

How does Matthew's example compare to how you respond to your friends and family and neighbors who are "sinners"?

What are the Pharisees really saying when they ask their "question"?

They are accusing Jesus of gross hypocrisy. "You act like you are a religious teacher, that you are God's friend and yet you hang out with people who clearly hate God and his ways. These tax collectors and other sinners have no concern for God or his laws. Just look at how they live. You must be just like them if you hang out with them."

How does Jesus answer their question? Why does he hang out with sinners?

He uses a metaphor and he quotes the Old Testament. Doctors only visit sick people. People who are well don't need the services of doctors. These people are sick, you guys don't think you are sick, therefore, as a good doctor, I visit those who need my help, not those who have no need of my help.

He claims by quoting Hosea 6:6 that this is the chief evidence that he is God because God himself delights in mercy, not religious performance.

Read Hosea 5: 1-7 & 6:4-7 (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekial, Daniel, Hosea). Jesus commands the Pharisees to go and learn what God meant in this passage. What should they and we learn about God and his relationship to people from this passage? What mistake do the Pharisees make that the people of Israel made in Hosea's day?

While the Israelites maintain the religious forms, they sacrifice animals in the temple they celebrate the new moon festivals, yet their hearts do not really love God. They really love and trust in other Gods and other nations, not the Lord. They think they are safe from God's judgement because of what they do for God (sacrifice) not because God has mercy on them and they respond by loving him back. They view their relationship to God in a minimalist sort of way. They perform their minimal religious duties to appease God and then go out and love the world thinking that God is pleased with them. Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of the same mistake. They do not understand that knowing God is based on God's mercy, not on human performance. The only

thing any human contributes to their salvation is their sin. If a person does not believe their sin is their biggest problem, then God will have nothing to do with them.

Compare Psalm 1: 4-6 & 34: 15-16 with Jesus' last statement in v. 13. How does it appear that Jesus is contradicting these OT statements (These two are only 2 examples of hundreds of similar statements.)?

The OT says that God saves the righteous and punishes sinners or the wicked. Jesus is saying he does not save "righteous" people but only sinners.

How are we to understand this, especially when Jesus is quoting an OT passage in support of his statement? (Compare Psalm 32, especially vv. 1-2 and 10-11)

Psalm 32 is one of many places in the OT that shows what Jesus is saying. Have everyone turn to it. Notice that the psalm begins by saying that God's favor rests on (that's the meaning of "blessed") the people whose sins he has forgiven. In other words, there is a group of people who are sinners and whose sins, God graciously (through no merit of their own) forgives. In v. 10, the Lord's unfailing love surrounds these sinners who are forgiven as they trust in him. Then in v. 11 they are called, "the righteous" who rejoice in the Lord who forgives them. Therefore, when Jesus says that he calls sinners and not the righteous he is simply saying what the whole Bible says, God makes sinners righteous by forgiving their sins and giving them new hearts. God doesn't save those who think they are righteous in themselves, he considers them to be among the wicked that he will judge. The Pharisees exclude themselves from God's salvation by considering themselves righteous in themselves and superior to Matthew and his friends.

Are you daily aware of the enormity of God's mercy towards you in view of your sin? Does it regularly amaze you that Jesus gave his life for you and has called you out of your rebellion and ignorance and sin and caused you to trust in him? Do you show the same mercy to other sinners as was shown to you?

Now consider that Jesus says your sins are a bigger problem than any other problem you've ever had or ever will have. If Jesus has said to you, "Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven", how ought you to feel? What impact should the knowledge of being forgiven have on our lives?

How do the teachers of the law respond to Jesus' forgiving the sins of the paralytic?

They accuse him of blasphemy.

What is blasphemy? (See Lev. 24: 10-16, Matthew 26:63-68 & John 10:29-33)

When a human being says that God is for something he is not for or against something he is not against. When a human assumes divine approval or authority for something he says or wants when there is no clearly stated divine approval. If Jesus is only a man then the teachers of the law are right, he is guilty of slandering God because he has declared that has done something he has not done, i.e. forgiven the sins of the paralytic.

Which is easier to say, "your sins are forgiven" or "take up your pallet and walk"?

All of us naturally think it is more difficult to say "be healed" because we don't think getting sins forgiven is that big of a deal and no one can see if it happens or not whereas telling someone to "be healed" is immediately obvious. However, Jesus sees forgiveness as way more difficult because only God can forgive sins. So he does the easier thing, heal the paralytic, in order to show that the harder thing, forgive sins, has also happened.

How does the paralytic respond to Jesus' command? What does this tell us about the commands of Jesus?

He does what he is told. He was not able to walk but when Jesus commands him to walk he obeys by taking up his pallet and walking. He obeys by going home, just like Jesus said. What Jesus commands, he creates. Just like God commanding, "Let there be light" and light "obeyed" by coming into existence so when Jesus commands the

paralyzed man to walk, he walks. The evidence that Jesus has healed you is that you obey his commands. In other words you are now able to do what you could not do before and you want to do what you did not want to do before. This is a picture of salvation. When Jesus gives a person spiritual life he wants to obey God's law and he is able to obey it. (See Romans 8: 5-14 for a statement of this principle)

Compare who speaks in the story of the healing of the paralytic (vv. 1-8) and the calling of Matthew (vv. 9-13). What is Matthew emphasizing by putting these two stories together?

The paralytic and his friends say nothing, they only obey. In the same way Matthew says nothing, he just obeys. The teachers of the law ask a hostile question, the Pharisees ask a hostile question. Jesus commands a healing and it happens. Jesus commands a man to follow him and he does. Jesus demonstrates his deity claiming to forgive sins and proving it by healing the paralytic. Jesus claims to have spoken the words of Hosea 6:6 where it is Yahweh speaking and he proves it by being with sinners in order to show mercy.

- ◆ *Jesus proves he is God by forgiving sins, having mercy on sinners*
- ◆ *Whatever Jesus commands, happens*
- ◆ *The religious leaders cannot accept the fact that sinners can be forgiven so easily nor that a man acts as if he is God.*

How does Matthew respond to being called by Christ into fellowship with him? What does this tell us about the changes God produces in a person when he saves them?

Like a person celebrating a happy occasion in his life he throws a party and invites all his friends to celebrate with him. This party is an evidence of the joy of Matthew in salvation and of his desire for others to enjoy what he now enjoys. He invites his friends to dinner with Jesus just like a football fan invites his friends to come watch the big game at his house, just like the parents who invite their family to celebrate their child's graduation, just like a cancer patient whose tests show no more cancer calls his family to come to dinner and rejoice. Matthew, out of joy in salvation and out of a desire for others to share in that joy by experiencing the mercy of Jesus throws a party.

PORTRAITS OF JESUS TO IGNITE FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE: HE DELIGHTS IN MERCY

Matthew 9: 1-13

(Based on sermon from 10/8/00)

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when you were in need and someone was kind to you or when someone whom you hurt was unexpectedly kind to you. How did it feel to be treated with kindness? How did you respond?

In the 1970's George Burns starred in a movie entitled, "O God!" He played God come to earth as a human. It was a hilarious movie, but not anything like what happened when God actually did become a man. In his biography on the life of Jesus Matthew is attempting to give us a picture of what it's like when God comes to earth as a man. He has recounted Jesus' amazing birth (Chapters 1-3), his battle with Satan (Chapter 4), his authoritative teaching (Chapters 5-7) and in chapter 8, five powerful miracles. All of these things point to Jesus' deity, but up to this point there has been no direct claim to deity. Until now in chapter 9. In the first 13 verses Jesus twice claims to be God. What ought to ignite our faith is that the characteristic that Jesus uses to most vividly show his deity is mercy. He is kind and forgiving to helpless people. In other words, his mercy shows his deity more clearly than all that has gone before. Let's pray that our meditation on his mercy causes us to be more hopeful and loving people.

STUDY

Describe the scene in vv. 1-8. Where does this take place? Who is present?

This takes place in Capernaum (Compare 8: 5, 14, 18, with 9:1). He has been here before, in fact Matthew calls it his "own town." It was his base of operations. There is a group of people around that includes not only his disciples but some teachers of the law. A group of people carry a paralytic to him, lying on a mat.

What do the paralyzed man and his friends say to Jesus?

Nothing.

What are we to assume they want?

They want their friend/relative to be healed by Jesus.

What does Jesus say to the paralytic? According to v. 2, why does Jesus say this to him?

Jesus saw their faith and so told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven.

Remembering what we discovered about faith in the leper and the centurion, what is it that Jesus saw?

They had confidence in Jesus that he would help them. There must have been a willingness to accept his will coupled with a knowledge that they did not deserve his help and undergirded by absolute confidence that he was able to help.

But why did Jesus tell this young man his sins were forgiven when the main reason he was there was to be healed physically?

There are two reasons. First he wants to clearly display his deity. He shows that he is God by doing what only God can do, forgive sins. But there is another reason. The crowds are so excited by him because of all the physical help he is giving them and their hope that he has come to set up God's kingdom on earth. So he wants to make very clear to people that the main thing he has come to do is forgive peoples sins. He is trying to make it as clear as he possibly can that the biggest problem facing every human being is their sins.

How does it strike you that Jesus, as God, would tell a young paralyzed man that his biggest problem isn't his paralysis but his sins?

Take a minute now and make a list of the top two or three problems you are currently facing. Now describe what the solution to each of these problems would look like. How would you feel if you woke up tomorrow morning and each of your problems was solved as you have described?