out to touch Jesus' robe, she received healing. Like this woman, first reach out in faith. Jesus will respond.

God changed a situation that had been a problem for years. Like the man with leprosy and the demon-possessed men (see the note on 8:2-3 and the fourth note on 8:28), this woman was considered unclean. Because of her condition, other rabbis would have rejected her. For 12 years, she, too, had been one of the "untouchables" and had not been able to lead a normal life. But Jesus changed that and restored her. Sometimes we are tempted to give up on people or

situations that have not changed for many years. God can change what seems unchangeable, giving new purpose and hope.

23 And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, 24 he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. 25 But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. 26 And the report of this went through all that district.

The synagogue leader didn't come to Jesus until after his daughter had died—it was too late for anyone else to help. But Jesus simply went to the girl and raised her! In our lives, Jesus can make a difference when the timing seems too late for anyone else to help. He can bring healing to broken relationships, release from addicting habits, and forgiveness and healing to emotional scars. If your situation looks hopeless, remember that Jesus can do what seems impossible.

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."

"Son of David" was a popular way of addressing Jesus as the Messiah because people knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (Isaiah 9:7). This is the first time Matthew records Jesus being addressed by this title. Jesus' ability to give sight to the blind was prophesied in Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; and 42:7.

28 When he entered 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."

These blind men were persistent. They went right into the house where Jesus was staying. They knew Jesus could heal them, and they would let nothing stop them from finding him. That's real faith in action. If you believe Jesus can meet your need, don't let anything or anyone stop you from reaching out to him.

29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it."

Jesus didn't respond immediately to the blind men's pleas. He waited to see if they had faith. Not everyone who asks for help really believes God can help them. Jesus may have waited and questioned these men to help them understand their deepest need and also to increase their faith. When you think that God is too slow in answering your prayers, consider that he might be building your faith, as he was doing for the blind men. Do you believe that God can help you? Do you really want his help?

Jesus told the people to keep quiet about his healings because he did not want the public attention of being known only as a miracle worker. He wanted his message of forgiveness,

restoration, and rescue to get out. He healed because he had compassion on people, but he also wanted to bring spiritual healing to a sin-sick world.

³¹ But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

Jesus Heals a Man Unable to Speak

³² As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him.

Jesus' ministry on earth actively exposed and confronted demons who were oppressing people. Although we cannot always be sure why or how demon possession occurs, it causes both physical and mental problems. Not every case of disability comes from Satan, but he delights in ruining the image of God in humans. In this case, the demon made the man unable to talk. (For more on demons and demon possession, see the notes on 8:28 and Mark 1:23.)

³³ And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." ³⁴ But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

In this chapter, we read about the Pharisees accusing Jesus of four things: blaspheming, befriending sinners, disrespecting religious tradition, and serving Satan. Matthew shows how Jesus was scorned and despised by the religious leaders who should have received him most gladly. Why did the Pharisees do this? (1) Jesus bypassed their religious authority to help people directly. (2) He weakened their control over the people. (3) He challenged their cherished beliefs. (4) He exposed their insincere motives.

While the Pharisees questioned, debated, and dissected Jesus' actions and teachings, people were being healed and lives were being changed right in front of them. Their skepticism was based not on insufficient evidence but on jealousy of Jesus' popularity.

The Harvest Is Plentiful, the Laborers Few

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus was overwhelmed with compassionate pity for the people. His response echoes the deep inner mercy of God, often described in the Old Testament. Ezekiel also compared Israel to sheep without a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:5-6). Jesus came to be the Shepherd, the one who could show people how to avoid life's pitfalls (see John 10:14).

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus looked at the crowds following him and referred to them as a field ripe for harvest. Many people are ready to give their lives to Jesus and only need someone to show them how. Jesus commands us to pray that people will respond to this need for workers. Often, when we pray for something, God answers our prayers by using *us*. Be prepared for God to use you to show another person the way to him.