

March 16-20

March 16 — Reading 54 — Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26 — **Seeing Faith**

Matthew 9

¹ *And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.*

Mark 2

¹ *And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.*
² *And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.*

Luke 5

¹⁷ *On one of those days,*

as he was teaching,

Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.^[fn]

ESV Footnote

(5:17) Some manuscripts was present to heal them

Matthew 9 (cont.)

² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." ³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves,

"This man is blaspheming."

Mark 2 (cont.)

³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic

carried by four men.

⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd,

they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,

"Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,

⁷ "Why does this man speak like that?

He is blaspheming!

Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Luke 5 (cont.)

¹⁸ And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed,

and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus,

¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd,

they went up on the roof

and let him down with his bed

through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said,

"Man, your sins are forgiven you." ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying,

"Who is this who speaks blasphemies?

Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Matthew 9 (cont.)

⁴ But Jesus, knowing^[fn] their thoughts,

said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?

⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? ⁶

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—

he then said to the paralytic—

"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."

⁷ And he rose

and went home.

⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God,

who had given such authority to men.

ESV Footnote

(9:4) Some manuscripts *perceiving*

Mark 2 (cont.)

⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves,

said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—

he said to the paralytic—

¹¹ "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all,

so that they were all amazed and glorified God,

saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Luke 5 (cont.)

²² When Jesus perceived their thoughts,

he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts?

²³ Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?

²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—

he said to the man who was paralyzed—

"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home."

²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe,

saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

Comment: Four desperate, loving friends carried their pal to the roof of the house, tore open a hole big enough for a bed and lowered their friend to Jesus. All three Gospel writers record that Jesus "saw their faith." Jesus did have the ability to read the hearts of people but I think there was more to it here: He saw unusual actions that demonstrated their faith. Real faith is dynamic; it acts on what is believed. Remember that the next time you ask God to do something that concerns you! They believed that Jesus could and would heal their friend if they could put him in His presence, so they did everything within their power to let Jesus do what only divine power could accomplish.

There was another kind of "seeing faith" involved in this story. Perhaps the primary audience in that house were some of Israel's religious bigwigs—Jesus "was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law" (Luke 5:17). One lesson He brought to them was that He had the authority to forgive sins. The Pharisees were right when they asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (:21). But they did not believe that Jesus was divine because they said to themselves, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies?" (:21). They needed to be shown evidence of Jesus' claim, so He said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." (:24). The paralyzed man

was healed as proof. Did those Pharisees believe then? Perhaps some of them did but the crowd in general “*glorified God*” (Matt. 9:8). We need to look for things God is doing around us and in the lives of others. When you see it, glorify God in praise!

March 17 — Reading 55 — Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:13-14; Luke 5:27-28 — **Calling the Unlikely**

Matthew 9

⁹ *As Jesus passed on from there,*

he saw a man called Matthew

sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me."

And he rose and followed him.

Mark 2

¹³ *He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.*

¹⁴ *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me."*

And he rose and followed him.

Luke 5

²⁷ *After this he went out*

and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."

²⁸ *And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*

Comment: Here we have the calling of Matthew, recorded by Matthew, who would become one of the Twelve. He was a Jew whose apparent given name was Levi, as Mark and Luke tell us. Somehow, he picked up the name Matthew, which seems to be his choice since that is the name he used in his Gospel. Luke called him a “*tax collector*,” which the KJV translates with the Latin word “*publican*,” meaning a “tax farmer.” He appears to have been a customs officer at the port of Capernaum. As we will see in our next reading, tax collectors were hated by the Jews. They not only cooperated with the Roman oppressors but they also were corrupt, extorting extra money for themselves from their own people. If Jesus had a recruiting officer, Matthew would never have been considered for such a position, but Jesus called him. Isn’t that just like grace?! We don’t deserve being chosen by Jesus any more than Levi did. We had our own baggage. After Jesus called this dishonest traitor, he left everything (Luke 5:28) and followed Him. Jesus called us, also sinners, and we have chosen to follow Him. Unlikely choice—undeserved sinners—marvelous grace.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

... Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!

... Grace, grace, God’s grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.
— Julia H. Johnston (1911)

Matthew 9

¹⁰ *And as Jesus^[fn] reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.*

¹¹ *And when the Pharisees saw this,*

they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² *But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

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

ESV Footnote
(9:10) Greek *he*

Mark 2

¹⁵ *And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.*

¹⁶ *And the scribes of^[fn] the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat^[fn] with tax collectors and sinners?"*

¹⁷ *And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

ESV Footnotes
(2:16) Some manuscripts *and*
(2:16) Some manuscripts add *and drink*

Luke 5

²⁹ *And Levi made him a great feast in his house,*

and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

³⁰ *And the Pharisees and their scribes*

grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ *And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

³² *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

Comment: According to the Pharisees, Jesus was wrong in attending the feast that Matthew had prepared. They recognized that these tax collectors and sinners were sinful people and they wanted to know why Jesus would associate with them and make Himself unclean by His contact with them. They seemed cowardly by asking their question to the disciples instead of to Jesus but He answered them directly. Jesus was an evangelist, seeking the salvation of others. Luke tells us about Jesus' purpose for attending that feast: "*I have ... come ... to call ... sinners to repentance*" (5:32). He was there for *His* purposes, not Matthew's. We should have the same evangelistic purpose in our association with unbelievers, too, not mingling with them for their *party* purposes but for our *evangelism* purposes.

Jesus, however, was not only an evangelist to the Matthew-type sinners but also to His Pharisee accusers. Matthew shows us Jesus' concern for those men who considered themselves righteous through being diligent by meticulously keeping God's Law. But they had missed something important in the Scripture they were so careful to obey; that was mercy. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 to show that God's requirement for them was to show mercy to people like the tax collectors. So, Jesus said, "*Go and learn what this means...*" (Matt. 9:13). That was evangelism. They thought they were righteous

but they were not. They knew the *words* of God but were ignorant about the *heart* of God. They needed repentance, too. Sometimes we Christians fall into the same trap, focusing on the *legalities* of God's Word but missing the *spirit* of it.

Meditation: I would like for you to think about a comment that stuck out to me today. Speaking about the tax collectors and sinners, Mark said that "*there were many who followed him*" (2:15). Why? Do many sinners follow Christians around today or is it more that they avoid them? Earlier, Jesus said that "*people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil*" and that one avoids the light "*lest his works should be exposed*" (John 3:19-20). Why did these sinners not run from the light of Jesus? The people eating with Jesus were outcasts from Jewish society because of their lifestyle. What did they see in Jesus that made them want to be with Him? How was His reaction to them different than that of the Pharisees? How can you change the way you think about and act toward unbelievers to allow the light in you to be attractive rather than threatening? Can you do it without compromise?

Matthew 9

¹⁴ *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we*

and the Pharisees fast,^[fn]

but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁵ *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?*

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

¹⁶ *No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.*

¹⁷ *Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."*

ESV Footnote

(9:14) Some manuscripts add *much, or often*

Mark 2

¹⁸ *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.*

And people came and said to him,

"Why do John's disciples and

the disciples of the Pharisees fast,

but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁹ *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.*

²⁰ *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.*

²¹ *No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.*

²² *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."*^[fn]

ESV Footnote

(2:22) Some manuscripts omit *But new wine is for fresh wineskins*

Luke 5

³³ *And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink."*

³⁴ *And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"*

³⁵ *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."*

³⁶ *He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new,*

and the piece from the new will not match the old.

³⁷ *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed.*

³⁸ *But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.*

³⁹ *And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'*^[fn]

ESV Footnote

(5:39) Some manuscripts *better*

Comment: This encounter with John's disciples could have happened just as Jesus was leaving Matthew's feast. The question of John's disciples was about the need for fasting, which they did "often" (Luke 5:33). Although fasting was frequently practiced in the Old Testament, it was required

only on the Day of Atonement (“*afflict yourselves*” in Lev. 23:27). Jesus first answered their question with an analogy, picturing the foolishness of someone wanting to fast at a wedding feast. Enjoy the bridegroom while he is there! Jesus identified Himself as the bridegroom who would be with them until being “*taken away*” (Luke 5:35) by death. He then told them two parables that showed the absurdity of trying to mix the new covenant with the old. It would be like attempting to save an old garment by patching it with new cloth or trying to use an old wineskin to hold new wine. Neither would work because they are too different. The traditional practice system of the Jews, including requirements for fasting, was an old robe that could not be patched but needed to be replaced. The new wine of the kingdom of heaven could not be poured into the old wineskins of Jewish traditions. Similarly, there are many attempts today to mix the gospel of grace with a system of works, thinking, “Be as good as you can in order to merit the grace of God.” No! Throw away that old garment of works and dress yourself in the beauty of God’s grace! We don’t deserve it but we were given it. Praise the Bridegroom!

March 20 — Reading 58 — John 5:1-9 — “**Do you want to be healed?**”

¹ *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

² *Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ^[fn] ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.*

Now that day was the Sabbath.

ESV Footnote

(5:3) Some manuscripts insert, wholly or in part, *waiting for the moving of the water*; ⁴ *for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had*

Comment: Jesus traveled back to Jerusalem for an unnamed feast, perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles, and saw this lame man at the Pool of Bethesda, appropriately meaning “house of mercy.” Just as Jesus supernaturally knew about the history of the Samaritan woman at the well, so He knew about this man at the pool. Jesus asked him one question, “*Do you want to be healed?*” Dumb question? No, sometimes some people rather enjoy their misery. You might ask a homeless man who lost his family because of alcohol, “Do you want to be sober?” and get a complaining excuse that points the blame to others. This lame man did, too, saying, “*Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool.*” It is a bit like questions to us: Do you want to lose weight? Do you want to witness to your neighbors? Do you want to save money? Sometimes the will to change is really not there. But Jesus healed him anyway, even though he reported Jesus to the authorities later. There was not only a “house of mercy” involved here but also a Man of mercy, Jesus—the lame man didn’t deserve to be healed.

Meditation: Why did Jesus pick that one man out of the crowd of sick people that day? Why didn’t He heal the rest of the people at the pool? Was that lame man the worst-case patient there? Did Jesus know in advance the turmoil the healing and carrying the mat on the Sabbath would cause with the Jewish religious authorities? Did He heal him in order to force a confrontation with that system? Our next two readings will provide further insight into these questions.