

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 31, Chapter 9

We're going to spend a little more time today with the story that opens Matthew 9; that of the paralytic man who was brought to Christ so that he might be healed. Let's begin by re-reading verses 1 - 7.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 9:1 - 7

This one paragraph reveals a few important topics for us. The first is the connection Jesus makes between sin and sickness. And yet another is an offshoot of the first: exactly what is sin according to Christ and what did the Jews think sin was? A third topic is that He has just stated that He has the power to forgive sins on earth. A fourth is that Matthew explains that Yeshua has the ability to know people's minds.

We explored the link between sin and sickness last week. It is a challenging and divisive topic; as one can imagine various scholars and denominations have taken different viewpoints on it. I've discussed with you in Torah Class lessons on the Old Testament that Roman based Christianity (meaning Protestant and Catholic) established their doctrines using a Greek mindset and approach. This perspective leads to the requirement for concrete answers to questions that arise in the Bible; therefore the solutions are usually of the either/or, this or that, type. That is, the result is doctrines that produce rigid rules whereby the shades of gray in the Bible are magically transformed into black or white. Thus regarding sin and sickness some denominations insist that all disease and infirmities are the result of the commission of sins. Others accept no connection whatsoever. Some say there used to be a connection but because of Jesus it doesn't exist any longer. And still others offer spiritual remedies or have an extensive explanation of which

illnesses and infirmities are connected with which sins.

Last week I gave you a few New Testament verses that demonstrate the range of thoughts about the connection between sin and sickness. It is my view that in the end we, as humans, can not and do not know when our illness or that of another is sin based or not. That is, there indeed are instances when God causes us to have an infirmity that is a direct consequence of our wrong behavior. But there are also instances that God causes us to have an infirmity that has nothing to do with our behavior, but rather He is using it to His Glory and for an end purpose that we likely will never know. And, there are instances when we get ill that are not because of God's involvement but rather they are caused by all the physical tangible things that modern Western Medicine seeks to cure through science.

No doubt it is true that because we're all descended from one man that, without exception, we have inherited the propensity for mental, physical and spiritual defects. This is often expressed in the biblical concept of something called our sin nature, which is equally often expressed by the writers of the Epistles as our "old nature". Through Adam's disobedience and rebellion against God, sin came into the world accompanied by death. With it came the defects, even though mankind was never intended to have any kind of defects at all. Adam was without defect until he disobeyed God and instead believed God's Adversary. So from the 30,000 foot view, sin and every manner of infirmity is caused by sin in the sense of the sin nature every human being is born with. So, as pertains to Christ's pronouncement upon the paralytic that "your sins are forgiven", was it this man's sin nature that He was referring to? Might it have been, quite literally, behavioral sins (as meaning breaking one or more of the Laws of Moses)? I don't know; but clearly for this paralyzed man it was one of the two, perhaps both, because Jesus saw forgiving him his sins as the actual remedy for his paralysis.

Now I want to talk about the **nature** of sin. In its most simplistic sense sin (as Christians usually think of it) is offending God. It is disobedience to Him (often in some undefined way) and thus it is revolt against the divine authority. It may be a direct offense against Him (by not worshipping Him properly, for instance) or it may be an indirect offense in that we do wrong to a fellow human being, which breaks the Torah command to love your neighbor; and therefore it offends God. However for the Jews of the 1st century, and especially for the Israelites of earlier times, sin was not merely a word for a behavioral offense against God, it was a word that meant pollution. And pollution was seen like an infection; thus the infection could be spread. Therefore sin and ritual uncleanness were closely tied

together. That is, sin may represent the particular offense itself, but uncleanness was one of the consequences. This is why when sacrifices were made at the Temple, especially for so-called sin offerings, water immersion of the worshipper was part of the process.

When I taught you the Torah, especially as regards Leviticus, I showed you that there were 5 different categories of altar sacrifices, and not all of them dealt with sin. Those that did had specific aspects of sin and its effects that they targeted. One of them that most textbooks will call the "sin offering", more accurately ought to be called the purification offering. That category of sacrifice is, in Hebrew, called **Hatta'at**. That is, while one of the 5 categories of sacrifices dealt with atoning for the specific sin that was committed, and another and different sacrifice was for re-establishing the relationship with God that was broken due to the sin, the **Hatta'at** sacrifice deals with the condition of the worshipper who committed the sin. And that condition is that as a result of sinning the worshipper has become polluted.... infected.... impure. So for Jews of Jesus's day and for centuries before, sin was as much pollution as wrong behavior.

The Jews present at Yeshua's healing of the paralyzed man knew all this. So traditionally they made a close association between sin and sickness (at times, too close). So forgiveness of sins as a cure for the condition of the worshipper (the sickness of the worshipper) was taken for granted. Yet in verse 3 we hear of the Torah Teachers being upset with Yeshua's pronouncement of forgiveness of sins as the **means** by which the man's condition was cured. They had no problem with the healing itself because Yeshua was seen as a **Tzadik**, a miracle healer, and He wasn't the first Holy Man to have appeared. So what was the problem? First: the Greek word that the CJB translates as Torah Teacher is **grammateus**, which directly translates to the English word "scribe". Scribes, in Jesus's day, were the synagogue teachers of both Scripture and Tradition; they had no ties to the Temple. They were in no way connected with the Levites or the Priesthood. So very likely the Scribes in this story taught in the local synagogue there in Capernaum where all this was taking place. If they didn't balk at the idea of the link between sin and sickness, nor at the idea of a miracle worker like Yeshua healing a paralytic, what was the nature of their complaint? It was that only God can forgive sins and here was Yeshua of Nazareth claiming that He could, also. That is why they leveled the charge of blasphemy against Him.

Matthew goes on to editorialize that Yeshua knew what the men were thinking

(another thing that within Jewish society was thought that only God could do). What were they thinking? It was that Yeshua had no authority to forgive. He called this an evil thought in their hearts. I know I've said it scores of times, but it bears continual reminding: notice that Christ associated that act of thinking with the heart organ. Yes, the Greek of this verse is translated correctly and I checked a number of translations and they all agree. In that era (and for a few hundred years before and after) people believed that the heart was where the invisible processes occur that we now know take place in the brain. So whereas today we associate the heart as but a figurative expression of the seat of human emotion or even of spiritual connection with the spiritual world, the people, gentile and Jew, knew of no such thing in Christ's era. Rather the heart was for them figuratively and physically where the mind and the human will were located. So when Christ asks which is easier: to forgive sins or to outright heal, the answer is that they are equal because for Jews sin was the cause of infirmities and therefore to forgive sins cures infirmities.

Thus Christ answers the Scribes' spoken and unspoken thoughts by saying that despite what they believe, the Son of Man indeed does have the authority to forgive sins. Why didn't Jesus just say "I have the authority", rather than using one of His favorite expressions for Himself, The Son of Man, because his answer merely muddies the waters? This opens yet another important topic, one that scholars call eschatology. Big word. But all it means is the study of End Times happenings. Most modern Bible scholars will say that everything that Jesus did and said were meant in an eschatological.... End Times.... context. While I agree with that, most of these scholars wouldn't agree with me about what that actually indicates. That is, most New Testament Bible scholars say that since the Latter Days, the End Times, haven't happened yet (in our time) then most things Christ says as recorded in the Gospels are about the far future to Him, and not in His present time. I claim that the things He said were in the context of not one but **two** Latter Days: the one leading up to His first coming and what happened soon thereafter, and the second one that is yet to happen but will be marked by Yeshua's return and what comes immediately before and after. The reality is that if it didn't work that way it would be counter to the way that nearly all biblical prophecy operates. That is, a prophecy is pronounced, and then fulfilled, and then at a later date it is fulfilled again. So it is important that we take what Christ says as pertaining directly to the people He is dealing with in His time, but it is also for people in the far distant future to when He was living and ministering on earth.

So why did Yeshua say that the Son of Man had authority to forgive sins? In Hebrew the term son of man is **ben Adam**; in every day use in the 1st century it basically meant human being. That is, it doesn't indicate anyone special. However, Yeshua was fan of the Prophet Daniel and Daniel used that term (Son of Man) in a specific and prominent way in one of his prophecies.

^{CJB} **Daniel 7:13-14** ¹³ *"I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

So while Daniel indeed means "someone like a human being" approaches the Ancient One (God in Heaven), and to him is given a kingdom and eternal rulership, obviously this can only be a very specific and unique person that is the one like a human being. Therefore for Jesus, Son of Man became a specific title for the person that would be the one given a kingdom and rulership forever: Himself. Did the Jews listening to Him in Capernaum understand it that way, but then reject it? Did they gather from what He said that He was the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy? I'm sure to most of them it sounded more like Christ was saying that He was a regular human being but He had been given divine authority to forgive sins. That is, it is **not** that He was the divine End Times ruler of God's Kingdom, even though that is precisely what He was communicating, because He was saying it through hints and implications that went over the heads of those He was speaking to.

It has always bothered me as to why Christ seemed to speak about His true identity in riddles.

^{CJB} **Luke 22:63-68** ⁶³ *Meanwhile, the men who were holding Yeshua made fun of him. They beat him, ⁶⁴ blindfolded him, and kept asking him, "Now, 'prophecy'! Who hit you that time?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him. ⁶⁶ At daybreak, the people's council of elders, including both head cohanim and Torah-teachers, met and led him off to their Sanhedrin, ⁶⁷ where they said, "If you are the Mashiach, tell us." He answered, "If I tell you, you won't believe me; ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you won't answer.*

So mere hours before His execution, He was still being guarded about His identity and anything but candid about being the Messiah. I can't necessarily answer the question of "why", but clearly except for a precious few (not even the full number of His original Disciples, not even John the Baptist) no one at this time believed that He was the Messiah nor that He was divine. He could have straightened that out so easily; but His claim in this Luke passage is that it would do no good to say it because the religious authorities wouldn't believe Him anyway. No doubt He was right. But the vast majority of the time He wasn't speaking to the religious authorities, He was speaking to the common people.

The point I am making is this: as we continue reading through Matthew we need to give both His followers and those who hear Him, but don't respond in the expected way, a bit of a break. Too often Christians read the Gospels and see the Jews as a bunch of stiff-necked knuckleheads who were either dense or intentionally rebuffed their own Jewish Messiah; I find that unfair and not reflective of what actually happened. Look how relatively few people of the world's population throughout post-Christ history have accepted Him for who He actually is: Savior; even though we have had the plain evidence of it before us for 2000 years. We have the benefit of hindsight and the teachings of the Apostles who were eye witnesses. I have no doubt that if we were present when Christ was still living and teaching, hearing Him with our own ears, we wouldn't be any different. So those Scribes that questioned His authority to forgive sins were doing it (at least partly) in the context of the true, biblical principle that human beings have no power to forgive sin (at least not on their own authority). And therefore to say that He can forgive sins, Christ is comparing Himself to God. They didn't get it that Christ actually was God on earth, and that He was the one both Moses and Daniel spoke about, because He never plainly said so in an unequivocal way.

In verse 6, Yeshua tells the man to pick up his mattress and go home. This wasn't a command to heal; it was that by having his sins forgiven he was already healed and so there was nothing more to do than for the man to go home! Matthew, the Jewish Gospel writer who is writing to the Jewish people, regularly focuses on a familiar topic to his readers: sin. Early in his Gospel he even sums up Christ's purpose and actions primarily in the context of saving God's people from their sins.

^{CJB} **Matthew 1:21** ²¹ *She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Yeshua, [which means 'ADONAI saves,'] because he will save his people*

from their sins."

Therefore the implication is that all else that comes from saving from sins is but a byproduct.

Verse 8 confirms something we ought to have taken for granted; there were many onlookers. This was all occurring in this house that now had a pretty large hole in its roof; large enough to lower a man strapped to a stretcher. The crowds were amazed no doubt not only because the paralyzed man could now walk, but also because how Jesus could respond to the Scribes. We're told that they said a blessing to God upon understanding more than the Scribes seem to have: Yeshua was indeed given authority by God forgive sins in order to heal. The CJB uses the phrase "said a ***b'rakhah***", whereas most other translations say "glorified" God. The way common Jews glorified God was by saying a blessing to Him, so the CJB says it most correctly. Let's read a little more in Matthew.

RE-READ MATTHEW 9:9 - 13

In verse 9 Christ adds another disciple: Matthew (also called Levi according to Mark). This is the briefest of stories. Yeshua is walking (still in Capernaum), he sees a Tax Collector sitting at a table, Yeshua says "follow Me" and Matthew follows. End of story. Unless the Gospel writer Matthew likes to talk about himself in the 3rd person, and is trying to hide that he is the same as this new disciple, this story simply adds to the evidence that the Gospel writer Matthew is not also the disciple Matthew. That the story of Matthew is as a tax collector might be better expressed that he is a toll collector. Once we understand that Capernaum lay along the vital and heavily used Via Maris trade route, then knowing that Capernaum was a substantial commercial fishing village, with Jews and gentiles living there side-by-side, a garrison of Roman troops commanded by a Centurion stationed there, and the presence of not one but a few toll collectors makes perfect sense. The commercial fishermen of the Sea of Galilee had a ready market for their catch, the Roman troops guarded the trade route and the money that changed hands daily, and the toll collector took in the customs duties from the merchants for using the maintained and protected trade route. Capernaum was no remote, sleepy little fishing village.

Tax Collectors were hated by the Jews. Like the Roman soldiers, Tax Collectors represented oppression to them because the money they forcibly took in went only to Rome's coffers. Since we know that Matthew's Hebrew name was Levi,

then we also know that he was a Levite. So for most Jewish folks he was very nearly a traitor. We're given no reason why Yeshua would call him (a controversial addition to His flock to say the least). However it does follow the same pattern that has already been established. Yeshua chooses the disciple; the disciple doesn't choose his Master.

Apparently nearly immediately Jesus went into a house and began eating with Matthew. Whose house is this? Probably it was Peter's house where Christ was most likely staying. The second most likely probability is that it was Matthew the tax collector's house because we're told that other tax collectors and sinners joined Him and His disciples at the table. We know what the tax collectors were, but how about the term sinners? Would not all who came, no matter their social position, be counted as sinners in the eyes of God? In Christ's day a class of people called **am ha'ertz** (people of the land), common Jews, were often called sinners. They were the lowest on the socio-economic ladder and considered too uneducated and too incapable to be able to follow God's commandments, so they must be sinners. It might be somewhat equivalent to how Americans view the homeless. However it is not likely that this is what Matthew is speaking about because Jesus was the champion of the poorest and most unlovable in Jewish society. Probably these "sinners" were the **resa'im**, the wicked among Jewish society because they did not keep the Law of Moses, perhaps even intentionally altogether abandoning the covenant God had with Israel. **Resa'im** was a most derogatory term among the Jews, and it was very nearly like calling a Jew a gentile (and those were fighting words). It was usually reserved for the most wretched of Jewish society like prostitutes, petty thieves and other no-accounts. From the 1st century Jewish perspective you could barely fit a piece of paper between what they called a sinner and a tax collector. To say it was startling for Christ to be sitting and eating with this despised group of people would be an understatement.

The Pharisees (some of which were the Scribes of the synagogue) immediately notice and were shocked by what they saw. What was this **Tzadik**, this most revered Holy Man, doing with unsavory people like this? The Pharisees confronted not Yeshua but rather His disciples wanting to know why their Master would risk sully His reputation, if not contracting ritual uncleanness, from being around such a vulgar group. But just as much the Pharisees want to know why the disciples would choose such a poor Master that would do such a thing. Yeshua overheard the conversation and answered their question. His response is wonderful and so very true. A person who is well doesn't need a physician; only

someone who is ill. The meaning of this is plain. He has come into this world to make the unrighteous, righteous. In other words, why would those who are certain they are already righteous need Him? Those who were eating with Christ perfectly well understood their low status and how people considered them the dregs of society. But how, within the world of the synagogue, would the Pharisees have understood what Christ said? It was that the sinners and the tax collectors were the sick, the Pharisees were the healthy, but Yeshua was the healing physician. The implications of such a stance were enormous. He was encroaching on the position that Pharisees and Scribes assigned themselves as the physicians to heal the Jewish people of their unrighteousness, and they weren't going to take an interloper horning in, lying down.

This is something we'd all do well to remember. Most Believers prefer to hang out and to congregate with people like ourselves. People who are "good" people, "nice" people, and of course, professed Believers. We're generally uncomfortable with those who society considers outsiders or derelicts. But of all the people in this world, it is they who are in most in need of what Jesus offers not because the rest of us are so righteous and thus have no need; but because they know they aren't and are likely feel there is no hope for them. I've heard from more than one person of the lower side of society say something like: "how could God possibly love me if He knows me?" Yeshua considered His number one priority as showing these so-called sinners and tax collectors that regardless of what others might think of them, God does love them and care about them and they aren't outsiders to Him. All of His created beings are valuable to Him.

Yeshua knew full well that the good folks of Jewish society would think less of Him for eating and associating with such people; the deplorables. His reputation would, and did, take a hit. He knew this before He did it, but it didn't matter to Him because He had a mission to save everyone who would accept Him as their Savior, not merely the Jewish religious elite, so it was worth the risk. Luke records this about the reputation He gained from the religious authorities and others:

^{CJB} **Luke 7:34** *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Aha! A glutton and a drunkard! A friend of tax-collectors and sinners!'*

Christ lectures those Pharisees and Scribes by saying that they are thinking as they are because they don't understand a rather basic principle of their own Hebrew faith; one that is written in Hosea 6:6. Matthew doesn't actually quote

Hosea 6:6, instead he abbreviates and paraphrases. Unfortunately, much of Christianity has misunderstood what Christ meant largely due to the unintended consequence of Matthew's Reader's Digest version of Hosea 6:6, and also because Bible Teachers and students don't turn to Hosea 6:6 to see it in its full form. I'll repeat something I've highlighted before: it was the Jewish way to quote or to use just a few words of Scripture to point a reader to a larger section of Scripture. That was about the only way to accomplish such a thing because the introduction of chapters and verses into the Bible wouldn't be invented for another 1000 years. So upon reading this verse in Matthew it seems to the Western Christian mind that, aha!, Christ is saying it's time to do away with animal sacrifices in exchange for grace and mercy. And since sacrifice is at the heart of the Torah and the Law of Moses, then it can be reasonably extrapolated that the Torah and the Law of Moses have just been demoted by Christ. But let's see what Hosea 6:6 actually says. We'll read it in the larger context that Yeshua intended.

CJB Hosea 6:1 - 7 ¹ Come, let us return to ADONAI; for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck, and he will bind our wounds. ² After two days, he will revive us; on the third day, he will raise us up; and we will live in his presence. ³ Let us know, let us strive to know ADONAI. That he will come is as certain as morning; he will come to us like the rain, like the spring rains that water the earth. ⁴ "Efrayim, what should I do to you? Y'hudah, what should I do to you? For your 'faithful love' is like a morning cloud, like dew that disappears quickly. ⁵ This is why I have cut them to pieces by the prophets, slaughtered them with the words from my mouth- the judgment on you shines out like light. ⁶ For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifices, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. ⁷ "But they, just like men, have broken the covenant, they have been faithless in dealing with me

So when this is taken in the fuller context, Yeshua's meaning is anything but about abolishing the Law. The point that Christ is making by invoking Hosea is that if God's people would have mercy and would also seek knowledge of God, then it wouldn't be necessary to kill God's innocent creatures from the animal world and burn up their carcasses on an altar to save the life of the guilty sinner. Hosea is not repeating himself in a kind of poetic way in verse 6 when he speaks of mercy and also of knowing God. Humans, God's people, are commanded to show mercy to our fellow humans.... not to God. He doesn't need our mercy. And God's people must also have knowledge of God, by means of learning the Torah, which is all the Holy Scripture they had in Hosea's time, so that they could know

what God's laws and commands are. Mercy is the natural result of obeying the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself"; and gaining knowledge of God is the natural result of obeying the commandment to "love God with all your mind, soul, and strength". This quoting of Hosea spoke directly to the religious Pharisees Jesus was scolding because the Temple was still standing, the Priesthood was still functioning, and sacrifices were still happening.

Please take notice: what we see developing is that the Pharisees are carefully watching Yeshua's increasing popularity among the people, His miracles are occurring at a blistering pace, and His teaching on the biblical Torah is not only surpassing theirs, but it is also at times contradicting their teaching because they taught in the synagogue from the standpoint of the Traditions of the Elders and Jewish customs as opposed to the plain and written truth of God's Word. It seems that from Matthew's perspective the Pharisees never learn. In fact they are closed to learning and their ignorance of God's ways has been harmful to the people who rely on them for spiritual guidance. Therefore the Pharisees, some of whom are Scribes, respond by peppering Christ with objections to what He is saying, trying to run down His character. Yeshua is without doubt openly and publicly challenging the teaching of the Scribes (who weren't supposed to be challenged because of their lofty positions), and they have little actual defense. So when you have no defense, go on offense; and that's exactly what they were doing.

Open your Bibles again to Matthew chapter 9.

RE-READ MATTHEW 9:14 - 17

Here we read something that catches many Believers by surprise. It is that some of John the Baptist's disciples were present in Capernaum as Yeshua healed, taught, and ate with tax collectors and sinners. From the perspective of 2000 years later, we might wonder how it could be that John who said that he came to make a path in the wilderness for the One that God was sending, still had his own flock of followers that were separate and apart from the flock of followers of the One that God sent? And so we witness in verse 14 an "us versus them" question. Why do we (John the Baptist's disciples) fast rather frequently (along with the Pharisees), but Jesus's disciples don't? Naturally Yeshua answers the question in His typical indirect and enigmatic way that leaves some scratching their heads, others awe stricken in their spirits with the profoundness of His words, and a few none too happy about it.

Christ says: ***"Can wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then they will fast."*** One must be very careful when considering this saying not to read more into than is there, and yet not to overlook what is only implied. Many Bible commentators refer to this as another of Yeshua's several parables; I take issue with that. This is not at all a parable from any Jewish perspective of His time; rather it is merely an illustration.... a metaphor. Soon, as we encounter an authentic Parable, we'll discuss what a Parable is, its form and its purpose.

It is imperative that we not try to make all the particulars about fasting, bridegrooms, feasts, and weddings pertain to what Christ has said. Illustrations and metaphors used in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, were never meant to exhaustively capture every detail of similarity. The illustration is not a cloaked clone of the object that is being better explained by the use of metaphor. Rather it is meant to draw a simplistic mental picture; it is a picture of an approximate comparison and not of an exact match.

The bottom line is that fasting in Christ's day was meant to display two things: repentance and mourning. For Jews repentance and mourning were usually connected, although not in every circumstance. For instance during the Holy Day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement where repentance of personal wrongdoing is the order of the day, fasting is the Torah command. The repentant person mourned over their prior condition. But a mourner could also have been mourning at the death of a family member or friend and so repentance was not the issue. Christians in many ways see repentance as involving joy when we think of it in the sense of deciding to leave our old life and begin a new one with Christ. While true, that in no way reflects what is being taught here in this story. The other side of the coin is that a wedding is an entirely joyful occasion that is always highlighted with a feast. Joy and feasting go together, just as do fasting and mourning. So the presence of a Bridegroom signals a wedding and a feast and therefore joy.

Yeshua is not calling Himself a Bridegroom; rather He is merely using the common knowledge among Jews of the happy tone and procedures of a wedding to make His point. And the point is that now, while He is still on earth, it is not the time for mourning; that will come soon enough. Of course that cryptic message wasn't entirely understood among His listeners. Only in hindsight after the Cross would that message become clear.

We'll continue next week with 2 other illustrations that He uses in response to the inquiry about fasting as brought by the disciples of John the Baptist.