



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from November 1 afternoon through November 8 morning

Matthew 9:1-13

After the people of Gadara begged Jesus to leave their region, he and his closest disciples made their way across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, which he had chosen as a home base. It was here that several friends worked together to carry a paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed. Matthew does not record all the details of this event that are listed in Mark and Luke, most notably that these four friends could not get through the crowd and therefore made a hole in the roof of the house where Jesus was so they could lower their friend down to see him. Here again we see the emphasis of Matthew is more on the power and authority of Jesus than on the finer details of each event. Matthew records that before healing this man, Jesus said to him, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." This note from R.T. France sheds some light on why Jesus may have said this:

To us this seems scarcely relevant to a case of paralysis, but in a culture where disease was generally traced to sin (see John 9:2) this was not so. Jesus himself does not state here or anywhere else that a given illness is the result of sin (cf. John 9:3), but to the patient the assurance of forgiveness was real cause to take heart (cf. v. 22: in both cases Matthew alone includes this word).

R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 169.

Some of the scribes who were present heard Jesus say this and inwardly accused him of blasphemy. After all, only God could forgive sin, and they certainly did not believe Jesus was God. (As a side note, this is the first recorded conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders.) However, Jesus knew what they were thinking and responded by demonstrating his authority to both forgive and to heal. He told the man to pick up the bed he was carried on and return to his home. Instantly, the man was healed and got up and left. The response of the crowds was a mixture of fear and praise. Matthew indicates they believed God had given this authority to Jesus, but he does not indicate they yet believed he was in fact the Son of God.

Jesus left the setting of this miracle and began to travel on foot. As he was walking, he saw Matthew (the author of this gospel account) sitting at his tax collector's booth. He called Matthew to follow him, and Matthew did just that. Some time later, Jesus had dinner with Matthew at his house, and there were others there who were known as sinners. Tax collectors in this culture were known as sinners because most practiced the illegal act of charging additional amounts and then keeping the difference. In fact, they were reviled by most Jews because they were using the Roman tax system to cheat their own countrymen. Now the Pharisees who were nearby chose to confront Jesus, albeit indirectly through questioning his

disciples about why their rabbi would spend time with those who were known for their sinful ways. Jesus heard about their questioning and responded with a proverbial saying that pointed directly to his mission: he came to seek and save those who were lost. These known sinners were in need of a “physician,” not those who already supposedly knew God and His ways. Jesus then quoted Hosea 6:6 to communicate that the religious leaders should follow his example of mercy rather than be so focused on attempting to keep every visible act of the law. Jesus then repeated his mission, this time without the proverb.

Matthew 9:14-26

Jesus had dealt with the scribes and Pharisees, and now the disciples of John came to him and questioned him. While the John’s disciples did not oppose Jesus at the level of the religious leaders, they nonetheless likely saw him and his followers as rivals. Their desire here was not merely to learn, but to possibly point out a flaw in the ways of Jesus. The disciples of John and the Pharisees probably fasted on a regular basis, in addition to the occasional fasts that were prescribed by the law. They had observed that Jesus and his followers did not adhere to this practice and this was the basis of their questioning. In answering them, Jesus proclaimed that his presence was the reason they did not fast. He identified himself as the “bridegroom,” which alluded to the coming wedding feast that would include Jesus and all who would place their faith in him (Revelation 19:6-10). The disciples who walked the earth with Jesus had the distinct privilege of being in his physical presence well before this future event. Jesus said they therefore had no reason to mourn or fast. Once he left them, they would.

While the next two verses (16-17) are believed not to be directly connected to Jesus’ teaching about fasting and the wedding, they do speak to the difference between observance of the Old Testament law according to the religious leaders and the fulfillment of the law through Christ. Jesus pointed out that using old material with new material has disastrous results. In the same way, attempting to reconcile observance of the Old Testament law with the new covenant of his blood was impossible. Trying to do so would prevent either from being correctly understood and applied.

In the midst of this teaching, Jesus was approached by the leader of a local synagogue whose daughter had recently died. This miracle and the one recorded next are both drastically abbreviated in Matthew as compared to Mark and Luke (especially when compared to Mark). The leader of the synagogue and the woman who experienced healing after touching the garment of Jesus both displayed remarkable faith in his ability to heal and restore. The daughter of synagogue leader had been dead long enough that funeral music was being played at the house, and yet Jesus raised her to life.

Matthew 9:27-38

There are two more recorded healing events in this chapter. Verses 27-31 tell of two men who were blind who sought out Jesus and cried out to him for mercy. They called him Son of David, indicating that they believed he was a king and possibly that they believed him to be the Messiah. Jesus asked for confirmation of their faith – which they gave – and he then touched their eyes, referenced their faith and healed them. He instructed them not to tell anyone about

this miracle, but they went away and told many people in that region. Just after this, someone brought to Jesus a man who was possessed by a demon that had caused him to be unable to speak. Jesus cast out the demon and the man was able to speak. Those in the crowd were amazed, but the Pharisees accused him of using the power of Satan to cast out demons.

Matthew then offers a summary of the activities of Jesus. He traveled throughout the region and taught, preached the gospel and healed many. Upon seeing the large crowds of people, Jesus was moved with compassion for them. He saw them as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” This speaks to the state of those who are lost, and to the love of Christ who cares deeply for people. However, his compassion moved not to ramp up his healing ministry, but to implore his disciples to pray and ask God to send more people who would do the work of sharing the gospel with people who were tormented, lost and wandering.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to “blaspheme”? Why did the scribes accuse Jesus of this sin? What can we learn from Jesus’ response in Matthew 9:4-6?
2. How do we balance the biblical teachings of avoiding evil people with the example Jesus set in spending time with and reaching out to those who were known for their sinful way of the life?
3. How would you apply Jesus’ quote from Hosea 6:6 (recorded in Matthew 9:13) to your own life within Christianity?
4. What can we learn from Jesus’ instruction about mixing new and old materials in Matthew 9:16-17? How does this apply to the Old Testament law and the new covenant of Christ’s blood?
5. Several times in this chapter, we see conflict beginning to develop between the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. How would you describe this conflict? What do you think is at the heart of how the religious leaders questioned and accused Jesus?
6. Why do you think there were so few laborers for the harvest in Jesus’ day? Why do you think there are so few laborers for the harvest now? How would you specifically pray and ask God to send more laborers out into the harvest field?