

MATTHEW

Chapter 9

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 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.” 3 And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” 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,’ 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.” 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.

9:1 *getting into the boat* – Mt 9:1 serves two functions. It closes out the narrative of the exorcisms in the region of the Gadarenes (8:28–34), since Jesus “got into the boat and crossed over” (9:1), fulfilling the townspeople’s request to leave their region (8:34). It also opens up the next miracle of Jesus’ authority in Capernaum, since Jesus “came into his own city” (9:1). (CC)

his own town – Capernaum Although not mentioned in the OT, it was evidently a sizable town in Jesus’ day. Peter’s house there became Jesus’ base of operations during his extended ministry in Galilee (see Mk 2:1; 9:33). A fifth-century basilica now stands over the supposed site of Peter’s house, and a fourth-century synagogue is located a short distance from it.) (CSB)

9:2 *bed* – Stretcher like mat. (TLSB)

saw their faith. Both the paralytic and the people who brought him to Jesus showed their faith. (TLSB)

Take heart, My son – Affectionate encouragement. (TLSB)

your sins are forgiven – That the Lord God forgives sins is taught throughout the OT (e.g., Ex 34:6–7). Jesus speaks directly and immediately with God’s authority. John Chrysostom: “He discloses also another sign, and that no small one, of His own Godhead, and of His equality in honor with the Father” (NPNF 1 10:196). (TLSB)

Mt 9:2 presents to Matthew’s hearers/readers a striking situation of need and of faith. Unnamed persons were bringing a paralyzed man, cast on a cot, to Jesus. Matthew draws attention to their situation of need, but then moves quickly to Jesus’ words in response to the need. Given the circumstances described by Matthew, Jesus’ response is unexpected. Matthew did not write, “They were bringing a sinner to Jesus” or even “They were bringing to Jesus a man who was sick because of his sin.” Instead, Matthew wrote, “They were bringing to him *a paralytic*” (9:2). Jesus responds with a word of comfort that meets the man’s true need and that reinforces teaching that he has already given in this marvelous Gospel: “Be courageous, child! Your sins are being forgiven” (9:2). Sin ultimately is the root of all human suffering and need. The sin of Adam and Eve brought the curse of death, sickness, and every malady upon the human race (Genesis 3; Rom 5:12–14; 1 Cor 15:21–22). Jesus speaks to the root cause of all need, and he invites this person to

be brave, for even as he is encountering Jesus, Jesus is in the act of forgiving his sins. (ἀφίενται, “are being forgiven.”) That Jesus spoke because he saw the faith in both the paralytic and in his friends is of no small significance. Even though their faith in Jesus cannot as yet have been what we would call “fully informed” about his person and work, nevertheless, these men were trusting that Jesus is the one who has authority from God to heal and restore—and to forgive sins! To such faith Jesus speaks his word, “Your sins are being forgiven” (9:2), which bestows the forgiveness that is the heart and center of salvation and that restores fellowship with God. (CC)

9:3 blaspheming – Here the term includes usurping God’s prerogative to forgive sins. (CSB)

To demean or malign God in some way. Here, the accusation is that Jesus claimed divine authority, since forgiveness must come from God. This was the beginning of long-standing conflict between followers of Jesus and heirs of the Pharisees in rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic writers would describe Jesus as a sinful magician who would not listen to wisdom and sought to destroy the Law of Moses. A similar scandal may occur when pastors forgive sins by Jesus’ authority. E.g., when a pastor states, “As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins” (*LSB*, p 151). (TLSB)

Quickly now Matthew changes focus, turning from the man’s need and Jesus’ response. He lines the second response up precisely with the first: “And look” (9:3), certain scribes are there in starkest contrast with those who were carrying the man to Jesus (“And look,” 9:2). The scribes evaluate Jesus’ words as evidence of blasphemy: this mere human is arrogating to himself the authority to do what only God can do! To them Jesus also responds “because Jesus saw their thoughts” (9:3; contrast “because Jesus saw their faith,” 9:2). (CC)

9:4 knowing – Many Gk manuscripts have the same word as in v 2: “saw.” Just as Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic, He saw the thoughts of the scribes. (TLSB)

think evil – Jesus’ question brought out the growing malice of the scribes against His gracious ministry. (TLSB)

9:5 which is easier – Obviously, it was easier to declare someone forgiven than to tell a paralytic to rise and walk. (TLSB)

Jesus puts two questions to them. First he asks, “Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?” (9:4). Jesus names their thoughts as “evil” for doubting that he has the authority to forgive, as he is claiming to do. (CC)

Then Jesus poses a second question, the answer to which is evident when we read his words in context. Jesus does not ask the scribes who accused him of blasphemy, “Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal a paralytic?” Nor does he ask, “Which is easier *to do*?” Instead, he asks, “Which is easier, *to say*, ‘Your sins are being forgiven,’ or *to say*, ‘Rise and walk!’?” (9:5). Two utterances are in view, one of which Jesus has already spoken, evoking the evil thoughts and unbelief of the scribes: “Your sins are being forgiven” (9:2). Does Jesus have this sort of authority? In order to demonstrate that yes he does possess that divine power by right, Jesus emphatically poses the second utterance that will also be spoken to the paralytic: “Rise and walk!” (9:5). (CC)

The logic will move from the greater to the lesser. If Jesus can speak the thing that is *harder* to say, this will show that he also has the authority to say the *easier* one. The command “Rise and walk!” is the harder thing to say because any observer will be able to tell immediately whether or

not Jesus is speaking with authority. In contrast, observers cannot tell for sure from the outside if someone's sins are actually being forgiven. However, they can tell whether a paralytic gets up and walks—or not—so it is harder *to say*. (CC)

authority...forgive sins – The drama of the moment is heightened by Matthew's narrative interruption of Jesus' words in mid-sentence, a technique that the evangelist scarcely uses elsewhere in his Gospel: " 'But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to be forgiving sins on the earth'—*then he says to the paralytic ...*" (9:6). Jesus literally demonstrates for all to see that he has the authority—the authority of God himself—to forgive sins on the earth. (CC)

9:6 *authority ... to forgive sins*. Jesus proved His authority to forgive sins on earth by commanding the paralytic to get up and go home. This was another example of the power of His words (cf 8:8, 16, 27, 32). (TLSB)

9:8 *afraid* – Sinful mortals react with fear when confronted with evidence of God at work (cf 28:8; Lk 1:30; 2:9–10). (TLSB)

glorified God – In contrast to the Gadarenes (8:34), these people responded to Jesus' authority by giving God the glory. (TLSB)

authority to men – What Matthew states in 9:8 about God must apply in the most direct sense to Jesus himself. (CC)

That is why I have offered a somewhat round-about rendering of the dative τοῖς ἀνθρώποις as "to the realm of men." Two things are implied by the periphrasis "the realm of men." First and most directly, the unique authority of Jesus is at work in the human realm, on the earth; Jesus is a man, an ἄνθρωπος ("man") on earth among other ἄνθρωποι ("men"). (The Nicene Creed affirms that Jesus "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven ... and was made man." The Athanasian Creed confesses that Jesus is "perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." Lenski, *St. Matthew's Gospel*, 361, suggests something close to what I am offering: "By sending Jesus with the divine ἐξουσία ['authority'], men in general had it in and through Jesus who was one of them, had it in the actual wondrous gifts it bestowed." Cf. Alford, *Matthew–Mark*, 90.) Second, Jesus will extend his own authority through others. Israel's Messiah will entrust authority to the Twelve in chapter 10. Moreover, although the Great Commission does not indicate that Jesus *transfers* or *gives* his authority for the carrying out of the work of baptizing and teaching, he does promise his own unique and abiding presence with his disciples who will carry out those missional tasks (28:18–20). Thus in that sense, as reflected especially in the book of Acts, the early church carries out its mission in the name of Jesus and with his authority. The authority to forgive and heal has been given by God the Father to the Son of Man, and in the most important sense to him alone. However, because the Son, who became a man (1:18–25), calls others to follow him, and through his promise he entrusts authority to disciples to continue the in-breaking of the reign of God all the days until his parousia, God can also be described as the one who gave such authority to the realm of men. (CC)

If we carefully understand the authority of the Word and the Sacraments, we see that God continues to bestow that gift of Jesus' authority "to the realm of men" (9:8) today. When the Law and the Gospel are preached by a man who is a Christian pastor, or when a Christian teacher speaks God's truth, Jesus' authority is there. When one Christian hears the confession of another troubled Christian's conscience and absolves that brother or sister of the sin, Jesus' authority is there. (Luther's Large Catechism affirms that both the pastor in his unique office and every

Christian have the right and the obligation to absolve another who confesses. See Luther's discussion in LC, "A Brief Exhortation to Confession," 1–8, 13–14. God delights in making forgiveness and cleansing from sin available to his people!) When pastors administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in accordance with the Lord's institution (26:26–29; 28:19), it is really Jesus' authority that is present to forgive and strengthen and seal his followers unto the Last Day for bodily resurrection, final healing, and eternal life. (Luther's Large Catechism affirms that both the pastor in his unique office and every Christian have the right and the obligation to absolve another who confesses. See Luther's discussion in LC, "A Brief Exhortation to Confession," 1–8, 13–14. God delights in making forgiveness and cleansing from sin available to his people! In the Small Catechism, Luther emphasizes that it is the power of God's Word "in and with" the water that enables Baptism to forgive sin, to rescue from the devil, and to give eternal salvation to all who believe (SC IV 6, 10; *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* [St Louis: Concordia, 1986, 1991], 22). Likewise, Luther says about the Words of Institution for the Sacrament of the Altar that whoever partakes of Christ's body and blood and believes the words receives what they say: "Given and shed for you *for the forgiveness of sins*" (cf. Mt 26:28; SC VI 8; *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, 29; emphasis added). Luther also maintains that the reason for the efficacy of holy absolution, which truly forgives the sins of the penitent, is that the absolving word of forgiveness from the confessor's mouth is really the Word of God (SC V 16, 28; SA III IV; see *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, 24–27, 221). (CC)

The reign of God, you see, continues to come through the Good News of Jesus. Even to the end of the age (28:20), God the Father has given Jesus this authority for the sake of those who are in need in the realm of men. (CC)

9:1–8 The paralytic who is brought to Jesus no doubt hopes for physical healing. He receives an even greater blessing: absolution. The word "absolve" comes from Lat *ab* ("from") and *solvere* ("loose") and refers to the sacred act of loosening a person from sin, to free one from guilt. When we confess our sins, whether publicly or privately, and hear God's word of forgiveness spoken to us, then, like the paralytic, we are absolved. Luther called absolution "a great and precious and magnificently splendid treasure" and urged believers "to accept it with all praise and thanksgiving to God" (BEC 22). • Jesus, precious Savior, cheer me with Your Word that I am washed clean from all my sins. Amen. (TLSB)

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

9:9 *Matthew* – Also called Levi. One of the 12 apostles. (TLSB)

tax booth – Possibly on the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas, where commercial tolls were levied. Matthew's administrative occupation likely helped prepare him for writing his Gospel. (TLSB)

follow me – akolootheh - to *accompany* (specifically as a disciple). A disciple was a follower. People in Jesus' day would listen to a number of teachers and then follow the one whose ideas they liked the best. This is not how Jesus does things. He does the choosing. In this case he found Matthew and asked him to bring his friends. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Romans 8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Ephesians 1:11 “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

He (Matthew) got up and followed – In contrast to those who only volunteered to follow Jesus (8:19–22), Matthew responded immediately to Jesus' call (cf 4:18–22). (TLSB)

9:10 tax collectors – It is important to begin any discussion of the character and activities of “tax gatherers” with a caveat about the extent of our knowledge. (T. E. Schmidt, “Taxes,” *DJG*, 804, reminds us: “Jews in the time of Jesus were subject to a complex system of religious and secular taxation, the extent and burden of which is difficult to determine.” Much of what scholars specifically conclude about taxation and tax gatherers is limited to “reasonable” conclusions drawn from limited evidence. A good illustration of our dependence on inferences is provided by two different scholarly conclusions about the significance of John's exhortation to tax gatherers not to collect more than is appointed for them (Lk 3:12–13). S. R. Llewelyn, “Tax Collection,” *NewDocs* 8:74, concludes that these tax gatherers were the actual bidders on tax-farming contracts, but that the *system* imposed limits on how much they could collect. By contrast, J. R. Donahue, “Tax Collector,” *ABD* 6:337, concludes that Lk 3:12–13 implies that these men were mere employees who were limited by their overseers. Both deductions are reasonable; there is no way of telling which is correct.) Specialists in this area work with the assumption that taxation in Roman-controlled Egypt (about which we have more firsthand knowledge through the discovery of various papyri) offers close parallels with taxation in Roman-controlled Palestine. However, even within Palestine, an important distinction existed during the ministry of Jesus. Taxation and tax farming in Judea and Samaria would have been carried out under more direct Roman supervision, since the Roman procurator (who was Pontius Pilate from AD 26/27 to 36/37) had direct power over these regions. In Galilee, by contrast, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled from 4 BC to AD 39, and any “tax gatherers” would have been operating under his aegis and authority. The Herods were Idumean, not Roman, and tended to be more favorable to the Jewish people than the Roman rulers were. Although we cannot be sure of common perceptions among the Jewish populace in Galilee, there is at least the possibility that animosity toward tax gatherers as collaborators and quislings may have been more muted in Galilee. An entire generation of the populace will have known no other ruler than Herod Antipas, and we cannot be sure that the Romans were uppermost in the minds of Galilean Jews, even though Antipas served only at the good will of Rome. (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266, notes the possible need to nuance our understandings at this point. He acknowledges: “This may not make too much

of a difference, since Herod was scarcely a popular monarch: kept in power by Rome as a client king, his Jewish orthodoxy was widely suspect.” Many scholars do not even consider the possibility of such a difference in context between Judea and Galilee (e.g., Keener, *Matthew*, 293; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:238). The magisterial study of Herod Antipas is by Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). (CC)

The “tax gatherers” (τελώναι) mentioned in the Gospels were probably engaged in the collection of indirect taxes, that is, customs and sales taxes on commerce as it changed hands and as it passed by toll booths in towns such as Capernaum. Direct taxes on persons and land were collected by government officials, and it is possible that Matthew was one such individual. The fact that he was sitting at the tax office when Jesus called him, however, leads at least some scholars to suppose that he is a minor official, as opposed to a chief tax gatherer (ἀρχιτελώνης) such as Zacchaeus of Jericho (Lk 19:2). Donahue, *ABD* 6:337, notes that τελώνης, “tax gatherer,” could refer to several different levels of those involved in the taxation industry. He thinks that the tax gatherers with whom Jesus associates are most often the employees of supervisory officials, since “they appear at transport and commercial centers (Jericho and Capernaum) and when John preaches to them (Luke 3:12–13), he tells them to collect no more than is ‘appointed’ (*diatetagmenon*, which suggests minor functionaries fulfilling the orders of higher officials).” Under the overall Roman system, individuals would bid on the right to collect indirect taxes in a certain region or town, and the Romans (or the local ruler, such as Herod Antipas) would award the contract to the highest bidder, who then would seek to recover the money that he had already paid as best he could. Such a system obviously would tempt tax gatherers to abuse their office and indulge in greed, and we should probably ground our understanding of why these men were despised in the natural human tendency toward greed and dishonesty. (Schmidt, *DJG*, 805–6; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266. Schmidt offers a deduction that may be correct when he writes: “The fact that the tax farmer advanced the money meant that he had excessive wealth to begin with, and in an agrarian subsistence economy, usury was the most common source of such portable wealth” (p. 806). In Galilee, pious Jews may or may not have associated tax gatherers with the Roman order and so regarded them as traitors and unclean by virtue of such associations. (CC)

sinners – Disreputable people. (TLSB)

The Pharisees complain to Jesus’ disciples that their teacher is eating with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:10–11). An ongoing debate in NT scholarship has tried to clarify, insofar as that is possible, what the term “sinners” might have meant in the first-century context of Jesus’ ministry. There are two extreme positions, neither of which is likely to be completely correct. Older scholars (e.g., K. H. Rengstorf) have at times concluded that the Pharisees despised as “sinners” essentially *all who were not themselves Pharisees*, including the general Jewish population or “the people of the land.” Others, led especially by the work of E. P. Sanders, believe that the “sinners” with whom Jesus associated at table were a much more limited group of “traitors” who were despised because they had all severely and unrepentantly broken God’s Torah, and perhaps had collaborated with the Romans as well. The former view also tends to see the Pharisees as harsh and exclusive, while the latter view regards them as more gracious and inclusive. (CC)

One of the keys to understanding the significance of “sinners” lies with the person or group employing the term. Significantly here in the text at hand, it is not only the Pharisees who speak of Jesus eating with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:11). The evangelist himself describes the scene: “Look, many tax gatherers *and sinners* came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples” (9:10). Now, Matthew surely knew that all Israelites—indeed, all people—were sinners and all were in need of the saving work of Jesus, who had come, and who was to be

named Jesus, because “he himself will save his people [all, not just some of them!] from their sins” (1:21). Nevertheless, even the evangelist himself can use the term “sinners” (ἁμαρτωλοί) in a narrow, more parochial sense. (CC)

Most scholars no longer think that the Pharisees regarded the general population as “sinners” in the sense of those who were especially depraved or alienated from God. The Pharisees seem to have been an admired and influential group among the people; why would the general populace admire those who despised them? (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:238, describes “sinners” as “disreputable figures in their own right who had abandoned the law,” and Keener, *Matthew*, 295, speaks about “blatant violators of the law.”) (CC)

Perhaps a commonsense approach to the problem is best. There were surely those people in first-century Judaism who more flagrantly and publicly violated the Law of God. Dishonest or extorting tax gatherers would be among that group of “sinners,” but others would be there as well, likely including prostitutes. This would be the sense in which the evangelist himself uses the term “sinners.” In the mouth of the Pharisees, the term “sinners” would probably have taken on additional meaning, depending on the context. The Pharisees’ own devotion to the practice of ritual purity and to the Oral Torah would, it seems, inevitably have led them to include in the category of “sinners” at least some of the people who despised the Pharisees’ interpretations and applications of Scripture. However, it would be too strong to claim that the Pharisees always would have regarded “the people of the land” as “sinners” in the sense of being gross transgressors of the Torah or unredeemed and outside God’s covenant. (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 266, suggests that we think in terms of a sliding scale when he writes:

It is very unlikely that anyone in the first century drew a sharp distinction between “people of the land” and “sinners”; we are dealing with shadings, not clear and obvious demarcations. Perhaps a Shammaite Pharisee would have been happy with a coloured scale: Shammaites—red; Hillelites—pink; “people of the land”—grey; “sinners”—black. There might well have been some disagreement when it came to voting on who came into which of the latter two groups; some ultra-zealous Shammaites might have elided the middle two as well.) (CC)

The Pharisees in our text are concerned about the fact that Jesus is participating in a banquet in the home of Matthew the tax gatherer, and that he is *eating* with “tax gatherers and sinners” (9:11). (Lk 5:29 makes explicit what is only implicit in Mt 9:10, namely, that the house in which Jesus was dining belonged to Matthew himself, whom Luke calls “Levi” (Lk 5:27, 29, but “Matthew” in Lk 6:15). Double names are well-attested in the first century AD as we know from Simon/Cephas (Jn 1:42) and Thomas/Didymus (e.g., Jn 11:16). See the references in Gundry, *Matthew*, 166. We do not know why Matthew chose to call himself “Matthew” in his Gospel (Mt 9:9; 10:3) and never “Levi.”) This brings us to the third important question, namely, the social and religious significance of table fellowship in first-century Judaism. (CC)

ATE WITH HIM – To eat with someone was a powerful message of acceptance, trust and the partnership of fellowship which also included a sense of intimacy and familiarity. Jesus took a huge risk here because it indicated that he was someone who hung around with a rough and wicked crowd. In the Lord’s Supper we experience the acceptance Christ has for us. The faith he gave us brings about this acceptance. The Lord’s Supper is also a reminder of the feast that is to come when we join him in heaven

Luke 15:2 “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Acts 11:2-3 “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

9:11 Pharisees – The intent behind their question was to find fault with Jesus, something they did increasingly (cf v 34; 12:2). (TLSB)

why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners – Tax Collectors and sinners were despised and thrown out of the synagogues by the church leaders of their time. They were also not permitted to associate on a plane of equality with Jews in good standing. Tax collectors worked for the hated Roman government and often collected more than the actual tax bill and thereby were getting rich off of their fellow countrymen. Sinners were notorious sinners. In Jesus’ day there was a ranking of people in this order:

- Priests and Sadducees were in class one
- Scribes and Pharisees were in class two
- Rural people were in class three
- Tax Collectors and Sinners were in class four
- Slaves (often Gentiles) were in class five

As to the meaning of table fellowship in general, there seems to be broad agreement among students of the NT and its cultural context. Generally in Mediterranean culture, meals functioned as important ceremonies that reinforced the stability of society and the interrelationships that existed between the members of a given group. Joint participation in festive meals *could* signal the strongest possible bonds of intimacy and mutual affirmation, to the extent that betrayal by a comrade who had shared such fellowship would be experienced as the most bitter of all betrayals (Ps 41:10 [ET 41:9]; Mt 26:23). Given the specific and focused Pharisaic commitments to purity with regard to food and meals, the meaning of a shared meal *could* be intensified so as to indicate the closest possible fellowship and mutual approval imaginable. (CC)

However, it is necessary to hold a nuanced understanding of what mutual participation at or an invitation to a banquet might mean, and what it might not mean. Two texts from the Gospel of Luke lead in this direction and provide a window into *possible* meanings that could attach to an invitation to a meal. In Lk 7:36–50 we read of Jesus’ invitation to the home of Simon the Pharisee, where a woman who was a “sinner” (Lk 7:39; cf. 7:47) anointed Jesus’ feet. The pertinent aspect of this text occurs in Jesus’ words to Simon in Lk 7:44–46. There Jesus accuses Simon, who had invited him to eat (Lk 7:36), of offering him no appropriate greeting, no customary foot-washing, and no honored head-anointing. In other words, Simon invited Jesus to share a meal, but he did so in such a way that he made it very clear that Jesus was on a lower, or at least provisional, standing in relation to Simon himself. Not everyone invited to dine was being offered full acceptance and approval! (CC)

The other text is Lk 14:7–11. Here Jesus comments on customary practices of table fellowship among some (if not many) of his contemporaries in Judaism. He rebukes them because at the meal to which they are called they struggle to obtain a higher status in relation to others who are also invited. In other words, an invitation to dine can still entail some degree of judgment, inequality, or criticism. Therefore, while sharing a meal in the ancient world could communicate something very intimate and positive, such an invitation could also signal an attempt to reinforce existing barriers and positions of relative status and shame. Not all meals in Jesus’ first-century

context served the same functions, and not all the guests invited to those meals were deemed equal. (CC)

Accordingly, when trying to discern why the Pharisees objected to Jesus' presence at the meal in Matthew's house, we cannot simply say, "Because Jesus was eating with them, he was signaling his acceptance of and full fellowship with 'the tax gatherers and sinners.'" Attendance at a meal did not necessarily indicate that at all, as the data from the texts in Luke 7 and 14 indicate. Jesus was not just present at the same meal with tax gatherers and sinners; there was something *different* about how he ate with them. What was it, then, about Jesus' meal in the home of Matthew, with "many tax gatherers and sinners" (9:10), that gave offence to the Pharisees? (CC)

I can offer four suggestions. The first is that there were those flagrant sinners (such as Matthew) who, from the moment of Jesus' authoritative call to faith and discipleship, had begun to be transformed. To such people Jesus offered an instantaneous and full acceptance and fellowship. There was no trial period, no probationary activities during which Matthew or another like him would prove himself worthy of full and free acceptance by Jesus. (We cannot know for certain whether the traditions of Pharisaic theology and piety required a probationary period during which a person would have to prove himself before being regarded as a full-fledged participant. Our sources do not reveal that much about the organization of the Pharisees. One possible indication that such a period existed is Josephus' own brief description of how, as a teenager, he set out to examine each of the major sects in Judaism. By his own account, this process took three years, and when it was over, at age nineteen he began to live in accordance with the rules of the Pharisees (*Life*, 9–12). Reicke, *New Testament Era*, 159, suggests that in this era the school of Hillel required a month-long trial period, while the Shammaites expected up to a year. We do know that the Essenes practiced a kind of "novitiate" that a candidate had to go through before being a full member of the community. According to Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historical Jesus," 28, one of the distinct differences between the Essenes and Jesus was that he required no trial period:

For Jesus "initiation" was not prolonged; rapidly one could leave all behind and "follow him," by repenting and perhaps by being baptized. To join the *haberim* [here referring to members of the Pharisaic community] required at least one month (t.Dem [Tosefta, *Demai*] 2.10–12); but to join the Essene group took at least two years of preparation and examination, after which all personal items were irretrievably given to the community (1QS 6.13–23).

Even as Jesus' miracles of healing were instantaneous and effective, so is his call to those who are "sick" in spirit (9:12) and in need of a spiritual physician. Only those who refuse to see themselves as needing such a physician will have no place at Jesus' table fellowship, for, he says, "I did not come to call righteous people, but sinners" (9:13). (It is perhaps best to view Jesus' words in 9:13 as ironic: he did not come to call "the righteous," but sinners. Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:240, suggests:

"From the standpoint of the kingdom and the ministry of Jesus, culminating in his death, all are unworthy and in need of forgiveness—the 'righteous,' the Pharisees included." Luz, *Matthew*, 2:35, n. 44, observes that the Protestant reformers tended to join with many interpreters from the ancient church in this ironic understanding of Jesus' word about "the righteous." See Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 30.3 (NPNF 10:201), who says that Jesus spoke these words "in irony." By contrast, according to Luz, Catholic authors more often tend to read Jesus' words about the "righteous" as a straightforward statement.

Another option, in light of the force of Hos 6:6a as dialectical negation, is to understand Jesus' words in 9:13b similarly: "I did not come *only* to call the righteous, but *even more* to call sinners." In this last instance, "righteous" could be a synonym for "believers," as the singular is in 1:19.) (CC)

Second, Jesus' teaching in Lk 14:7–11 indicates that when he was either the host or the guest of a meal, he eschewed completely all notions of relative standing among the guests, holding all to be of equal status in his sight. In that sense, Jesus' table fellowship was radically inclusive and filled with grace. Just as Jesus declared that all in Israel were equally in need of repentance (4:17), so also all were equally the objects of Jesus' own mission to gather Israel's lost sheep (9:36; 10:6; 15:24) back to their God in his own person and ministry. In that sense, to eat at table with Jesus was *always* an invitation to receive through him forgiveness, acceptance, and restoration into full fellowship with God and with those others around Jesus' table. Since Jesus thus proffered such fare at table, no matter who owned the home, every table at which Jesus reclined was *Jesus'* table, with he the true host. (CC)

In the third place and in an interesting contrast with the point just made, Jesus' table fellowship was radically *exclusive*. Everything depended on his own person. Jesus did not call people to do anything other than to follow him and him alone. This always entailed a call to responsive obedience to the will of God; Jesus did not, after all, come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17). However, it was what one made of Jesus and his call that made all the difference in the here and now and that would make all the difference on the Last Day (8:11–13, 18–22, 34; 9:2). (Allison, "Jesus and the Covenant," 80, states this in a provocative manner. In response to the common view that Jesus' opponents thought that his table fellowship was too inclusive, he writes:

I am inclined to think this turns everything upside down. What offended was Jesus' *exclusivity*. Jesus did not assume the salvation of pious Israelites and then go on to add the "wicked" to the redemption rolls. Starting instead with a Christocentric view of things, from the assumption that he himself was the destined king of Israel, Jesus redefined salvation with reference to his own person. And what he required of all Israelites, including the "sinners," was acceptance of God's eschatological representative.) Jesus was not calling sinners of any kind into anything other than a saving fellowship with himself—and through himself, with God the Father. (CC)

Fourth, the meals with Jesus were events at which *transformation* and *conversion* could and did take place; at these experiences of meal fellowship, Jesus was actually *calling* the "tax gatherers and sinners" (9:10–11) to leave their old way of life and to follow him in faith. According to Jesus' own explicit statement, this is why he had come and why he ate with disreputable, flagrant transgressors: "to *call* ... sinners," and not the "righteous" (9:13). The meals were, to use modern terminology, evangelistic and missional. (CC)

This too was completely gracious and also radically different from the customary way that table fellowship would normally function in first-century Palestinian society. As the important essay by S. Scott Bartchy reminds us, meals were normally experiences in which the status quo of mutual relationship was reinforced and solidified, not changed. (S. S. Bartchy, "Table Fellowship," *DJG*, 796, writes about that cultural context: "Even everyday mealtimes were highly complex events in which social values, boundaries, statuses and hierarchies were reinforced." Again, he emphasizes: "Jesus challenged the central role played by table fellowship in reinforcing boundaries and statuses widely believed to be sanctioned by God. His use of table fellowship as a divine tool for

undermining boundaries and hierarchies made him an enemy of social stability in the eyes of leading contemporaries” (p. 797). Jesus, however, sat at table with those who had already begun to trust in him, even with only dim and uncertain faith, and with those who had not yet believed in him and also with those who would reject him. Through that meal and the conversation at it, Jesus reached out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. More than anything else, this shows the gracious character of the meals that Jesus practiced during his earthly ministry. They were an embodiment of grace reaching out “while we were still God’s enemies” (Rom 5:10). (CC)

To be sure, not all to whom Jesus called out at table received his call and responded; many were called, but few were chosen (22:14). To be offered a place at table did not mean that you were already his disciple, a found sheep. The offer was to come and be found, to come and be fed and let the physician make you well. (CC)

The theme of eating with the Lord and with his provision is prominent in the OT, of course, and Jesus’ meal-ministry should be seen as the extension and fulfillment of that gracious provision. Just as Yahweh had fed his people with meals in his presence, now those feedings find fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus who brings to completion the Scriptures of Israel. At the same time that Jesus’ table fellowship looks back to God’s grace in the OT, it also looks forward as an anticipation of the day when many from east and west will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the reign of God (8:11; cf. Is 25:6–8; 43:5; Ps 107:2–3). In his own teaching, the Lord Jesus made the connection between the *present* enjoyment of the wedding banquet with him (Mt 9:15; 22:1–14) and the final, *future* consummation of that banquet when he would return in glory (25:1–13). (CC)

9:12 *not healthy who need a doctor* – The Pharisees erroneously declared themselves healthy (righteous) by observing the Law (mostly what they had created). Therefore they did not see their sin or their need for Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

Jesus is the sinners’ “doctor.” (TLSB)

9:13 Jesus told the Pharisees, who were proud of their knowledge of Scripture, to go back to school. They failed to see that mercy was the point of God’s work. (TLSB)

I desire mercy and not sacrifice – Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 to stress that even in the old covenant empty formalism does not please God. Recognizing one’s sins and having faith in the mercy of Christ is active in showing mercy toward others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

Hosea condemned Israel for supposing that God desired obedience to ritual laws (sacrifice) more than the practice of mercy. The Pharisees were equally guilty of this sin. (TLSB)

Galatians 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

righteous, but sinners Those proud of their own righteousness will not respond positively when Jesus calls sinners. (TLSB)

Psalms 14:3 “All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Psalm 53:3 “Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Romans 3:10 “As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;”

9:9–13 That Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners may not shock Bible readers today. We think of Him as the friend of sinners. But it was shocking to many first-century Jews that Jesus would practice table fellowship with such people (cf 11:19). Jesus is unlike any other Jewish rabbi. This festive banquet is His opportunity to call to faith people who are conscious of their unrighteousness. Jesus sits with them, not because they are worthy, but because He is merciful. He wants sinners included in His kingdom. • Dear Jesus, thank You for inviting me, a sinner, to Your marriage supper. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Questioned 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?” 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. 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.”

9:14 *John’s disciples* – John was in prison (4:12) but still had disciples. (TLSB)

how is it...do not fast – Matthew’s banquet may have prompted this question (v 10). (TLSB)

Fasting was partial or total abstaining from food. Moses fasted on Sinai for 40 days and nights (Ex. 34:28. In the OT, fasting was a sign of religious humiliation. At first, fasting was supposed to be done only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29. Later, days of national disaster and the like were added. (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

The disciples of John fasted, but not those of Jesus. Jesus fasted 40 days and nights in the desert (Mt. 4:2). He approved of fasting but not if done for show (Mt. 6:16-18. (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

Note from Mark 2:18 – Pharisees fasted twice weekly (on the second and fifth days of the week, according to the *Didache*; ANF 1:174). This went far beyond the required annual fast (affliction) on the Day of Atonement (Lv 23:26–32; Ac 27:9) and the few mentioned in Zec 8:19. Fasting, therefore, was an important aspect of the Pharisees’ ritual observance.

The form of the question posed to Jesus is extremely significant. Some of “John’s disciples” group themselves together with the Pharisees in the pious practice of voluntary fasting (9:14). (Pharisees in the first century seem to have observed regular, non-compulsory fasting on Mondays and Thursdays (Gundry, *Matthew*, 169; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:109; cf. Lk 18:12; *Didache* 8:1). They wonder why Jesus’ disciples, *as one more group within the context of first-century Judaism*, are not engaged in similar practices: “We fast, and they fast; why don’t your people fast?” Already Matthew’s hearers/readers can discern the error in the question as it is posed. Jesus’ interlocutors are assuming that there is (or should be!) nothing *distinctive* about the disciples of Jesus. Jesus’ followers should be practicing their religion in the same ways as other groups. By implication, the questioners are also convinced that there is nothing qualitatively

different or new about Jesus himself. Jesus perceives the “Christology” implicit in the form of the question, and he gives his answer in 9:15–17. His answer, in the first place and through the first image employed, challenges and invites his listeners to a new understanding of who he himself is. (CC)

9:15 *guests mourn...bridegroom* – Jesus compares Himself to a bridegroom at a wedding feast and the disciples to guests. In Jesus’ day a bride and groom stayed home for the honeymoon. They kept open house for a week or more with their closest friends who shared their joy and feasting. (LL)

Being with Jesus brings incomparable joy, because in Him the burden of sin is removed. Assurance of personal forgiveness and peace of mind and heart fill repentant sinners who lean on Him. (LL)

How can fasting be uppermost in the minds of those who, as the close friends of the bridegroom himself, are participating in the wedding feast? Jesus’ words in 9:15 evoke both cultural and theological imagery. (CC)

Following Jesus and being his disciples are like participating as the dear friends of the groom in the joyful festivities of a wedding. On that basis alone, to make fasting a central practice of discipleship would be an anomaly. (CC)

Theologically, Jesus’ reply in 9:15 offers something that is old and something that is significantly new. In the OT, the future restored relationship between Yahweh and his people Israel is compared to that of a husband marrying a wife (Is 54:5–6; 62:4–5; Hos 2:16–22 [ET 2:14–20]). The literature of Judaism had taken up this image and continued to look forward to “the days of the Messiah pictured as a wedding celebration.” Jesus’ words here claim that the future day of the Messiah has come. The old hope and promise are coming true in Jesus’ ministry. (CC)

Something new is here, however, and if Jesus’ first hearers might not have understood, at least Matthew’s hearers/readers will be able to perceive it. In the texts of the OT and of Judaism that look forward to the eschatological wedding feast, the bridegroom figure in those texts is always God himself. There is apparently no instance in which the *Messiah is termed “the Bridegroom” for Israel*. (The traditional Jewish interpretation of the Song of Songs is that it portrays the wedding between *God* and Israel that took place at the exodus from Egypt (see Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 463–67). The traditional Christian interpretation of Psalm 45 and the Song of Songs is that they portray royal weddings of the king of Israel in a way that is typological of Christ’s betrothal to his church. That, however, is precisely what Jesus is claiming, as other texts in Matthew’s Gospel make abundantly clear (22:1–14; 25:1–13). The Christological implications of Jesus’ terminological transfer are stunning and consistent with the proclamation that Jesus is Immanuel,” “God is with us” (1:23). Jesus is in the place of Yahweh, the God of Israel. He is the Bridegroom for the people of God. His disciples are not one group among many in Israel, that they should comport themselves in fasting as do the disciples of John or the Pharisees. The wedding feast has begun! (CC)

Note from Mark 2:19-20 – Fasting is a time for sorrow or penitence, whereas feasting is associated with joy. Jesus emphasizes that feasting is proper because the Messiah (the Bridegroom) is now present among God’s people. Jesus hastens to add that He will someday be taken away from them (after His death, resurrection, and ascension), and then God’s people will have occasions to fast. (TLSB)

they will fast – There will come a brief time for Jesus’ disciples to engage in fasting and mourning, it is true. Yet Jesus’ words here are not a teaching about fasting. They comprise the invitation to repent and believe in the Bridegroom. It is an inclusive invitation in that Jesus extends it to all who hear his words. Yet at the same time, Jesus’ words extend an *exclusive* invitation since he himself is the sole Bridegroom. Just as in the OT Yahweh called Israel to forsake her adulterous liaisons with other gods and be his wife exclusively (e.g., Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea 1–3; cf. Ex 20:3–5), so Jesus brooks no rivals. (CC)

9:16-17 Jesus illustrated the significance of His presence with two short parables, both of which communicated that someone new is here. Jesus compared His ministry to unshrunk (new) cloth and new wine. His Gospel message tore away and burst the old traditions and practices about fasting and table fellowship. (TLSB)

New Truths require new hearts with elasticity to accept and accommodate those truths. (LL – Matthew)

9:16 αἶρει γὰρ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱματίου—This sentence is relatively obscure and can be taken in different ways. Translated literally, the clause is, “for its fullness pulls away from the coat,” taking “fullness” as the subject, though morphologically τὸ πλήρωμα could also be the accusative case object. The sense is that a patch of new cloth will shrink and tear the unchanging fabric of the old coat as it is washed and worn. For an old coat, one should use a patch of old fabric, but for a new coat, a new patch is needed, so that in either case the fabric of the patch behaves like the rest of the coat. (CC)

Self-righteousness did not die with the Pharisees of the first century. Many people want somehow to earn right standing before God by performing ceremonies or by observing certain rules or rituals. His gracious offer of pardon and freedom offends those who want to patch up the robe of their own righteousness. Still today people think they can “mend” the tatters of their own lives by studying Christ’s teachings or by admiring His life or by emulating His concern for peace and justice. They refuse to admit their own nakedness and guilt before God; they refuse to let Him clothe them in His righteousness. (LL – Luke)

Jesus’ second image, that of the dangers of putting a new patch on an old garment (9:16), entails a sober note of warning to his hearers. They are in danger of trying to take something new—Jesus himself—and simply adding him or stitching him onto their old way of life in Judaism. No one does such a thing with a garment, and for good reason: the only possible result is that the old garment will be ruined. Jesus cannot be “a patch,” something small and secondary that merely “repairs” the larger structure that was already in place; that was what these disciples of John and the Pharisees (see 9:11) wished to make of Jesus. But Jesus is and must be primary, first, central. He has not come to fix a small breach in the existing religion, nor just to supplement it. Rather, he has come to fulfill the entirety of the OT Scriptures and inaugurate the promised new covenant in himself. Any other approach to him results in something even worse than before. (CC)

The self-righteous system of the Pharisees simply was incompatible with Jesus’ gospel and His kingdom. Grace and works cannot be combined. Anyone who insists on earning his salvation, wholly or in part, by his own works rejects God’s grace in Christ Jesus. And anyone who relies upon the merits of Christ alone does not attempt to add his own works of righteousness to the price paid for his salvation. Such a combination is like “a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment.” Such a patch will be useless, for it will shrink and rear itself loose. (PBC)

9:17 *fresh wineskins* – In ancient times goatskins were used to hold wine. As the fresh grape juice fermented, the wine would expand, and the new wineskins would stretch. But a used skin, already stretched, would break. Jesus brings a newness that cannot be confined within the old forms. (CSB)

Goatskin bags that, when new, could withstand the pressure of fermenting wine. (TLSB)

Jesus' third image (9:17), of wine and wineskins, is perhaps the most evocative of all for the careful hearers/readers of Matthew' Gospel. Its basic message is essentially the same as the previous verse. The "old wineskins" are the theologies of John's lingering disciples and of the Pharisees, as well as the practices that issue forth from those beliefs. Jesus has initiated and inaugurated the very kingly reign of God in history (4:17). Through him the Father in heaven is offering salvation, forgiveness, and fellowship. The end-time Bridegroom is present, because Jesus is "Immanuel," "God is with us" (1:23). Those gifts that he brings cannot be regarded as something "smaller," something that can be contained or "fit into" existing structures of belief and practice—"old wineskins." It is not that there will be no overlap or similarities between the disciples of Jesus and the Judaism that surrounded them in the first century. Judaism was not completely wrong-headed about everything; it preserved some elements of OT teaching. The starting point, however, has to be new. Jesus himself must be the starting point! (CC)

The language of "tearing" and "pouring out" is strongly evocative of events that take place around the trial and crucifixion of the Lord, where Jesus' blood is poured out. He will say, "This is my blood of the covenant, [blood] which is being poured out on behalf of many" (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον, 26:28). Many in Israel, however, remain in unbelief, and the leaders of the people will "pour out" the blood and fail to receive the forgiveness Jesus' bloody death will earn for them and for all. (CC)

Recall also that after Jesus responds to Caiaphas' question as to Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the high priest "*tore his garments*" (διέπρηξεν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, 26:65) as a sign that he rejected Jesus' true identity as God's Son. In addition, the language in 9:16, "a worse tear happens" (χεῖρον σχίσμα γίνετα) to the garment, finds an echo in the description of the tearing of the temple veil: "The curtain of the temple was torn" (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη, 27:51), a polyvalent event that signifies, among other things, the destruction of the temple because Israel's leaders have rejected Jesus. (CC)

There is a kind of narrative irony in these portions of the Passion Narrative. The high priest thinks that he is rightly tearing his garments as a sign of righteous indignation at the claims of Jesus, a blasphemer. Matthew wants his hearers/readers to know that the high priest has refused to let the new wine of Jesus' identity be placed in the new wineskins of faith in Jesus and his authority to forgive sins and call sinners back into fellowship with God. This refusal will result in the tearing of Judaism, the destruction of the temple, and the pouring out of Jesus' blood for the redemption of all, but tragically to no avail for those who persist in clinging to their "old wineskins." To trust in Jesus and his gracious authority is to be saved. To reject Jesus and his supreme authority is to be lost. (CC)

In sum, the issue at stake in 9:14–17 is Christology: what do you make of Jesus? Contemporary applications of these words of Jesus will take their lead from the essential meaning of the text. No person or system of thought can take Jesus as an add-on to an existing theology. All faith and practice must begin with him as the center. For those who are already Christians, there is also the call *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*, "The church always needs reformation." The church must ever and always be reexamining its teaching and practice in light of Scripture, beseeching the

Spirit's guidance through the words of Jesus and the inspired NT writers, so that no custom or practice will become an "old wineskin" in danger of being burst by the new wine of Jesus and the Gospel message that proclaims him. The Good News of a completely gracious salvation that is received simply and only by faith—in other words, the Good News about Jesus—is that one teaching by which the church stands or falls. (CC)

New truths require new hearts with the elasticity to accept and accommodate those truths. Jesus brought new wine, new concepts of the truth that did not fit the religious thought and practice of that day. Change was needed. (LL)

9:14–17 John the Baptist compared Jesus to a bridegroom (Jn 3:29). Jesus does the same here and in His parable of the 10 virgins (25:1–13). Marriage imagery also figures prominently in Rv (e.g., 19:9; 21:9). The Bride of Christ is the Church—all those who by repentance and faith are united with the Bridegroom. The Church sings with anticipation: "The Bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take! Alleluia! With bridal care Yourselves prepare To meet the Bridegroom, who is near" (LSB 516:1). • Come, heavenly Bridegroom, and make all things new. Amen. (TLSB)

A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman

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." **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. **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.

9:18-26 Could there be a more effective way of communicating that the new wine has begun to flow for the marriage feast of the Bridegroom (9:14–17) than to narrate Jesus' authority over death itself? Matthew begins the third and final triad of miracle stories in Matthew 8–9 with a sort of "double" story, the healing of the hemorrhaging woman and the raising up from the dead of the ruler's daughter. The two people healed share much in common, and Matthew introduces each situation of need with "Look!" (ἰδοὺ, 9:18, 20). Both are female, and both are referred to as "daughter" (9:18 and 9:22). Both would be regarded as ritually unclean: the girl because she was dead, and the woman because of her flow of blood. In both cases, Jesus responds to remarkable faith in him and his authority to do what is needed. The ruler says, "Put your hand on her so that she may live!" (9:18). He knows that Jesus has the authority and the ability to help him. The bleeding woman believes as well, and Jesus explicitly says to her, "Your faith has healed you" (9:22). Significantly, Jesus touches both of these "daughters" who are in need. (CC)

Given the remarkable number of parallels between the two females, another connection between the two cases is possible. The woman has suffered physical illness and ritual uncleanness *for twelve years*. She has been bleeding, and the OT associates one's blood with one's life (Lev 17:11–14; Deut 12:23). Therefore Matthew may want his hearers/readers to regard her as *slowly dying*. The ruler's daughter is *actually dead*. Although Matthew has already given testimony enough to the gracious authority of Jesus for those who come to him in need, this account adds

remarkable emphasis when Jesus *raises the dead*. Because of Jesus, the woman's body, slowly dying, now ceases its bleeding. Because of Jesus, death is no more than a sleep from which the little girl needs to be awakened. If this last connection that I am suggesting is valid, then it also helps to explain why we have this single story with two miracles interwoven. They are both miracles of restoring life to the dead. On the way to raising the dead, Jesus heals a woman who is on the way to becoming dead! (CC)

In each case, Jesus responds to faith in him, and he “heals” both people. The verb used thrice in 9:21–22 is the familiar *σώζω* that is often translated “to save” and that refers to salvation in the fullest sense (see it in 1:21; 10:22; 19:25; 24:13; 27:42, 49). Only in 9:21–22 does Matthew use the verb to refer to the results of the healing of physical illness (loss of life blood, a kind of death), but he does so with purpose. In this context of Jesus' ministry of both forgiving sins and taking away the illness of Israel in fulfillment of Isaiah 53 (see Mt 8:16–17), we should understand that the faith in Jesus expressed by the ruler and the hemorrhaging woman was not merely that he could help them physically, but that he also was God's anointed Messiah for Israel. This faith truly resulted in salvation, in soul as well as in body. To be sure, the girl and the woman eventually would grow old and die from some cause. But all with faith in Jesus will be raised on the Last Day, when he returns in glory, and as whole persons with glorified bodies, they shall dwell forever in the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet 3:1–13). This is how Jesus “will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). (CC)

Jesus is master over illness, over storm and demons, and even over death itself. He shows that mastery here in this double miracle account. Even more, after he is crucified, dies, and is buried, he will show that mastery by his own rising from the dead as the supreme expression and demonstration that God the Father has given him all authority in both heaven and earth (28:18). The day will come when, just as he raised the ruler's daughter, Jesus will take our hand and raise us up with all the dead. Then he will give to all believers eternal life (cf. SC II 6). (CC)

What eyewitness of Jesus raising the girl could not speak of it? The report of that miracle went out into the whole land (9:26). On the Last Day, the report will go out as well—“Jesus Christ is Lord”—and God the Father will be glorified (Phil 2:9–11). (CC)

9:18 ruler – From Mark and Luke we know that he was a synagogue ruler named Jairus (A ruler of the synagogue was a layman whose responsibilities were administrative and included such things as looking after the building.) (CSB)

9:20 suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years – (The precise nature of the woman's problem is not known. Her existence was wretched because she was shunned by people generally, since anyone having contact with her was made ceremonially unclean (Lev 15:25–33). (CSB)

9:21 Due to her gender and affliction, the woman was probably ashamed to speak to Jesus directly, but inwardly she expressed great faith in His healing power. (TLSB)

9:22 Take heart, daughter – Affectionate encouragement. (TLSB)

your faith has made you well – A repeated emphasis (8:2, 10; 9:2, 29). Only the disciples showed “little faith” (8:26). (TLSB)

made well – The Greek for “healed” actually means “saved.” Here both physical healing (“be freed from your suffering” and spiritual salvation (“go in peace”) are meant.) (CSB)

9:23 *flute players* – Musicians hired to play in mourning ceremonies. (CSB)

Even poor families hired two flute players and a wailing woman to express grief when a loved one died. (TLSB)

crowd making a commotion – Mourners hired to wail and lament. (CSB)

9:24 *not dead but sleeping* – Jesus meant that she was not permanently dead (see Jn 11:11–14 for a similar statement about Lazarus. (CSB)

laughed – The crowd, including the professional mourners, ridiculed Jesus. (TLSB)

9:25 The healing touch of Jesus (8:3, 15; 9:21, 29) had power to raise the dead. (TLSB)

9:26 *district* – Area around the Sea of Galilee. (TLSB)

9:18–26 These miracles benefit a woman and a girl. Generally, girls were not as highly prized by families. Among pagans, infant daughters were more likely than their brothers to be abandoned after birth. But Jesus does not see women and girls this way. In His sight, all alike have sinned, and all alike are justified by His grace (Rm 3:23–24). • Jesus, Savior of all, cheer me by touching my heart with Your saving power. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Heals the Blind and Mute

27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, “Have mercy on us, Son of David.” **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.” **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.”** **31** But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. **32** As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. **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.”

9:27-34 This brief miracle account is the middle story in the third and final triad of miracles in Matthew 8–9. There are several echoes of the very first miracle story (8:1–4) in how this wonder unfolds. In 8:2 the leper expressed faith in Jesus’ ability: “If you are willing, you are able [δύνασαι] to cleanse me.” Jesus here says to the two blind men, “Do you believe that I am able [δύναμαι] to do this?” (9:28). In both accounts, Jesus touches the person(s) in need. Moreover, Jesus warns those whom he has healed to speak to no one, something that he does only five times in Matthew’s Gospel. As we have repeatedly seen in this portion of the Gospel that depicts Jesus’ ministry of messianic deeds (8:1–9:35), Jesus’ authority and people’s faith in his authority are key to the unfolding accounts. (CC)

9:27 *two blind men*. They followed Jesus after He left the ruler’s house (v 23). (TLSB)

Have mercy. Common prayer for help based on Ps 51:1. (TLSB)

Son of David. A popular Jewish title for the coming Messiah (e.g., 12:23; 20:30; 21:9; 22:41–45. (CSB)

What is new here is the way the two blind men call out to Jesus: “Have mercy on us, *Son of David!*” (9:27). Matthew introduced Jesus as “Son of David” at the start of his Gospel (1:1), but this messianic title has not been used of Jesus since then—until now. More significantly, this is the first time that any person in Matthew’s Gospel narrative has so spoken to Jesus. Precisely because of 1:1 (as well as 1:18–25), the evangelist’s hearers/readers know that Jesus is, in fact, the “Son of David”—the promised Heir of David’s line—and the “Christ,” the rightful anointed King over God’s people Israel. There is, however, a kind of strange irony in the fact that the first thus to acknowledge Jesus are two men who are *blind*. Neither the crowds nor the religious leaders nor even Jesus’ own disciples have “seen” or known Jesus well enough to name him as the evangelist had named him in 1:1 and as the blind men now confess him. (CC)

do you believe – Jesus seemingly wants to give sharper focus to their plea for mercy. He asks them whether they trust in his authority: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They respond as believing disciples do: “Yes, *Lord*” (9:28). In response to their confession of faith, Jesus touches them and heals them. These men, who were able to perceive Jesus’ identity as Israel’s Messiah, are now able also *literally* to see Jesus. The healing, as with *all* of Jesus’ healings, is an anticipation of what the Christ will do on the final day of victory and vindication. The reign of God has come in Jesus, bringing forgiveness and healing. One day, that salvation and healing will be fully experienced. After Christ returns in glory, all the dead shall be raised, and all in Christ, with their bodies now glorified to be like the risen Christ’s, shall enter the eternal kingdom prepared before the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15; Rev 20:11–22:21). (CC)

no one knows about this – Curiously, Jesus now sternly warns the men, “Look! Let no one know!” (Mt 9:30). His warning goes unheeded, and that in itself reveals that the faith of the two blind men, who now can see, is not a perfect faith. Why, however, would Jesus warn these men to silence, when he has not offered such a command in any other of the miracles performed since 8:1–4? As was suggested in the commentary on 8:4, there may very well be different reasons why Jesus occasionally enjoins people to silence about his true identity or his marvelous deeds (8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9). (CC)

Here it is possible that their public declaration that Jesus is the “*Son of David*” (9:27) may be the reason. Unlike “Son of Man,” the phrase “the Son of David” was a well-known messianic title in the first century AD. There were popular conceptions and misconceptions attached to the phrase in the minds of first-century Jews. Although we cannot be sure what all of those misconceptions might have been, at the least we can suppose that some Jews thought only of a Son of David who would come in power, perhaps especially to judge and condemn the Gentile idol-worshippers who were oppressing Israel. (Sometimes modern Christians tend to dismiss Judaism’s desire that God would destroy the Romans as “merely political.” As a matter of fact, the Romans were idolaters and the God of Israel was (and is!) the only true God. It was entirely appropriate for the Jewish people in the first century AD to desire that idolaters no longer rule over them, since the Romans persecuted them and hindered their attempt to be faithful to the one true God in their religious life. In other ways, of course, the messianic expectations of Judaism had strayed far from what God had promised in the OT—promises that Christ fulfilled (e.g., 1:22–23; 2:14–15, 16–18, 23; 4:12–16; 5:17–20; 8:16–17). (CC)

That would not necessarily have been a merely political or nationalistic expectation, for the documents of Judaism give ample testimony to the hope that a “Son of David” would come in righteousness and to restore divine justice in the whole world. Nevertheless, the point is that such an expectation would not be looking for a gentle, serving, suffering Son of David. By warning the blind men not to disseminate the miracle—and thus also the title they had applied to him—Jesus

wants to downplay any false preconceptions of what he has come to do. (Carson, *Matthew*, 233, observes regarding ἐμβριμῶσαι (Jesus “sternly warned” them) in 9:30: “This rather violent verb reveals Jesus’ intense desire to avoid a falsely based and ill-conceived acclaim that would not only impede but also endanger his true mission.”) (CC)

9:28 *house* – Possibly where Jesus lived (cf 4:13). (TLSB)

came to Him – They followed Jesus into the house. (TLSB)

Do you believe – Jesus’ question brings out the importance of faith. (TLSB)

9:29 *your faith* – Jesus spoke similar words to the centurion (8:13) and the Canaanite woman (15:28). (TLSB)

9:30 *no one knows* – Jesus did not want too much publicity, because many Jews misunderstood His messianic mission (cf 16:20). (TLSB)

9:31 *spread His fame* – With their sight restored, these men disregarded the Lord’s warning. (TLSB)

9:27–31 Jesus answers the blind men’s cry for mercy by restoring their sight. He urges the Pharisees to acquire the same virtue (9:13; 12:7). In the OT, God describes Himself as “merciful and gracious” (Ex 34:6), and His Son demonstrates this same divine attribute. We are truly blessed to receive God’s mercy (5:7). • Heavenly Father, may we who have received mercy also show mercy. Forgive me for the many times I have failed to show mercy to others. Amen. (TLSB)

9:32-34 Miracle reported with great brevity, rushing to explain the conflict described in v 34. (TLSB)

The evangelist now records the final wonder in his lengthy narration of Jesus’ messianic ministry of deeds (8:1–9:35). In Jesus, God’s royal ruling deeds have begun, breaking into the world of sin and sickness and demonic powers. Wherever he goes in Israel, Jesus moves with the purpose of proclaiming and teaching the Good News of what God is now doing through Jesus himself and with the purpose of driving back sin and all its effects. One of the major reasons for this brief account is to record three contrasting reactions to Jesus. (CC)

The voices of three speakers are recorded in 9:32–34. The first speaker was demon possessed and mute, but he becomes a straightforward testimony to the grace of God in Jesus. After Jesus cast the demon out of the man, Matthew says simply, “The *mute* man *spoke*” (9:33). A contradiction in terms is overcome, because Jesus is there. (CC)

The second “speaker” is, collectively, the crowds that are present. They “marveled” at the results of Jesus’ ministry, and they acknowledge that what is happening is unique: “Never did it appear this way in Israel!” (9:33). Their words should not be construed as an explicit expression of faith in Jesus. Nevertheless, the words are correct as far as they go, and even more correct than the crowds themselves probably realized. They know that no man has ever done in Israel what Jesus of Nazareth has been doing. The believing hearer/reader of Matthew’s Gospel knows even more. Moses and the OT prophets never did such things, but Jesus is fulfilling the OT Scriptures. Now, in the time of fulfillment and in accordance with the OT Scriptures, Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God, is bringing a new salvation to the people of Israel, and to all people. (CC)

The third “speaker” is the voice of the Pharisees. Their words portend the shape of their increasingly hostile interactions with Jesus as the Gospel progresses. They do not and cannot deny that supernatural power is at work in Jesus. But they attribute that power to “the ruler of the demons” (9:34), a reference to “the evil one” (6:13), Satan. This is a charge that they will repeat in chapter 12 (12:24; see Jesus’ response in 12:25–37). It is *shockingly* wrong, given Jesus’ conflict in the wilderness with Satan (4:1–11) and the teaching that directs his disciples to pray for deliverance from the evil one (6:13). (CC)

With the exorcism in 9:32–34, Matthew brings to a close the third miracle in the third triad of miracle stories. Though not a little didactic material is also present, for two chapters the evangelist has related the authoritative deeds of Jesus and how he showed his powerful compassion to many in Israel who were in need (Matthew 8–9). I might comment briefly on the general significance of these miracle accounts for our lives today. Several points seem important. (CC)

First, the primary message of the miracles is their Christology. The miracles proclaim Jesus as Son of David and Lord and Christ. That is to say, Jesus is God’s Son, who has begun to reestablish the Creator’s gracious rule and reign over a fallen, demon-wracked, sinful creation. He has the authority to do so because he possesses the authority of the Creator himself, and he is, mysteriously and wondrously, both the agent of the original creation (Jn 1:1–3; Heb 1:2–3) and the Savior of the creatures who have fallen into sin (Mt 1:21). It is to this Jesus that the church of Matthew’s day and the church of our day looks in faith. From this Lord the church may expect blessing and salvation. (CC)

Second, the miracles communicate and promise salvation from sin. This salvation is rooted and centered in the forgiveness of sins that Jesus bestows and that faith receives (1:21; 9:1–8; 26:28). Jesus has authority to forgive, and he will ultimately provide that forgiveness through his atoning, sacrificial death on the cross. (CC)

Yet a third point is that salvation is not limited to forgiveness. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the forgiveness of sins in Jesus extends out to encompass and heal the whole person and ultimately the whole creation. The reign of God stands near, in Jesus (4:17). The miracles of healing and exorcism and the calming of the storm on the sea in Matthew 8–9 point forward to the promise of renewal and restoration and the new creation with no tumultuous sea (Rev 21:1) when Christ comes again in glory. The promise is certain, and the church prays in faith and confident hope, “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20; cf. 1 Cor 16:22). (CC)

Might Jesus do similar miracles today? Yes. However, he has not promised whether, when, where, or how. Such miracles are not the staple of our existence, which is lived under the cross (10:38; 16:24; cf. 27:32), awaiting the age to come. (CC)

Does God in Jesus continue to break into the fallen creation? Yes! Faith can see it, just as surely as the blind men could truly see who Jesus was even before their eyes had been opened (9:27). Our lives as Christians are constituted and continued through the ongoing action of God, who breaks into our world with his Word and with his always-efficacious Sacraments, Baptism and our Lord’s Supper. Faith in Christ is also faith that through the Word and the Sacraments, God actually offers us what Christ has earned: forgiveness for our sins and salvation now, with the promise of bodily resurrection to everlasting life on the Last Day. Until then, we may not experience the kind of miraculous physical healing that some did in Galilee during the years of Jesus’ ministry there so long ago. Nevertheless, as we wait for the final in-breaking, we look to the places where God promises his in-breaking in our lives. And we trust the authority of Jesus,

who will do, through the Gospel in words and water and bread and wine, what he has promised to do. The reign of God in Jesus continues to stand near! (CC)

9:32 *mute* – Unable to speak. (TLSB)

9:33 The crowds responded positively to what Jesus had done. (TLSB)

9:34 *Pharisees* – They responded negatively as their opposition to Jesus increased (cf 12:2, 14, 24). (TLSB)

by the prince of demons – Beelzebul. (TLSB)

Such is the power of evil and unbelief, however, that men can be eyewitnesses of the mighty deeds of God in Jesus and yet conclude that the power at work comes from the devil. As Jesus himself will teach, the reign of God as he is now manifesting it is under violent attack (11:12). Only those in whom God works the miracle of faith (cf. 16:17) can see the truth of Jesus and then can speak words of trust and praise, not words of mere astonishment (the crowds who “marveled,” 9:33) or of hostile unbelief. (CC)

9:32–34 When the mute man speaks, the crowds recognize that Jesus is someone special. But the Pharisees have a negative explanation for His power over demons. Today, people are still divided in their reactions to Jesus. Yet, the Gospel speaks clearly that He is the Christ (16:16), the Savior. • Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Loose my tongue, that I may bear witness to His mercy. Amen. (TLSB)

The Workers Are 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. 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.”

9:35 This second summary leads into the calling of the 12 apostles (10:1–4) and the missionary discourse (10:5–42). (TLSB)

Mt 9:35 is the back end of a bracket that Matthew has placed around the entire section from 4:23 to now. Jesus, the Messiah of word and deed, has spoken grace and truth with authority in Israel (especially chapters 5–7), and he has been doing deeds of mercy with that same rightful power (especially chapters 8–9). Some have been called to be disciples. Many in the crowds are marveling, but most do not believe. And some—the Pharisees—have begun to set themselves in violent opposition to Jesus and to the reign of God. Despite this varied response, Jesus remains true to his ministry of compassion and salvation, and he keeps on traveling in Israel, fulfilling his purpose. (CC)

Now, however, he will choose Twelve from the larger group of his disciples and uniquely commission them to share in his authority and to extend his work to Israel’s lost sheep. Following a narrative introduction (9:36–10:4), Jesus will send out the Twelve for their mission work (10:5–42). To the account of why and how Jesus sends them, the Gospel’s narrative has now arrived. (CC)

9:35 *teaching...preaching...healing* – didaskon – karuson – therapeuon – This verse sums up Jesus’ entire ministry in Galilee and echoes Mt. 4:23. At this point Jesus focused on the lost sheep of Israel, teaching in their synagogues.

9:36 *had compassion on them* – splagchnizomai – This refers to the inner organs – heart, kidneys, liver, intestines, lungs – and later spoke of them as the seat of emotions such as anger and anxious desire. The Latin literally means to “suffer with, to feel the pain and suffering of another.” Compassion comes from identifying closely with another.

Lit, “moved with pity”; based on a term referring to the belly, regarded as the seat of the emotions. (TLSB)

harassed – Has the meaning to be flayed – skin torn off which sometimes happened when sheep go through brambles or rocks.

Helpless -To be thrown prone or exhausted. When sheep have a lot of wool on them it is easy for them to fall and not be able to get back up.

Matthew teaches his readers that the compassion of Jesus is the source from which the apostles’ work will flow. Jesus is the true Shepherd of God’s people, as the prophecies quoted by Jerusalem’s chief priests and the scribes of the people had revealed long ago to King Herod (2:4–6): Jesus is the “Ruler who indeed will shepherd my people, Israel” (2:6, quoting Micah 5:1). With the coming of Jesus and the initial course of his ministry, the people’s need for a shepherd has become even more apparent. Israel’s leaders should have been nurturing the people and guiding them to follow Jesus, but instead those leaders are blaspheming Jesus, declaring him to be in league with Satan (9:3, 34). At the hands of such false shepherds, the people are helpless and in great need. (CC)

like sheep without a shepherd – The people had spiritual leaders like the Pharisees, who charged Jesus with being a pawn of Satan (v 34). (TLSB)

9:37 *disciples*. Not just the Twelve (10:1), but a larger group. (TLSB)

harvest is plentiful – Various harvests would occur throughout the year. See calendar, p 262. Jesus used this agricultural metaphor to picture the many people who needed to hear the Gospel. (TLSB)

9:38 *pray earnestly...to send out* – The plentiful harvest continues to require our prayers for workers today. It also calls us to bear witness ourselves. (TLSB)

In Jesus’ compassion, he speaks to the larger group of his disciples and bids them to pray to the Father (9:36–38). Jesus uses the metaphor of a great harvest that is approaching. In the fields where the crop is growing ready for harvest, there is urgent need for workers to cultivate and prepare for the day when the harvest will be gathered in. With this eschatological language, Jesus communicates to his disciples the urgency of the times, an urgency that continues for the church in the world to this day. God must send workers into the harvest! All of Jesus’ disciples, then and now, are to beseech the harvest’s Lord to send forth faithful laborers. The compassion of Jesus for lost sheep produces this command to pray; the compassion of Jesus, placed into the hearts of all his disciples, will produce this trusting prayer. Although this text does not report any response,

presumably the disciples began to pray to the Father for him to send out workers. God grant to the church today this prayer as well. (CC)

9:35–38 As Jesus travels around Galilee, the need for partners to preach the Gospel becomes more and more obvious. He urges His disciples to pray for laborers, and He sends out 12 of them as His personal ambassadors (ch 10). Jesus’ desire to save Jewish people and to “make disciples of all nations” (28:19) has not changed. All Christians are called to be witnesses of the surpassing compassion Jesus shows them by the forgiveness, life, and salvation He offers. • Good Shepherd, make me faithful, and bless my every effort to enlarge Your flock. Amen. (TLSB)