

Matthew continues to provide his readers with evidence that Jesus is the Messiah in this passage. He gives us descriptions of healings, forgiveness of sins and how Jesus reaches out to those in need of salvation. Matthew also includes a brief personal testimony of the day when Jesus called him to be a disciple.

Verse 1: In the previous chapter Jesus had traveled to the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee where He had cast out the demons from two men into a herd of swine, after which the swine ran into the sea and were drowned. The people of the city were apparently not pleased and when they asked Jesus to leave he boarded a ship, came back across the sea and has now returned to Capernaum.

² And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

“And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed” – There were at least four illnesses that were diagnosed as “palsy” and the common symptom for all of them was partial or complete paralysis. This man was helplessly bed-ridden.

“and Jesus seeing their faith” – Luke’s description of this incident gives us a few more details. It was too crowded in the house where Jesus was to carry this man on his stretcher so they proceeded to uncover the roof above Jesus’ head and let the man down through the opening. They were determined to get their friend to Jesus because they were convinced that Jesus could heal him. Jesus recognized the faith that these men had because of the determination they had to get their friend to Him.

“said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” – Commentators suggest that the reason Jesus immediately addresses the man’s sin is because the illness may have been a consequence of the man’s sin. If so, this man must have been filled with good cheer indeed for he would have been laying there unable to move while being conscious of the reason for his illness. To hear that the sin that resulted in his paralysis was forgiven would be wonderful news.

³ And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth.

Luke includes the Pharisees in the group that were offended by what Jesus said (Luke 5:21). Forgiving sins was something that only God can do and so if Jesus were only a man, He would certainly be blaspheming God. However, Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is indeed God and Jesus will prove it to these scribes (and Pharisees) as well as us.

⁴ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? ⁵ For whether is easier, to say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*; or to say, *Arise, and walk*?

“And Jesus knowing their thoughts” – Perhaps as a man seeing the look on their faces Jesus could anticipate their reaction to what He said, or as God, He knew exactly what they were thinking. Either way, Jesus confronts the objection in their hearts even before they could express it verbally.

“said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?” – This phrase could be interpreted as “Why do you think bad of me?” Another possibility is that their thoughts came from an “evil heart of unbelief” because they did not recognize Jesus as God. **Heb. 3:12** “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*”

“For whether is easier, to say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*; or to say, *Arise, and walk*?” – Jesus asks a rhetorical question. Of the two things He could have said, which one would be easier for Him to say? Since forgiveness is invisible and intangible, He could say “Thy sins be forgiven thee” and it would be impossible to prove that the sins were not forgiven. However, if Jesus had said “Arise and walk” then the evidence of whether the man was healed would be obvious to all.

⁶ But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) *Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.* ⁷ And he arose, and departed to his house.

In order to prove that He was able to forgive sins, Jesus proceeds to heal the man and tell him to take up his bed and go home, which the man did. Since Jesus was able to do the more visible and difficult thing (the healing), it was obvious that He could also do the invisible as well (forgiving sins). Thus Jesus proved that He was not a blasphemer because He is God.

⁸ But when the multitudes saw *it*, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

It appears that the crowd that witnessed this healing only partially understood what had happened. They were amazed and recognized that the power to heal had come from God. However, even though they glorified God for the healing, they apparently considered Jesus to be a mere man - a prophet through whom God was working and had given this healing power. They seem to have failed to recognize that Jesus was the Son of God and their Messiah.

⁹ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, *Follow me.* And he arose, and followed him.

Matthew now briefly recounts how Jesus called him to be a disciple. He does not conceal the fact that he was a tax collector, who were among the most despised people in Jewish society. Not only were they despised because they collected taxes, but they collected those taxes for Rome (and thus seen as traitors to their people) and often collected more money than necessary in order to pad their own pockets. Matthew was sitting at the place where taxes were collected when Jesus came by and called him to become a disciple. Matthew stands and leaves his job and apparently all his wealth behind to follow Jesus.

¹⁰ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

“And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples” – In Luke’s account of Matthew’s calling (Luke uses Matthew’s other name, “Levi”), Matthew has a great feast in Jesus’ honor and invites his friends to come as well to meet Jesus, many of whom were also tax collectors (Luke 5:27-32). It is in this context that the Pharisees challenge Jesus’ motives.

“And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” -

Apparently the Pharisees were watching Jesus in order to find fault so they could discredit Him. When they see that Jesus is eating and socializing with “publicans” (tax collectors), they immediately challenge the disciples to explain. In their mind, Jesus could not possibly be a man of God if He socialized with such sinful people as these publicans and these other guests that were eating in the house of a publican. The question the Pharisees ask was more of an accusation than a request for information because they may have been implying that Jesus was having fellowship with others like Himself.

¹² But when Jesus heard *that*, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. ¹³ But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

“But when Jesus heard *that*” – He either overheard the Pharisees questioning His disciples or else someone came and told Him what had been said.

“he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” – Jesus reveals that His motive is not purely social but His intent is to meet a spiritual need. Therefore He did not go to those who were spiritual healthy (or believed that they were) but He has gone to those Who need Him and acknowledge their need. **Matt. 5:3** *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

“But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” – The phrase “go ye and learn what *that* meaneth” was a commonly used rebuke for those who did not know something that they should have known. Jesus says that they ought to understand the principle behind the verse He quoted (**Hosea 6:6** *“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”*), which emphasizes the priority of the law’s moral standards over its ceremonial requirements. Many people make the same mistakes today by insisting on legalistic rules when they ought to be reaching the lost with the gospel of Christ. **Mark 2:27** *“And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.”*

“for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” – His focus is on bringing sinners to repentance and so that is where He will spend His time. Those who have already repented (or believe that they need no repentance) do not need His attention. Jesus is eating with these publicans and sinners so that He may call them to repentance.

¹⁴ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? ¹⁵ And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

“Then came to him the disciples of John” – These are the disciples of John the Baptist who are still following him despite the fact that he is in prison and that he publicly recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

“saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?” - We don’t know how often the disciples of John the Baptist fasted, but it seems the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12). The fasts of the disciples of John may have been sincere, but the fasts of the Pharisees were likely done as a religious show to “prove” how spiritual and holy that they were (Matt. 6:16). The question that the disciples of John ask, likely with the Pharisees still present, may also be a veiled accusation about why the disciples of Jesus did not perform the same religious practices as they did.

“And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?” - Jesus uses the analogy of a wedding to explain why His disciples did not fast. Picturing Himself as the groom, the “groomsmen” (the disciples) have no reason to “mourn” (fast) because of their joy in the presence of the groom. There is no need to fast to grow closer to God when God is already with them.

“but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast” – The time is coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them (when Jesus goes to the cross and then ascends to the Father) and then they will want to fast in order to have fellowship with Him.

¹⁶ No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. ¹⁷ Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

Jesus uses two examples familiar to them to illustrate that you cannot force the truths of the New Covenant onto the old Mosaic religious practices. If you sew a new, unshrunk cloth patch onto a old garment, then when the patch shrinks after subsequent washings it will draw up and make the hole you were trying to patch worse. Also, you cannot put “new wine” (unfermented grape juice) in old wine skins and expect the old skins to be able to contain the juice as it ferments. As the juice ferments, the pressure inside the wineskin builds and stretches the wineskin. Placing new wine in skins that have already been stretched will result in burst skins. Instead, new wine (New Covenant) is placed in new bottles (New Covenant practices) so that neither is lost.