

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Hi. Welcome back for the first term of 2020. If you had the opportunity to travel over the Christmas / New Year break, you may not only have had a chance to escape the smoke and heat, but also to explore different places, foods and engage in new experiences. Sometimes, it is an opportunity to get out of our comfort zone and be challenged to see the world through different lenses. We then are able to bring those experiences and perspectives back into our routine world. When Jesus walked on earth, he looked, acted and dressed like any Jewish man of his day. However, his worldview and way of seeing things and people very much challenged the way ordinary people (and, especially, the religious hierarchy) saw things. As we journey through the 2nd half of Matthew's gospel this term, may I challenge you to put on a new 'set of glasses' and look at the world from Jesus' perspective, as he teaches us about life in the kingdom of God.

**GETTING STARTED:** Take out your phone and find a photograph that captures an incident or highlight of what happened for you over the Christmas/ New Year break. Share the photo with your group. Quickly summarise: where were you? Who were you with? What was happening and / or what were people doing when you took the photo? And what was something you remember was said, during that time?

**READ: MATTHEW 9:1-13** [The NLT version from [Biblegateway.com](http://Biblegateway.com) is below]

## **Jesus Heals a Paralysed Man**

*9 Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. <sup>2</sup> Some people brought to him a paralysed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralysed man, "Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven." <sup>3</sup> But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, "That's blasphemy! Does he think he's God?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus knew<sup>[a]</sup> what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you have such evil thoughts in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? <sup>6</sup> So I will prove to you that the Son of Man<sup>[b]</sup> has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralysed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" <sup>7</sup> And the man jumped up and went home! <sup>8</sup> Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for giving humans such authority.*

## **Jesus Calls Matthew**

*<sup>9</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup> Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. <sup>11</sup> But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?<sup>[c]</sup>" <sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor - sick people do." <sup>13</sup> Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.'<sup>[d]</sup> For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."<sup>1</sup>*

- a. [9:4](#) Some manuscripts read saw.
- b. [9:6](#) "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself.
- c. [9:11](#) Greek *with tax collectors and sinners?*
- d. [9:13](#) [Hos 6:6](#) (Greek version).

This passage is a snapshot of two incidents in Jesus' ministry. In the space of 13 verses, Matthew's gospel records a number of events set in different contexts. Jesus is the central person in the narrative, but it is not just Matthew who notes and makes mention of the actions and words of the different people in the text.

### ➤ **TEAR APART THE TEXT**

 List all the people who are mentioned in this passage.

 Circle the words "seeing" and "saw". (Also look at the footnote)  
? Who "saw"? And what did they see / perceive?

 Underline the words "said", "told" and "asked".  
? In each case, 'who' said 'what' and to whom?

 List all the "active" actions (other than verbs about "seeing" and "talking").

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=MATT+9&version=NLT>

## ➤ RE-ENACT THE TEXT & BRING IT TO LIFE

Two people are needed for the following exercise: a narrator and an actor. Clear a space in the middle of the group, for the actor to role-play the passage. This is meant to be a fun exercise for the group.

- 🗣️ Narrator: Read the passage again – phrase by phrase. Add personalities, accents, emotion and tone – to bring the people to life. (Have fun and be creative!)
  - 🎭 Actor: Listen for the verbs / actions in the text and either act out (eg stepping into) or create a symbol (eg for 'seeing') to indicate an action. Use facial expressions where appropriate – to express emotions and attitudes that you imagine were happening in that situation.
- ? What did you find helpful or unhelpful from this exercise? What extra things did you discover about these stories, by seeing them role-played?

When we are reading a piece of Scripture, it can get repetitive and boring. We can forget that the people in the text – including Jesus - were real people with emotions and inner thought lives that translated into attitudes and actions. Some movies about the life of Christ depict Jesus as a cardboard character, with deadpan tone and expression. When was the last time you saw a movie depicting Jesus sharing a joke over dinner with Matthew's work-mates, including demonstrating genuine interest for them and their lives?

- ? What attitudes did the Pharisees and teachers of the law exhibit, particularly towards the paralysed man, Matthew, the tax collectors and sinners, and to Jesus?
- ? By contrast, what attitudes and actions did Jesus exhibit towards the paralysed man, his friends/ helpers, Matthew, the tax collectors (and other 'scum') and to the Pharisees and religious teachers?

In Matt 9:12-13, we read <sup>12</sup> *When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor - sick people do."* <sup>13</sup> *Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.'<sup>[a]</sup> For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."* The Jewish religious cult required people to offer sacrifices to deal with their sin and get right with God. But even while working in the temple, the religious hierarchy didn't comprehend that they, themselves, were sick with sin. By contrast, Matthew was a person who knew he was a sinner and that self-understanding was something that Jesus saw in him. When Jesus saw Matthew, alone and dealing with his internal personal struggles, Jesus wanted to get beside him and journey with him. Jesus turned the tables, declaring that he didn't come for those who think we are 'good people', but for those who come to God with faith, acknowledging how broken we really are. John Calvin calls this state: 'total depravity'.

## LOOK INWARDS – AT YOUR OWN LIFE

- Read the following quote.

**"Total Depravity:** This doctrine teaches there is no part of our human nature which has not been affected by the taint of sin. Our intellect, emotions, will, and even physical bodies, have been corrupted by the Fall. As a point of clarification, total depravity does not mean that humanity is as bad as possible or that no good *in any sense* can be done by unbelievers (though ultimately any good that does come about should be attributed to God's grace). Rather, it means that in the natural fallen state we are born into we are unable to do any *spiritual* good that will please God and we cannot come to God *by our own strength*. This is why some theologians refer to this point, perhaps more accurately, as *total inability*."<sup>2</sup>

- ? Our own 'total depravity', sin-sickness and brokenness affects the way we see the world and the way we see others. We can be quick to identify the sin in others and in the world we live in, but we can fail to see the sin in our own lives and the way we treat other people. In what ways are your thoughts and attitudes similar to those of the religious leaders in Jesus' day?

In Hebrews 4:16 we read: *"So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."* The writer to the Hebrews highlights that we can come to God for mercy.

- As a group, recite the words: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- ? What do these words mean for you?

## LOOK OUTWARDS – TO THE WORLD AROUND YOU

- ? When you look at other people and listen to the things they say and watch the things they do, what do you see? Do you see them as people that God yearns to bring into a relationship with himself and to heal their brokenness? How will you show / demonstrate God's mercy to them? Can you make time to catch up for coffee and/ or lunch with them this week, to get to know them better?

<sup>2</sup> <http://apologeticjunkie.blogspot.com/2009/09/john-calvin-on-total-depravity.html>