



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Nine

- V. Matthew 8:1-9:38 - The Authoritative Power of the Messiah: Kingdom Power Demonstrated (continues/concludes)
- V.a Matthew 8:1-9:8 - Healings, discipleship, and overpowering Satan's strongholds (continues/concludes)
- V.a.vi Matthew 8:28-9:1 - Jesus heals the Gadarene Demoniacs (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Nine

The chapter commences with the conclusion of the healing of the two demon possessed people in the Gaderenes, showing that Jesus complied with the local inhabitants wish and sailed back to the western shore of Lake Galilee.

A key theme to the many and varied instances of healing in this chapter is that Jesus is the ultimate physician, and it leaves the reader in no doubt of Jesus' ability and willingness to provide both healing and forgiveness to all who would return to God through him. It shows that what was such a great loss to those in the Gaderenes who had rejected him, was to the great gain of those in Capernaum who did accept him, although it was far from all of them!

Once he was back in Capernaum, some people brought a paralysed man to Jesus, who surprised and disturbed some of the onlookers by immediately forgiving the man's sins, something that is the exclusive right of God. To show that he had the authority to do so, Jesus also instantaneously and publically healed the man of his disability.

Jesus encountered a tax collector called Matthew working at a local tax booth, called him into service, a call with which Matthew immediately complied. He would go on to become an apostle, evangelist and the author of this Gospel.

Some disciples of John the Baptist enquired of Jesus as to why his disciples did not fast as the others did. Jesus' response was to indicate that fasting was not necessary by anyone who is in the presence of the Christ.

A local synagogue ruler came to Jesus to plead with him to heal his recently deceased daughter. Jesus agreed to accompany him to see the child and, while they were on their way, a woman with constant menstrual bleeding had the faith to be healed by Jesus and she did so simply by touching his cloak. Jesus confirmed that her faith to be healed physically would ensure her spiritual salvation too. At the synagogue ruler's home, Jesus found that mourners had gathered for the girl's burial, but Jesus restored her back to life.

Other healings then followed as Jesus first restores the sight to two blind men and then the speech to a demon possessed man, where the evil spirit had robbed him of that ability. Jesus drove the spirit out with a word.

The chapter concludes with a call for evangelism. Jesus indicates that God's harvest field is full of ripened crops and all that is needed is for workers to step out into the field and to spread the Gospel.

**<sup>1</sup> And after getting into a boat he crossed the water and came to his own town.**

#### Matthew 9:1

After healing the two demoniac in the region of the Gaderenes on the eastern side of the Lake, Jesus crossed the water, returning to his own town Capernaum, the main base for his ministry in Galilee: <<*When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home*>> (Mark 2:1). This concludes the previous chapter.

#### V.a.vii Matthew 9:2-8 - Jesus Heals a Paralytic

This is a remarkable account on many levels. Firstly, the friends of a paralysed man showed both compassion and faith in bringing their friend to Jesus to be healed. Jesus not only complied with their request but went further and announced that the man was also healed of his sins, something only God can do. Thus Jesus was aligning himself with God in public, something the scribes immediately believed to be blasphemy, yet the healing was an unequivocal testimony to Jesus' assertions.

**<sup>2</sup> And just then some people were carrying a paralysed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.'**

#### Matthew 9:2

Just then probably refers to them arriving at Peter's home, where the healing probably took place: <<*When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him*>> (Matthew 8:14-15).

Some people probably refers to close friends of the man for they went to remarkable lengths to get the disabled man to Jesus: <<*And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic*>>

**lay>>** (Mark 2:4), a fact omitted by Matthew, for he quite correctly focuses on the forgiveness of Jesus.

**Lying on a bed** could refer to either a strong mat or something similar to a medical stretcher with a frame or handles to which ropes could be attached, which seems more likely since other accounts show the man was lowered down to Jesus through the roof as noted.



**The paralytic's mat?**

**Saw their faith.** Mark's fuller narrative recounts the character of the friends' faith: they were so persistent and determined to reach Jesus, so confident that their friend would be healed if they reached him that they dug through the roof. In fact, the man's faith is never mentioned, showing that it is not necessary for a person to have faith in order to receive healing; it is the people praying for the healing that need to have faith in God.

**The paralytic.** Jesus had already cured paralysis: *<<So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them>>* (Matthew 4:24), and: *<<When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress'>>* (Matthew 8:5-6), and these people had no doubt heard of his miraculous powers.

**Your sins are forgiven** implies that in this case sin and sickness are related but also that, of the two, sin is the more fundamental problem. This is understandable because sickness first came into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. However, individual sin is not always the direct cause of a person's disease or illness: *<<His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him>>* (John 9:2-3). Ultimately all corruption and death result from the entrance of sin into the world as noted: *<<but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die>>* (Genesis 2:17), and: *<<To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it", cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return'>>* (Genesis 3:16-19).

<sup>3</sup> Then some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.'

### Matthew 9:3

This man is blaspheming. The scribes believed Jesus was dishonouring God by taking upon himself the prerogative to forgive sins, something only God can do: <<*Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?*>> (Mark 2:7), and: <<*Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, ‘Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’>> (Luke 5:21). Religious leaders, specifically the priests, could announce healings in the name of God but only after performing the prescribed ritual atonement for the person concerned. Here, no atonement was offered and Jesus was not a priest in the line of Aaron, although his priestly line was later understood: <<*For it is attested of him, ‘You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek’>> (Hebrews 7:17).**

**<sup>4</sup> But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’**

### Matthew 9:4

Perceiving their thoughts is an insight into the kind of powers that Jesus possessed even in his human nature. That a person’s thoughts are known to God should be a concern to all believers and become part of the motivation to get their hearts right with God: <<*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away*>> (Psalm 139:2), <<*Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts, or curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter*>> (Ecclesiastes 10:20), <<*For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory*>> (Isaiah 66:18), and: <<*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account*>> (Hebrews 4:12-13). Ultimately, everyone will face judgement for their deeds, their lifestyle choices and their personal thoughts: <<*They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all*>> (Romans 2:15-16).

Why do you think evil in your hearts? The Jewish religious leaders taught on ritual purification but Jesus will show it is the state of the heart that determines whether a person is clean or not: <<*Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander*>> (Matthew 15:17-19).

**<sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and walk”?**

## Matthew 9:5

Which is easier. The implied answer is that it is easier to say Your sins are forgiven, for there is no way to verify whether or not this has happened. However, to say stand up and walk will lead to proof of the statement one way or the other.

The reasoning runs something like a traditional Jewish *qal wahomer* or ‘how much more’ argument: if God would authorise Jesus to visibly heal the effects of humanity’s fallenness, would he not also send him to combat that fallenness itself? The rationale for Jesus’ claim is quite explicit and verifiable.

<sup>6</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he then said to the paralytic – ‘Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.’ <sup>7</sup> And he stood up and went to his home.

## Matthew 9:6-7

So that you may know. Jesus did not just want these people to blindly accept what he was saying; he would go on to give irrefutable proof. Now that proof has been provided in the Gospel account, he calls all people everywhere to accept his call by faith rather than waiting to be shown the miracle time after time.

The Son of Man is Jesus favourite self designation and is frequently used in Scripture. Refer to comments made on Matthew 8:20.

Jesus’ authority on earth to forgive sins is an explicit piece of evidential proof of his divinity, since only God has that prerogative. This is clearly demonstrated in John’s Gospel and links to the claims being made here: <<***For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man***>> (John 5:26-27). The miracles provide proof of this authority and are manifest only through that same authority.

That the man stood up and went to his home is visible and irrefutable evidence of Jesus’ claim to that authority. That it was demonstrated so publically gives additional weight to the argument for these were not unsubstantiated claims made by a third party, and therefore Jesus’ words were just as verifiable as his actions: <<***Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret’***>> (John 18:20). The miracles that Jesus performed were always testimony to his power and compassion, but ultimately are a method of pointing toward the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven. God allowed the apostles and disciples of the early church to use miracles also as a testimony to the Gospel, but it was always the message that was paramount: <<***So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through them***>> (Acts 14:3). Since there is so much evidential testimony to the truth and reality of the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the need for signs and wonders has decreased but they are still very much in evidence, especially with regard to physical healing.

<sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

### Matthew 9:8

That the crowds glorified God indicates their awareness that this healing was miraculous; not the product of a sorcerer's trick but the work of God: <<*Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel*>> (Matthew 15:31), and: <<*When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law*>> (Acts 21:20).

Who had given such authority to human beings. They could see from Jesus' appearance that he was fully human and were filled with awe of the power that had been devolved to him. Only later would it become known that he was truly God come to his people as a man.

### V.b Matthew 9:9-38 - Unexpected discipleship, miracles, and workers

Jesus reveals his unexpected definition of discipleship (vv.9-17), and demonstrates extraordinary compassion through his unexpected miracles (vv.18-34). The socially underappreciated are called to follow him, while the religious leaders continue to resist him, thereby resisting the very God they professed to represent.

#### V.b.i Matthew 9:9-13 - The Calling of Matthew

Although Jesus had a number of disciples by this time, he would now call one who would become a member of his core apostolic group. Having so far called fishermen to service, he now called a tax collector, someone who would be despised by other Jews for his choice of profession.

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

### Matthew 9:9

As Jesus was walking along. This may be chronologically out of sequence for the healing of the paralytic happened in Peter's home. Other accounts seem to indicate this occurred shortly after he had called the four fishermen from the lake. As with many of the events recorded here, the timing and sequence play little part in the account, only the outcomes and what it demonstrates are of significance.

Matthew is widely accepted as the author of this, the first Gospel in the NT canon. For further information refer to the Author and Title section of the Introduction to this Gospel on the website. In the other synoptic Gospels he is referred to by what was probably his pre-Christian name: <<*As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him*>> (Mark 2:14), and: <<*After this he went out and*

*saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me'>>* (Luke 5:27). Some commentators believe that, like many men, [Matthew](#) was known by two names, where others believe that he may have received a new name in the way that Simon Peter did: *<<He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)>>* (John 1:42), for [Matthew](#) means 'the gift of God', befitting his newly given salvation and the complete personal transformation it represents.

Sitting at the tax booth. Such structures were common place along major trading routes or by the lake where fishermen would land their catches, so that the tax collectors could assess a person's goods and tax them accordingly.

The Jews probably considered [Matthew](#) a traitor, since collecting taxes entailed cooperation with the Roman occupiers of Palestine, even though he was probably employed directly by the government of Herod Antipas. As with Peter, Andrew, James and John, Matthew was engaged in his business when he was called, even if his business may not have been the honest endeavour of the first four. However, all five would have been in a similar spiritual position before their calling, as was Paul before his, something he freely admitted to: *<<I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief>>* (1 Timothy 1:12-13). The words of Jesus are true with regard to all of these men and to all disciples throughout the church age: *<<You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name>>* (John 15:16). Something all disciples should be eternally thankful for.

Referring to this issue, Matthew Henry wrote: 'None can justify themselves in their unbelief, by their calling in the world; for there is no sinful calling, but some have been saved out of it, and no lawful calling, but some have been saved in it'.

He got up and followed him. Matthew may have witnessed Jesus' public teaching and healings, realising it was now time to join him. Others responded to Jesus' call in a like fashion, such as Peter and Andrew: *<<And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him>>* (Mark 1:17-18), with a similar response from James and John at the same time. Likewise, he called Philip: *<<The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me'>>* (John 1:43).

<sup>10</sup> And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples.

### Matthew 9:10

As he sat at dinner in the house almost certainly refers to the home of Matthew who was clearly so overwhelmed at being called to serve that he wanted to celebrate the event by inviting all his friends to share a meal with him before he left everything to follow Jesus, as had the first four disciples recorded in the

synoptic Gospels: <<*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him*>> (Luke 5:11). This can also be viewed as his first act of evangelism for he brought these other men into the presence of his Lord.

In Palestine, tax-collectors were reputed to have a tendency to resort to extortion, even to the point of physical assault (Philo, The Special Laws), which made them despised and hated by their own people: <<*The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector"*>> (Luke 18:11).

The Pharisees would have regarded as sinners anyone who failed to keep God's law as they interpreted it, and the term here seems to reflect a commonly understood meaning by which it included both people guilty of publicly known sin and others who did not keep the strict purity requirements of the Pharisees.

Jesus, of course, would have known the hearts of the people he chose here to dine with but his disciples would not have known. Therefore, Jesus demonstrates it is not for a disciple to determine who should and should not hear the Gospel but be prepared to share it with everyone they have the opportunity to be with.

Sitting with him and his disciples. Those who welcome Jesus into their company should be prepared to welcome all who genuinely follow him as well, for all are one body: <<*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another*>> (Romans 12:4-5).

<sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?'

#### Matthew 9:11

When the Pharisees saw this. These religious leaders would have viewed sharing a meal with such men of ill repute as a demonstration of approving of their status and actions, thus placing Jesus firmly on the side of the people they despised, making him an opponent in their own eyes. Jesus only ever spoke the truth yet men like these seemed to find fault with everything he did and argued with him about it. One thing that believers can learn, and thereby not become like these Pharisees, is to ensure they try to avoid sin as much as they try to avoid sinners.

The Pharisees were a laymen's fellowship, popular with the common people and connected to local synagogues, chiefly characterised by their adherence to extensive extra-biblical traditions, which they rigorously obeyed as a means of applying the law to daily life. They wielded significant power and influence in the lives of ordinary Jews. Many were zealous and pious, but there were others that had a reputation of being self-seeking and domineering.

That the Pharisees should choose to speak with his disciples rather than directly with Jesus would indicate they were trying to undermine his disciples support for him from the outset by claiming he was himself a sinner and therefore, if the disciples were to be law-abiding Jews, they should disassociate themselves from him.

Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners? The Jewish Scriptures clearly stated that one should not fellowship with sinners: <<**Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers**>> (Psalm 1:1), but should seek to be with those who are righteous: <<**I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts**>> (Psalm 119:63). However, these references warn against being influenced by sinners, whereas Jesus is the one doing the influencing even if his ministry may appear flawed to those on the outside. Early Jewish literature indicates that, for all Judaism's emphasis on mercy and repentance, Jesus' act of actively pursuing sinners was virtually unheard of; therefore, it is thus not surprising that it appeared scandalous.

<sup>12</sup> **But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'**

### Matthew 9:12

When he heard this. Culturally, such a complaint as the one made here would have represented a challenge, which Jesus met full on by quoting from Scripture and by telling them to: <<**go and learn what this means**>> (v.13). Jesus was always prepared to defend God's position, something all disciples should be just as ready to do in all situations: <<**but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you**>> (1 Peter 3:15).

Those who are well, those who are sick. The Pharisees considered themselves right before God because of their observance of the law, and thus they were blind to their spiritual and moral sickness. Jesus' point is that only those who realise their need will come to him to receive his help and guidance over their lives. The Pharisees showed that they did not have the grace of God in their hearts otherwise they would not have so readily criticised seeing that same grace being shown to these tax collectors and sinners, or to anyone else for that matter. A believer should always rejoice at seeing the impact of grace on someone else.

<sup>13</sup> **Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'**

### Matthew 9:13

Go and learn what this means. Jesus is alluding to the fact that his interlocutors, who would clearly have known the writings of Hosea, have failed to understand this key point of Scripture, even though they profess to be experts in the law. Jesus had picked up on Nicodemus' lack of understanding on a much less serious point: <<**Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?'**>> (John 3:10).

I desire mercy, not sacrifice is a quotation from Hosea 6:6. Sacrifice summarised observance of religious rituals, but more important to God was mercy, which is the Septuagint rendering of Hebrew *hesed*, meaning steadfast love, and would have led the Pharisees to care for these sinners in the way Jesus did. Jesus would challenge them on a number of occasions over their lack of compassion for their

own people: <<*But if you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”, you would not have condemned the guiltless*>> (Matthew 12:7), and: <<*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others*>> (Matthew 23:23). Jesus was showing mercy by forgiving the sins of those who would accept him as the Christ of God.

Through Hosea, God was calling the Northern tribes of Israel back into a proper covenant relationship with him rather than performing purely ritualistic sacrifices that were little more than lip service by many of them. Jesus is calling all people everywhere back to God but with a new covenant through his blood: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah*>> (Jeremiah 31:31), <<*And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’*>> (Luke 22:20), <<*For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant*>> (Hebrews 9:15).

For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners. Jesus’ offer of salvation to sinners threatens the Pharisees’ authority and even their way of life, for it is at the heart of the Gospel he came announcing. Yet they, like all people, should recognise their own shortcomings and come before God in all humility: <<*The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost*>> (1 Timothy 1:15), asking for his forgiveness of them, rather than living as if they were innocent, a stance taken by too many modern day believers as well: <<*you say, ‘I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.’ Now I am bringing you to judgement for saying, ‘I have not sinned’*>> (Jeremiah 2:35), and: <<*If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*>> (1 John 1:10).

#### V.b.ii Matthew 9:14-17 - The Question about Fasting

Although fasting was a common discipline for the pious Jews, the Pharisees would often practice it purely to gain recognition from others for doing so. However, when it was noted that Jesus’ disciples did not fast at all, their own piety was challenged. Jesus would meet the challenge by showing there is no need to fast when he is present. It is only when a disciple is distant from him in their relationship that they will need to fast as part of the process of reconciliation.

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’

#### Matthew 9:14

The disciples of John came to him. John the Baptist had freely proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah and had already allowed Andrew and John to leave their discipleship duties to him in order to follow the Christ: <<*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk*

*by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus>> (John 1:35-37).*

Some commentators have said that John's disciples were trying to disrupt the work of Jesus by complaining to him about his own disciples in the same way the Pharisees had tried to dissuade Jesus' disciples by complaining about Jesus to them in v.11. However, this seems unlikely as John was the herald for Jesus and would no doubt have fully briefed all his disciples as to who he actually was. Therefore, this is more likely a general enquiry on their part to clarify a point of procedure in their own faith. What should also be noted however is that in Mark 2:18 and Luke 5:33 the disciples of the Pharisees were also involved in this conversation and their motives may have been far more sinister than those of John's disciples. What better way to disrupt the work of Jesus than setting his and John's disciples against each other.

Your disciples do not fast. Fasting for a Jew was a legal requirement only once a year on the Day of Atonement, although many chose to fast more frequently, up to twice a week for one Pharisee at least. John's disciples would have fasted frequently to copy what their teacher did: <<*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon">> (Matthew 11:18). Jesus had instructed his disciples to fast in secret so neither John's nor the Pharisee's disciples would have known whether his people were fasting or not: <<*But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you>> (Matthew 6:17-18). For further comments on Jesus' requirements for fasting refer to comments made on Matthew 6:16-18.**

<sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

### Matthew 9:15

And Jesus said to them. Jesus did not rebuke the disciples of John for their fasting, as they did so for a reason known to them and taught to them by John. What Jesus would show though is that there is a higher level than the teaching of John and certainly that of men like the Pharisees. It is to God that each man should look for his motivation and act accordingly, whether by fasting and praying, praising and celebrating. Both have their appropriate time and place. What is important is that it should bring honour and glory to God, for he alone is sovereign.

By ignoring the presence of the Pharisees, Matthew shows another valuable lesson from this encounter. Since Jesus neither rebuked John's disciples for their fasting nor his own for their lack of fasting, he shows there should be unity between these two different groups, for ultimately the two were part of the one true church of God. That he didn't criticise the Pharisees' disciples either, who were outside of the church at that time, does not alienate them but provides the opportunity for them to choose to join it at any time simply by accepting and confessing Jesus as their Lord.

The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them. Jesus did not retort with reference to his own 40 day period of fasting but acknowledged that those who remain in his presence do not need to fast. Instead, they are to follow his example of enjoying what God gives while sharing the Gospel with others. Jesus did not want his disciples to be like the bride of Samson who did not participate even in the traditional festivities of her own wedding celebrations: <<*She wept before him for the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people*>> (Judges 14:17).

The bridegroom in the OT was *Yahweh*: <<*For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you*>> (Isaiah 62:5), <<*And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord*>> (Hosea 2:19-20). The arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven is cause for a time of rejoicing, similar to what is experienced during marriage ceremonies: <<*And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut*>> (Matthew 25:10).

When the bridegroom is taken away refers to Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, a time when the disciples of that generation would no longer have the security and comfort of his physical presence: <<*But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts*>> (John 16:6). However, they and all believers since have the privilege of having the personal and eternal presence of his Holy Spirit, who teaches, comforts and guides them in all circumstances. Disciples would do well to abide by the wisdom of Solomon's teaching: <<*On the day of prosperity be joyful, and on the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:14), updated in a prayer of faith: <<*Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise*>> (James 5:13).

Then they will fast. Fasting is a matter of personal choice and its timing is down to the individual in response to God's individual call on their life. Corporate fasting is also a common practice in some church groups when they wish to show solidarity over an issue they are praying for as a body.

For many of Jesus' opponents, his lifestyle appeared to be self-indulgent. However, what Jesus is demonstrating here is that when sinners repent and come into his presence by accepting the Gospel, there is reason for celebrating by sharing a meal together rather than fasting, something that is the right thing to do at more appropriate times.

<sup>16</sup> No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made.

<sup>17</sup> Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, 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.'

## Matthew 9:16-17

Thus Jesus concludes his response to the question about fasting with a parable consisting of two main metaphors:

1. A new patch cannot be put on an old garment, for upon washing, it will shrink and, pulling on the already shrunken old garment, it will tear it.
2. One does not put new wine into old wineskins. New fermenting wine would stretch the old, inelastic wineskins and cause them to burst. New wine needs newer, more elastic wine skins.

These metaphors can be applied to the attitude of those who accept the ideas of the Gospel and the New Covenant with Jesus, and those who resolutely hold to OT ideas and, in particular, their traditions.

Unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. Rather than patching up the traditional practices of righteousness within religious Judaism, Jesus has come to offer real growth in Kingdom righteousness, which is like when new wine is put into fresh wineskins.

New wine put into old wineskins refers to trying to force the Gospel onto those whose hearts are set on the old ways and are not willing to change in order to receive the good news of the Kingdom. The result is the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed meaning that the Gospel falls on deaf ears and the individuals are subsequently lost for all eternity.

So both are preserved. The key objective is to maintain the purity of the Gospel message, the new wine, while at the same time winning converts to Christ, the fresh wineskins, through faithful representation of the full Gospel and not a watered down version to meet the cultural needs of a given age or society, as some have a tendency to do. It is the full Gospel that is to be preached with both its promises and persecutions, the reality of heaven and the reality of hell, the eternal future for both the tares and the wheat. It was at the heart of Paul's ministry: *<<If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!>>* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

What God does with new disciples, the unshrunk cloth and the fresh wineskins is not to feed them on solid food to start with: *<<I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready>>* (1 Corinthians 3:2), for Jesus did not tell them everything at once: *<<I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now>>* (John 16:12). As with Jacob's care of his children and cattle, not to overdrive them: *<<But Jacob said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die'>>* (Genesis 33:13), and God's care not to provide too tough a challenge for his people when they first left Egypt: *<<When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, 'If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle>>* (Exodus

13:17-18), so too is Christ's care of the little ones of his family, and the lambs of his flock; thus he gently leads them: <<*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake*>> (Psalm 23:1-3 ESV).

#### V.b.iii Matthew 9:18-26 - A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

Jesus raises the synagogue leader Jairus' daughter back to life, although his mission to do so was interrupted by a woman who was also in desperate need of his healing touch, both physically and spiritually. The first miracle forms a parenthesis around the second, yet neither acted as a distraction to Jesus for the work to which he was called to do in his Father's name.

<sup>18</sup> While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.'

<sup>19</sup> And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples.

#### Matthew 9:18-19

While he was saying these things links the subsequent events with what has just transpired, while suddenly alerts the reader to the dramatic change in focus of the events that are about to unfold.

A leader of the synagogue was named Jairus: <<*Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet*>> (Mark 5:22), and: <<*Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house*>> (Luke 8:41). Despite being a ruler and a man of considerable influence, he knelt before Jesus, the appropriate position to take before God but an unusual public display of humility for a man of his social standing.

That he was a synagogue leader is only implied in Matthew for the actual statement of the synagogue is missing in Greek manuscripts, although it is included in Mark and Luke as recently noted. The question was asked: <<*Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?*>> (John 7:48), yet what this account also reveals is an affirmative to that question showing that not all the religious leaders rejected Jesus and many would come to believe in him, although not all would accept him so openly as Jairus did here: <<*Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue*>> (John 12:42).

My daughter has just died. Others had asked Jesus to intervene for the seriously ill and dying, but here a man had the faith to go beyond that. His daughter was already dead and yet he still believed in the power of God through Christ to raise the dead.

**This should not give rise to hope that people can call lost loved ones back from the dead in the present day, except at the point of their apparent death. These**

were special circumstances during Christ physical presence on earth. Today, those who have left us are now beyond recall and should simply be left in the care of God's grace and mercy without further call on his intervention for them or their return to us.

She will live is an indication of Jairus' deep faith in Jesus, even in the face of the recent death of his beloved daughter.

Jesus got up and followed him. When it was the centurion's servant, Jesus simply spoke and the man was healed: <<*And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.'* And the servant was healed in that hour>> (Matthew 8:13), but here Jesus decided to go personally to restore the child to life.

<sup>20</sup> Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hæmorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, <sup>21</sup> for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.'

#### Matthew 9:20-21

Then suddenly again alerts the reader to the drama that was unfolding around Jesus. He had urgent work to attend to save a child, yet had the compassion to face this additional need for a desperate woman.

Suffering from hæmorrhages. Her plight was heightened by its duration, i.e. twelve years, leaving her hopeless and in an anæmic, weakened condition. Moreover, her hæmorrhaging would have made her ceremonially unclean: <<*If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, for all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean*>> (Leviticus 15:25), which would have excluded her from normal social and religious relations. In addition, her condition is desperate both for medical reasons and because of its social consequences; her ostracism would extend even to her private life. If it had started at puberty, her ailment probably had kept her from marriage, and almost surely would have led to divorce if it began after she was married, which would have been within a few years following puberty, since intercourse was prohibited under such circumstances: <<*You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness*>> (Leviticus 18:19), and childlessness normally led to divorce. If this were not bad enough she had also spent what little money she had on doctor's fees: <<*Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hæmorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her*>> (Luke 8:43). This was a poor woman in all possible aspects of her life except that of her faith in Jesus. Therefore, she was indeed rich and well rewarded: <<*I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich*>> (Revelation 2:9a).

If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well. Despite the severity and social stigma of her plight, the woman's faith and trust in Jesus was strong. More importantly, she had the courage of her convictions and she touched the fringe of

his cloak. In normal circumstances, and given her uncleanness, such an act would normally have been considered outrageous and unthinkable, but a mixture of faith and desperation had brought her to this point.

Once again, Matthew chooses to write an abbreviated account, omitting details of the crowd: <<*She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak*>> (Mark 5:27), that would also have become unclean through contact with the woman. Instead, Matthew focuses on the key issue of Jesus' power to forgive and to heal.

In the other synoptic Gospels Jesus seems to show excitement at the power that went out from him at her touch. Jewish rabbis like Jesus would always wear a *tallit* or prayer shawl. As they walked along, the *tallit* would billow out like a bird's wings. Perhaps Jesus was excited that someone actually had the faith to believe in the Scripture about him that says: <<*But for you who reverence my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall*>> (Malachi 4:2).

<sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well.

#### Matthew 9:22

Jesus turned, take heart, daughter. By failing to offer a rebuke, Jesus demonstrated both that the healing came by God's power and not automatic magic, and that he was unashamed to be identified with her uncleanness, being full of compassion instead, acknowledging her as his daughter, an acceptance into his heavenly family, the bride of Christ.

Your faith has made you well. It is the intended role and duty of all mankind to honour Jesus as Lord, yet here he shows honour to the faith of one who would acknowledge him, even if she did so clandestinely. Faith itself does not do the healing; God does. But the woman's faith was the divinely appointed means for her bodily healing, as well as for her spiritual salvation. The physical healing was the fruit of her faith but her spiritual healing is an eternal reward for that same faith, being of far greater value than the fruit.

Once again the immediacy of the healing should be noted, confirming this was no coincidence, for instantly the woman was made well. This was no isolated incident as Jesus would confirm when the blind man received his sight: <<*Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.'* Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way>> (Mark 10:52).

<sup>23</sup> When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion,

#### Matthew 9:23

Flute-players and the crowd. Professional mourners were customarily hired to assist at funerals, usually including flautists and wailing women, to make the traditional commotion, indicating great grief. This had long been a tradition in Israel: <<*Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing-men*>>

*and singing-women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in the Laments>>* (2 Chronicles 35:25). Since bodies decomposed quickly in Palestine, mourners had to assemble fairly soon after a death, and burial usually occurred on the same day as the death.

<sup>24</sup> he said, 'Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup> And the report of this spread throughout that district.

### Matthew 9:24-26

**Not dead but sleeping.** To fall asleep was a common euphemism for dying, similar to the notion of passing away. Ultimately, in Kingdom terms, there is little difference other than where and to what one shall awaken: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2). Jesus could intend this saying either to mean that for him she was not dead but simply parted from her spirit that he would shortly restore to her, or less likely that he pretended she was not dead for he wanted the subsequent restoration to life to go unnoticed in order that there would be little talk of it afterwards.

However, the crowd, which he dismissed by saying **go away**, would have been experienced in recognising death. They must have believed that Jesus was unprepared to accept the reality of the death of this young child so **they laughed at him** because of that.

The soul does not sleep but continues to be active in a different realm from when it indwelt its human body. Just as natural sleep is like a short death, death is but a long sleep. The death of the righteous is in a special manner to be looked upon as being asleep: <<*The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised*>> (Matthew 27:52), <<*After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him'*>> (John 11:11), and: <<*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

**When the crowd had been put outside.** Those who scoff at the words of Jesus are not to be considered credible witnesses. It also seems that Jesus wanted as few witnesses to the actual healing as possible, taking with him just the parents and three of his closest disciples: <<*He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James*>> (Mark 5:37), <<*And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was*>> (Mark 5:40); yet in nearby Nain Jesus raised the widow's son in full view of the mourners, all his disciples and the crowd that was following him: <<*Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and*>>

said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us!' and 'God has looked favourably on his people!' This word about him spread throughout Judæa and all the surrounding country>> (Luke 7:11-17).

Took her by the hand. Touching a corpse rendered a person unclean and was the most serious uncleanness anyone could contract: <<Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean for seven days>> (Numbers 19:11), but Jesus brought the girl to life, transforming uncleanness into purity, by showing his exceptional kindness and willingness to get involved by taking the girl's hand when he raised her up. Jesus did not pray as did Elijah: <<Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again'>> (1 Kings 17:21), Elisha: <<So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord>> (2 Kings 4:33), and Peter: <<Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up>> (Acts 9:40). These men acted as faithful servants, whereas Jesus chose to physically intervene, with his own authority as God incarnate. Jesus' power over death anticipates his later raising of Lazarus: <<When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go'>> (John 11:43-44), his own resurrection: <<For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father'>> (John 10:17-18), and subsequently all who come to believe in him: <<Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'>> (John 11:25-26).

The report of this spread throughout that district. Despite Jesus' call for secrecy there was nothing it seems that could stop the spread of the news about the works he did and the message he proclaimed.

#### V.b.iv Matthew 9:27-31 - Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

Here, Matthew records the miracle of restoring sight to the blind, part of the calling for the long prophesied Messiah. This is one of several occasions that Jesus demonstrated his ability to heal this particular physical affliction.

<sup>27</sup> As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'

#### Matthew 9:27

This account of the healing of two blind men has significant differences from the healing of Bartimæus: <<As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they

heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!' Jesus stood still and called them, saying, 'What do you want me to do for you?' They said to him, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened.' Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him>> (Matthew 20:29-34), that occurred towards the end of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and is also related in Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43. It should not be thought of as that same event or indeed the one recorded in John 9:1-12, for Jesus no doubt healed many blind people over the course of his ministry. The messianic age was to bring healing to the blind: <<On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see>> (Isaiah 29:18), and: <<Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped>> (Isaiah 35:5).

Two blind men followed him. These men clearly had faith that Jesus was their only source of hope for healing and salvation, but acknowledging they had no right of their own to assume he would help them, thereby crying out have mercy on us.

Have mercy on us, Son of David! With this statement, these two blind men acknowledge the presence of their long awaited Messiah and did so before Peter announced it: <<Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'>> (Matthew 16:16), although Jesus had also stated who he was to the Samaritan woman in Sychar: <<The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you'>> (John 4:25-26). Whether spoken in prayer by a dying David for his son, or written by Solomon from his own heart, Psalm 72 is clearly prophetic of the Messiah to come: <<For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy>> (Psalm 72:12-13), indicating that: <<By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us>> (Luke 1:78).

Son of David is a reference to the promised messianic deliverer from the line of King David, whose kingdom will continue forever according to the promises of God: <<When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever>> (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Son of David. This is the first of several references recorded in Matthew that people make to Jesus by this title: <<All the crowds were amazed and said, 'Can this be the Son of David?'>> (Matthew 12:23), <<Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon'>> (Matthew 15:22), <<There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was

*passing by, they shouted, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!'*>> (Matthew 20:30-31), <<*The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*>> (Matthew 21:9), <<*But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry*>> (Matthew 21:15), and: <<*'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David'*>> (Matthew 22:42). He was listed as such in his genealogy record: <<*An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*>> (Matthew 1:1).

<sup>28</sup> 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.'<sup>29</sup> Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you.'<sup>30</sup> And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, 'See that no one knows of this.'<sup>31</sup> But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district.

#### Matthew 9:28-31

When he entered the house probably refers to the Capernaum home of Peter and Andrew. It appears that Jesus either sought privacy again for the healing or for the benefit of the men so that the crowds would give them some time to come to terms with their healing.

'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord'. Jesus did not want to perform the healing without the men admitting they had the faith to be healed, for God heals those with faith or in answer to prayer made in faith by others on the sick or disabled person's behalf. Although it is not faith that heals, it is usually in evidence before healing occurs, and was not just a feature of Jesus' ministry: <<*He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And the man sprang up and began to walk*>> (Acts 14:9-10).

He touched their eyes. This is another occasion when Jesus chose to use physical intervention to enable the healing. He used a variation of this in Bethsaida: <<*He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?'*>> (Mark 8:23), and again with a slight difference to the man born blind: <<*When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see*>> (John 9:6-7). The result was the same in each case - the restoration of sight for the blind.

According to your faith let it be done to you. Once again, it is God that heals and not faith, yet faith has to be present in order for healing to occur and faith can only exist where there is grace and mercy: <<*O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you, and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone!*>> (Psalm 31:19).

Their eyes were opened. Their physical sight was restored: <<*The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind*>> (Psalm 146:7b-8a), and probably their spiritual sight as well, as it appeared to be for the disciples who had walked with Jesus on the Emmaus Road: <<*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight*>> (Luke 24:30-31).

See that no one knows of this. Jesus did not want to publicise his ministry in this way as it could cause adverse political problems with the Romans ahead of the right time and also draw people to him for the wrong reasons. The Jews expected that the Messiah would set up a temporal kingdom to oppose the Romans and restore Israel to the status it had under David and Solomon, a misunderstanding Jesus sought to avoid: <<*When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself*>> (John 6:15). His Kingdom was always intended to be spiritual and set in another realm: <<*Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'* Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice'>> (John 18:36-37), although elements of it can be manifested in the present world and within believers themselves.

Despite undertaking the healings in the privacy of the house, they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district. See comments made on Matthew 8:4.

#### V.b.v Matthew 9:32-34 - Jesus Heals One Who Was Mute

Having just restored the sight to the blind, Jesus now restores a man's speech. However, on this occasion, the impairment was due to demonic possession rather than a physical disability.

<sup>32</sup> After they had gone away, a demoniac who was mute was brought to him. <sup>33</sup> And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, 'Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.'

#### Matthew 9:32-33

A demoniac who was mute. Demonic influence manifests itself in a variety of forms; here it prevented the man from speaking. Matthew records a very similar incident later on: <<*Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and*

*mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see*>> (Matthew 12:22). Here too the man's cleansing was immediate and complete, demonstrated when the one who had been mute spoke, and confirming that the demon had been cast out.

The crowds were amazed but not sufficiently so to turn to Christ and accept him as their personal Lord and Saviour, thus dismissing the power of his Kingdom from within their own lives.

Never has anything like this been seen in Israel. Throughout biblical history Israel had been the recipient of so many miracles and such an abundance of God's grace, and yet the works of Jesus surpassed them all.

<sup>34</sup> **But the Pharisees said, 'By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.'**

#### Matthew 9:34

*This verse is very similar to: <<But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons'>> (Matthew 12:24), and is indeed missing from many ancient manuscripts in this chapter, so it is possible that a scribe has inserted it here perhaps erroneously believing Matthew was relating the same incident rather than it indicating the same thing happened twice in exactly the same way.*

By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons. The Pharisees were unable to recognise that God was doing something unique in the teaching and works of Jesus, so they attributed his powers to the only other existing credible source, his adversary the devil. They did so since they could not deny the reality of the miraculous works that Jesus had done. However, the truthfulness of Jesus' teachings, the moral excellence of his character, and his ministry of doing such good works should have convinced them otherwise: <<*You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?*>> (Matthew 7:16), <<*He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'*>> (John 3:2), and: <<*We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing*>> (John 9:31-33). Here, these men could not comprehend, so instead they did what they accused Jesus of doing - they blasphemed. Perhaps Paul had such deeds in mind when he wrote: <<*But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived*>> (2 Timothy 3:13), or perhaps this was just another sign of their ignorance and closed minds to the Scriptures they professed to know and follow.

*It is easy to understand the reasoning of the Pharisees and other religious leaders, particularly the priests for, from their perspective, if God were working miracles similar to those he did through Elijah and Elisha, then surely he would use men like them and not this man Jesus!*

When the academy became largely anti-Christian, some Christians argued with the academics, although today many people only get to hear of Jesus from a secular perspective. Therefore, it is important for disciples to enter the debate and offer reasoned argument to oppose the type of assertions that the Pharisees made here. Although reasoned argument may not win converts, it will at least plant seeds and then, if those same disciples are themselves leading the godly life according to the Gospel they have been proclaiming, those seeds may get watered as well. At times, reasoned debate worked for Paul: *<<When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' At that point Paul left them. But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them>> (Acts 17:32-34), while at other times it was through their ministry: <<I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth>> (1 Corinthians 3:6).*

#### V.b.vi Matthew 9:35-38 - The Harvest Is Great, the Labourers Few

The chapter concludes with this summary statement by Matthew, providing Jesus' Kingdom proclamation that calls on disciples everywhere to share the Gospel with all who will listen to them. Jesus is clearly stating that his mission is ultimately the church's mission.

**<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.**

#### Matthew 9:35

Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Jesus set the standard for all disciples on the need for local evangelisation. He focused his early teaching and healing ministry in all the cities and villages of Galilee, although it demonstrated the need for personal mobility and not just waiting for the people to come to him, even though many did just that.

Not only did Jesus go to every place, he was curing every disease and every sickness, showing that his message is universal and all embracing, while his power is beyond human comparison.

Jesus' motivation was to take the message of the Kingdom to the people and to heal them both physically and spiritually. He did so out of compassion but also from the knowledge that the people needed it, for they had turned away from God, hurting mainly themselves by doing so: *<<for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water>> (Jeremiah 2:13), and: <<Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me>> (Hosea 7:13).*

When lacking God-appointed leaders, God's people in the Hebrew Bible often appear as sheep without a shepherd: *<<Then Micaiah said, 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord*

said, "These have no master; let each one go home in peace">> (1 Kings 22:17 and 2 Chronicles 18:16), inviting the compassionate Lord to shepherd his people himself, including feeding them, healing them and bringing the lost sheep back: <<I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice>> (Ezekiel 34:15-16). This implies that the religious leaders of Israel who purported to be their shepherds had failed to obey God's commission. The disciples will carry on Jesus' mission to his sheep.

<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.  
<sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

### Matthew 9:36-38

The compassion of Jesus is a repeated theme in this Gospel: <<When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick>> (Matthew 14:14), and: <<Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way'>> (Matthew 15:32), as it was throughout both the OT: <<When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you>> (Deuteronomy 30:1-3), <<Saul said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord for showing me compassion!'>> (1 Samuel 23:21), <<As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him>> (Psalm 103:13), <<Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you>> (Isaiah 49:15), <<In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer>> (Isaiah 54:8), although during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians: <<The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people>> (Lamentations 4:10). In the NT, Christians are especially admonished to show compassion to those in need: <<As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience>> (Colossians 3:12), <<For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting>> (Hebrews 10:34), and: <<Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of

*the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful>> (James 5:11).*

Like sheep without a shepherd. Israel's leaders had failed in their responsibility, but the prophet had predicted that the Messiah would shepherd his people: <<*And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth*>> (Micah 5:4).

Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Given the helplessness and the need of the crowds, Jesus' disciples are urged to pray earnestly that the Lord would send out workers into his field, since many are ready to receive the good news of the Kingdom, i.e. the harvest is plentiful; a prayer that is as urgent today as it was when Jesus' original disciples first heard these words. In fact, in most parts of the world and in most church groups the situation remains one where the labourers are few.

For some evangelists the harvest field could be anywhere in the world: countries where 99% of the population are non-Christians or that have a closed political system, where even owning a bible is a crime, which makes spreading the Gospel extremely challenging. Yet for so many other disciples the harvest field is their own neighbourhood, their workplace or even within their own family group. They too should pray to the Lord to send them and respond to his call as did the prophet: <<*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'*>> (Isaiah 6:8).