

Matthew 9:1-13 – “Jesus Came To Save Sinners”

1. Cleansing – 9:1-8

9:1 - *So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.*

In Chapter 8, Jesus had gone to the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. He delivered two men from demons and the demons were sent into a herd of pigs and they all perished. You may be surprised that demons would possess animals, but those of you that own cats, this starts to make a lot more sense now.

But the people in that area didn't like that they lost all their pigs, so they ask Jesus to go. And Jesus won't force Himself on anyone. He's a gracious God, and so He goes back to His own city (Capernaum) on the other side of the Sea.

- Sometimes our prayers are better off unanswered, or at least not answered in the way we want them answered.
- Jesus honored their request, but it would not be helpful for them.

9:2 - *Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”*

As Jesus comes back to his hometown, some people brought a paralytic to Him to be healed. It's interesting that it says Jesus ***saw their faith***... What did He see exactly that showed they had faith?

- In Mark's gospel we read that 4 men brought this man to Jesus. It also says that Jesus was in the house (we're not sure which house, maybe Peter's). But when the people heard Jesus was there, they all came flocking to hear from Him, and as they came, He preached the word to them (Mark 1:2).
- Now when these 4 men brought the paralytic there, the crowds were so great they couldn't even get inside or near the front door. So, they went up on the roof and began to tear up the roof so they could lower him down. These were men that showed their faith by taking action. They didn't turn around and think they missed their window. They took action.
- Faith should always move us to action. Faith causes us to step out boldly, not allowing the present conditions we see to hinder us from trusting God.

So when Jesus saw their faith, He said, ***“Son, be of good cheer, yours sins are forgiven you.”***

Now that might seem like an odd response for someone who was most likely wanting to hear, *‘Be healed, get up and walk!’*

First of all, Jesus used a term here that was a real term of endearment – **Son**. This alone would have brought great comfort to this man. But then Jesus adds, **be of good cheer**. This meant to take courage; or cheer up. Perhaps this man believed his condition was a result of sin. This was common in Jewish thought – **John 9:2**, *“And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?””*

- So, Jesus begins with the most pressing of needs – sin. And He says, **your sins are forgiven you**. In a way, you could say that all our sickness is a result of sin. It was never God’s intention in creation to have that a part of His world. That’s why there will be a new heaven and new earth and we’ll be given new bodies that will never be plagued again by sickness or suffering.
- The greater need then is not physical health but spiritual health. Jesus wanted to deal with this man’s sins because it’s the life of forgiveness that truly makes one whole. This is what would truly bring joy and peace.

Now I’m not saying that all our sicknesses are a direct result of sin by any means. Or that being forgiven means we should never be sick again. But when our sins are forgiven, the root problem is now gone. Everything else we experience in this world is now only temporary.

- Someone once said that God heals all sickness except the last one. There comes a time when that last sickness is simply meant to take us home where we will have no more sickness.

9:3-5 - *And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!”* ⁴ *But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”* ⁵ *For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’?*

The scribes, this sect of Pharisees who were experts in the law, saw all that was going on and quickly accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They knew that only God could forgive sins, but as of yet, they didn’t understand that Jesus was the Son of God. It was the religious leaders who were truly in a state of paralysis. They refused to accept Jesus as anything other than a man.

But Jesus now on a couple of instances proves that He is indeed more than just a man.

First of all, He knew what they were thinking. Nobody but God can know our thoughts. And that either brings great comfort to you or great apprehension. These scribes are laying the seeds of thoughts of conspiring against Jesus. Jesus said they were thinking **evil** in their **hearts**.

- Understand something today, nothing is hidden from God. Do you live your life thinking that God is not really to focused on your life and that things can sort of get swept under the carpet? It can't and it won't. He sees all, but even more than that, He sees the unseen! He knows your very thoughts and what's going on in your heart.
- You may be keeping others in the dark, but God is never in the dark. So don't deceive yourself. Keep all things open and in the light. Confess your faults, He already knows them and His desire is to restore you. But we must be sure we're not trying to hide anything from Him.

Then Jesus asks a question that was meant to get these scribes thinking: *'Which is easier – forgiving sins, or saying, 'Arise and walk'?* It was a rhetorical question meant to provoke the position the religious leaders were taking toward Jesus. The answer has been interpreted in different ways.

- Some say the easier thing was to say your sins are forgiven since there's no real immediate proof of that. Whereas is if you say arise and walk and nothing happens, you're sitting there with egg on your face. So that's the harder thing.
- Others say that the harder thing was to say your sins are forgiven. The scribes rightfully said only God could do that. They had correct information, but they lacked revelation. So, Jesus says I'll do something else now that will back up who I really am. For Jesus, a healing was no difficult thing. However, we know the forgiveness of sins would come about through a very difficult means – crucifixion on the cross.

Plus, if Jesus were blaspheming God, there's no way God would allow Him to perform a miracle or healing of this significance. So, this healing would clearly show He's more than an ordinary man.

9:6-8 - *But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins*—then He said to the paralytic, *“Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”*⁷ *And he arose and departed to his house.*⁸ *Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.*

This healing revealed the power and Person that Jesus claimed to be. It authenticated and validated everything He said.

Jesus did this work that they may know who Jesus is and that He can forgive sins.

- **John 17:3**, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

Again, this was a complete healing and restoration. This man walked home. Imagine what that would have been like for this man who's had to be carried everywhere.

- And having not walked for a long time you would think this would need some time for the muscles to develop after not being used. But we don't read of this being gradual or this man looking like Bambi trying to stand up for the first time. It's an amazing and complete work.

Apart from Christ, we too are limping around, crippled and in paralysis by sin. But when you choose to put your trust in Christ and activate faith, He restores you and makes you whole!

- I trust that all of you have experienced this and that you still marvel each day at His goodness in your life. The people glorified God ***who had given such power to men***. The Greek word for power here is *exousia*, which isn't the dunamis power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8. This word *exousia* speaks of authority.
- Matthew has been building the case of the authority that Jesus holds. The people were astonished at the conclusion of the sermon on the mount because Jesus spoke with authority (7:28-29). He's shown authority over sickness (8:1-17), authority over nature (8:23-27), power and authority over demons (8:28-34), and now He reveals He has authority to forgive sins – a divine act, which He also proved by a significant healing.
- Since Jesus has authority over all, are we willing to surrender all to Him? He's certainly worthy of it all. This is where Matthew takes us next.

2. Conversion – 9:9

9:9 - *As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.*

Here we see the calling of Matthew, the writer of this gospel. And Jesus calling Matthew was significant. His name used to be Levi, but it was changed to Matthew.

- Levi means 'joined'. And that relates to where Matthew once was. He was a tax collector. And tax collectors were despised by Jews because they were seen as traitors; those that joined with Rome to carry out their work.

Rome had developed taxes for everything. People travelling through were taxed based on what goods they were carrying, and how many wheels were on their chariots. It was believed people were taxed for the fish they caught. This may have meant that Matthew collected money from Peter, James, and John for their fishing business (as well as other fisherman among the disciples). Could you imagine the introductions of Matthew to the other disciples? I'm sure some of the guys were thinking, *'The minute I get alone with Matthew I'm gonna make him pay for a change!'*

Being a tax collector was a lucrative gig, but it meant you were a sell out; a turn coat. Tax collectors basically became extortioners.

They were able to ask whatever tax price they thought they could get. Nobody really knew what the true price was. So, the collector would try to take however much he could, and then as long as he paid Rome what they asked for, he could keep the rest. So, of course they're going to try and cheat people – it would become very profitable for them.

The Jew that took on this profession could not serve as a judge or a witness in a court session, plus they were excommunicated from the synagogue.

So, grasp the significance of Jesus calling Matthew to follow Him. He's no longer Levi – joined to Rome, he's Matthew, which means 'gift of God'.

Matthew will be a gift because he's going to be a great example of Jesus calling the outcasts and rejects of society. He's not calling the gifted, He's calling regular people, turning their life around, and causing them to be a gift.

- And now we're getting to study through the eyewitness account of Jesus by someone who was otherwise dismissed and spurned but has experienced the incredible grace of God. What a blessing!

3. Celebration – 9:10

9:10 - *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.*

Not only does Jesus call Matthew, but He goes into his house and eats with him and his tax collecting buddies. And the Pharisees flipped out.

Matthew has no doubt brought many of his friends together to introduce them to Jesus. This is something we need to do.

- We need to follow this example and have some Matthew meetings, where we are with the sinners of this world, the despised in the world's eyes.
- Potential problems with Christianity is that we: a) desire to be separate from the world and so we isolate ourselves from the world, or, b) we want to reach the world, so we become like the world.
- We need to get into the world but do so to show Jesus. When you have unbelievers over to your house talk about Jesus as if they already know Him. Just let it be something that exudes out of your life.
- If Jesus has saved you, celebrate that by sharing it with others.

4. Criticism – 9:11

9:11 - *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

The process of sharing a meal in this day took on a much more deeper meaning. Their style of eating was very different than what we are used to. They didn't use knives or forks, or napkins; they had a loaf of bread that they would tear off a piece for themselves, and they would dip it in a soup or sauce. It was a messy affair. Germs were passed around. Double dipping was not an issue. If meat was there they would just tear off a piece dirty hands and all. And people viewed this time as very intimate and, in a sense, the food going into you is going into me. In other words, we're becoming one as we break bread.

Pharisees would never eat with these kinds of people because they didn't want to be associated with them. In their eyes, Jesus was becoming one with these sinners. Jesus knew that nothing could be further from the truth.

Now sometimes Christians can take this a little too far and justify themselves doing some fairly controversial things. They'll indulge in activities that are very worldly and excuse it away by saying Jesus ate with sinners.

But understand the difference. Jesus never stooped to the level of sinners by compromising who He was, He always lived out truth and holiness and called others to that level.

5. Correction – 9:12-13

9:12-13 - *When Jesus heard that, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”*

People that feel healthy and well aren't typically going to seek out a doctor. Nobody sits around when everything is feeling fine and thinks, “I'm gonna go see my doctor today.” Or, “You know, I think I'm gonna head over to the dentist and get a few teeth drilled.” No way! You want no part of these guys unless you see the need. Even then it can be a bit of struggle to go.

The scribes and Pharisees were the ones that felt strong and healthy. They viewed themselves as righteous and so they didn't really see their need to trust in God.

They were relying on their works to make them right with God. So Matthew quotes from Hosea 6:6 to demonstrate what God's heart is. He's not looking for sacrifice, He's looking for a right heart and a right attitude. He's desiring mercy over vain sacrifice. Sacrifice wasn't wrong or bad, but if it's not accompanied with a right heart, it means nothing.

For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Now Jesus is not saying that He will not call the righteous or save the righteous. What He's saying is that it's the sinners that will see their need and will respond in repentance.

The righteous (and we're meaning self-righteous) are typically not going to respond to Jesus because they already feel they have it all together.

The sick, or the sinners on the other hand, know that they are hurting inside and in spiritual poverty.

- **Psalm 51:17**, *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise."*

Jesus wasn't turning aside the righteous, the issue was that they weren't coming to Jesus admitting they were sick.

Have you admitted your sickness today? Have you come to Jesus saying you need healing? He is our great physician looking to make you whole spiritually. The only one able to do that. Come to Him today expressing that need.

- "The 1st link between my soul & Christ is not my goodness, but my badness; not my merit, but my misery; not my standing, but my falling; not my riches, but my need." (Kent Hughes)