

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

All praise be to You, Living Lord, for from the darkest of depths, You have lift my soul; and from the deepest of despair You have raise me up. Remind me daily of Your power to save, Lord God, so that I never forget the wonder of Your grace and the powerful provision You have made for my life. Thank You, Lord Jesus, Thank you from the bottom of my heart. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

**1. For yourself**

*As you read God's Word today, listen for what He is saying to you about what is happening in your life and where it is heading, and then speak to Him about it in prayer*

**2. For your friends and family**

*As above, and listen for what He is saying to you about your relationship with your family and friends, and then pray in the light of this*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray for the work of your own church and pray especially that it will encourage people to meet Jesus, the Lord of all and great Shepherd of the Sheep*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for barriers to be broken down between people so that God's love on Jesus can be shown to all people. Pray for those involved with any headline news in your own country*

### Meditation

The freshness of each new day reveals the blessings

And the gifts of God given to those who will receive them:

The cost of precious moments spent in reading the Word;  
The challenge of sustaining the work we have been given to do;  
The chance to be creative in the path of discipleship and service;  
The excitement of knowing that Christ has more for us each day;  
The valuable moments of quiet peace which refresh the soul;  
The privilege of living the life of Christ, and helping the poor;  
The freedom of prayer to bless other people and the whole world;  
And the opportunity to love again, where yesterday we failed;

What can we possibly do to give thanks for all of this?

We can know what we do and the Lord for whom we do it.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Matthew 9:9-17

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. He said to him,

'Follow me,'

and he got up and followed Him.

<sup>10</sup> While He sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Him and His disciples. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisees saw this, and said to His disciples,

‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’

<sup>12</sup> When He heard this, He said,

‘Those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John approached Him and said,

‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?’

<sup>15</sup> Jesus replied to them,

‘Can the wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast. <sup>16</sup> No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old coat, as the repair only breaks up the coat again, 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 ruined. Rather, new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.’

## Review

After preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had performed some amazing miracles and healings (8:1-9:8), and while He was doing this, He also began to teach his small group of disciples about what they could expect if they continued to follow Him (8:18-22). The only people who had been specifically called to discipleship by Jesus at this point in the Gospel were Peter and Simon and James and John (4:18-22), but there were undoubtedly more people around Jesus, wanting to follow him (8:18-22). By the time Jesus named and sent his disciples on mission (see chapter 10f.) a group of twelve were established, but Matthew is the only other disciple whose call is recorded in the Gospel, and this forms the first part of passage today. This is perhaps only natural, because Matthew was the author of the Gospel! The second part of our reading contains Jesus’ reply to some sharp questions put to Him by some disciples of John the Baptist.

Each of these two incidents arises from a dispute, firstly about what Jesus did, and secondly about what the disciples did (or failed to do!). Jesus sat at table with sinners, and the disciples failed to practise rituals of fasting expected of followers of a teacher, or ‘rabbi’. In each case, Jesus replied with some penetrating comments which have become well known sayings; ‘those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick’ (9:12) and ‘no-one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old coat ...’ (9:16). On the surface, these comments seem very clear, but they hide considerable power and depth, and as we study them further we will find that they tell us some interesting things about Jesus’ ministry and how it developed.

It is helpful if we recall that the miracle leading up to today’s passage was the healing of the paralysed man. The controversy within this miracle was about the forgiveness of sin, and the right of the Messiah to both forgive sins and also perform the ministry of healing. During this incident, we saw that the scribes and leaders of the people were becoming very tense and cautious about what Jesus was doing (e.g. 9:3), and this opposition to Jesus continued both in the short term (see 9:34) and all the way to His death at the end of the Gospel (Chapter 26f.). However, as this opposition grew, Jesus’ miracles and healings gradually emphasised the power of the Messiah to bring new life despite great odds. The story we will read tomorrow will be that of the woman healed of a haemorrhage (8:20-22), then the raising of a little girl (8,23-26) and new life of sense of sight to the blind (8:27-31); in all these miracles, there is an increasing emphasis on new life as a consequence of healing, than in previous ones.

It looks as if the series of miracles and teaching within chapters 8 and 9 are all directed towards the availability of new life in Jesus. This is indeed a ‘resurrection’ theme, and was certainly one that would have been spotted by Matthew’s first readers. Jesus used the occasion of the call of Matthew and the feast at his house to begin to hint at the future of His ministry, talking about the saving of sinners and the mercy of God. Then the questions that were put to Him by John’s disciples spoke of a coming time when God brought in a new age with the wedding of His Son. Matthew’s readers would have seen this straight away; and when Jesus began to talk about new and old cloth, and not putting new wine in old wineskins, then the connection with ‘new life in Christ’ was obvious.

## Going Deeper

It is only possible for us to look at these things with hindsight, but that can often be the right thing to do, given that the Gospel was written after Jesus' life, death and resurrection, with the purpose of explaining what everyone knew had happened to Jesus. But there is yet more for us to discover in this text!

### **Jesus, Matthew and the Pharisees**

The call of Matthew is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Tax collectors were regarded with suspicion by the general population and with condemnation by the religious authorities, who regarded them as 'unclean' because of their corruption and regular contact with Gentiles. So when Jesus called Matthew (known as Matthew also in Mark's Gospel, and as Levi in Luke), it was something of a surprise. Jesus called him in the same way that he had called the previous four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John. He was at work, Jesus came by and called him to follow, and Matthew immediately left his place of work and followed (v9). How we would love to know more about the personal details; but if we did, would we focus on them and not Jesus!

The meal to which Jesus and His disciples were subsequently invited was most probably at Matthew's house. Luke, in his Gospel, gives a fuller account, describing a banquet thrown by Levi (Matthew) in celebration of his call. Jesus had forbidden other would be followers to go home (8:21,22), but Jesus was no legalist and dealt with each person as He found them, and in the case of Levi, He was able to use the occasion of the meal to great advantage.

When the Pharisees observed what was going on they immediately raised their objections about God's people mixing with the 'unclean', but they seemed uncertain about confronting Jesus directly, because they addressed their question to the disciples (9:11). It did not take long for Jesus to hear what was being said, and His reply was twofold. The first part, 'those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick' exposed the false religiosity of the Pharisees. Jesus had demonstrated the importance of the forgiveness of sins in the previous story (9:1-8), and in this saying demonstrated God's concern to forgive the sinner. Quite apart from connecting sin and sickness again, this saying represents a challenge to God's church, which must accept that it exists primarily to help sinners.

The second part of Jesus' reply, 'Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."' was a quote from Hosea 6:6. Jesus was doing the same thing that he had done in His teaching; instead of following the traditions of the Pharisees which regarded the writings of Moses as more important than the Prophets, He interpreting the laws of God according to the Old Testament Prophets. The words of Hosea's He quoted were very similar to Amos (5:21-24), Micah (6:6-8), and Isaiah (1:17-22). All four great prophets were alive at roughly the same time, and their message was clear, drawing upon the ancient meaning of a word for 'mercy' that was part of the Old Testament's basic understanding of the nature of God, a word which meant 'compassionate, faithful love'. The prophets all said that unless God's people practiced love and compassion to those in need, then all their sacrifices, worship and legal obedience were nothing but vain religiosity. This was Jesus' blunt message to the Pharisees.

### **Jesus, the disciples, and John's disciples**

The whole incident of Jesus' eating with the tax collectors continued to raise a storm. Waiting in the wings for the Pharisees to leave the field were John's disciples. One would have thought that they would understand Jesus' willingness to be with sinners, given that He had made it clear that His purpose was their 'healing' (v12). However, they thought that Jesus' comments did not apply to them because as followers of John they were concerned for sinners, yet they wanted to raise a different 'religious' objection to Jesus' feasting and apparent extravagance.

Behind the question 'why do we and the Pharisees fast ...' posed by the disciples of John the Baptist, lay the opinion that good religious observance was a better witness to the pagans than cavorting with them. Jesus' reply cut across their presumptions, for they believed that fasting was a sign of sorrow at the sinful state of the world and longing for the Messiah. Jesus' reply about the wedding feast was a way of telling them that the Messiah had come, and He would save the world, so why be sorrowful? Surely John's disciples had been there when Jesus was baptised, and surely they would have learned from John the Baptist who Jesus was?

Beyond this clear rebuke within Jesus' reply lies an even more, though subtle point. It is quite likely that at this time, John was in prison; as we shall discover later, in Matthew 11. John had indeed been 'taken from them' (9:15). Now if that was a reason for John's disciple's to fast, then Jesus was indicating that a time would come when He would also be taken away (9:15), and this would be the time for His own disciples to mourn. Certainly it sounds as if Jesus was beginning to hint at His future, His Passion, and His death and resurrection (in a few chapters time we will find Jesus talking more fully with the disciple about this - 10:32).

We should also notice that this is the first time that Jesus likens Himself to the figure of the 'Bridegroom'. The marriage of God with His people was a long established image of the relationship of God and Israel, going back at least to the prophecies of Hosea, which is interesting, in view of Matthew's earlier quote; and

Jesus was bold enough to equate Himself with the Bridegroom, who was God! The imagery would not have been lost on those present.

### **Old Clothes and New wine!**

The two sayings of Jesus that come next are very well known, and are about the false wisdom of sowing a patch of new cloth onto old material, and the true wisdom of putting new wine into new wineskins that would allow for the expansion of the fermenting wine. Jesus said absolutely nothing new when saying this; it was all common knowledge. The allegory He gives however is radical, and not necessarily what we expect, and it does not really say anything about how to combine new and old. If you read the first part about sewing up an old coat again, you will find that Jesus' concern is that the 'old coat' is not torn unnecessarily! It is possible this is a rebuke to the disciples of John, who were still hankering after the old religiosity of Judaism, having been given a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven through John's ministry. Jesus was inviting John's disciples to look forward to God's fulfilment of John's work in Him, and not look back.

Next, we come to the part about wineskins. Putting new wine into old wineskins was not simply a false economy, it was daft. It wouldn't work at all! In the light of what Jesus had just said, I believe He was describing His work as the 'Messiah' and the 'Bridegroom' as utterly different from the religion of the Pharisees, or even the elementary faith of John's disciples. He was saying that the old religious systems simply could not cope with what He was making – the 'new wine' of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus was taken away and endured the Passion, leading to His death and resurrection, He established a new way for God and people to be brought together so that sinners could repent, and people made whole (as in the miracles Jesus had demonstrated), and whilst Jesus was concerned that the 'old coat' was not unnecessarily torn even further (to extend the allegory), what He did was to make possible the new way of the Kingdom of God on earth.

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## **Discipleship**

### Application

I close with the observation that too many times people take this saying of Jesus about 'new wine' as a way of promoting 'the latest thing' in church as contrary to that which has gone before. This is risky, because it is not a proper development of what Jesus is saying in this text. Jesus was clearly talking about His death and Resurrection, and as far as I am aware, that happened once, and it is done. No new church or new thing we do today compares in any way with what Jesus has done for us on the Cross. The 'picture' of the 'new wine' was completed when Jesus rose from the dead, ascended, and sent the Holy Spirit to establish the Church. We would be unwise to use it in the church to refer to anything less. Personally, I wince when people use this Scripture to argue that the latest thing that someone has thought of will necessarily be better than what has gone before.

Much of what this text says is about God's work in His Kingdom, which is to save sinners, and it also hints at Jesus' death and resurrection in a number of ways. It is important to see these connections because they are essential to the Gospel and the way that it unfolds. New wine must be put in new wineskins in order for them to be preserved is the message of the last verse (9:17). The best way for us to make sure that we are part of the 'new wine' and the 'new wineskins' is to keep close to Jesus in all things; and that is the path of true discipleship, as it always has been.

### Questions for groups

1. Do find it easy to 'spend time with sinners'? In what way do you follow Jesus in His call to bring the message of God's love to those who do not know it?
2. Which do you love most (be honest) being merciful, kind and loving, or worshipping God on Sundays (see 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' – 9:13)
3. Do you think that the pictures of the old coat and the new wine are saying the same thing, or something different? How do you read these allegories?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Which of these stories affects you most of all? Each has its message and each will touch us in slightly different ways according to our experience of life. Let the scripture speak to you and guide your ways.*
  - *Speak to a close friend, someone with whom you believe you have a strong spiritual bond, and check out your understanding of these texts with them. Such sharing is an essential part of growing in our knowledge of His Word.*
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## **Final Prayer**

Yours, Lord, is the Glory, the Majesty, the Power and the Authority. I place myself in Your hands; a sinner who repents, broken and seeking healing. Jesus Christ, I trust in Your saving power. Save me, heal me, and make me fit for service. I ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus; AMEN

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