

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Forgiveness, Mercy, and New Wine

Matthew 9:1–38

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 9 carries some of the weightiest doctrine in the Gospel, and the teacher should keep three great truths in view. First, Jesus claims and demonstrates the authority to forgive sins, an authority that belongs to God alone, and so quietly but unmistakably asserts His own deity. Second, He reveals the heart of God toward sinners, declaring that He desires mercy and came to call not the righteous but sinners, overturning a religion of mere performance. Third, through the images of the new patch and the new wine, He announces that something genuinely new has arrived in Him, the New Covenant, which fulfills and replaces the Old Law and cannot be poured back into the old forms. To teach this chapter well is to help your class see who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

But this chapter is not content to inform; it means to transform. The same Jesus who forgives sins wants your students to bring Him their deepest need rather than only their circumstances. The same Jesus who ate with sinners wants them to extend that mercy to the people they are tempted to avoid. The same Jesus who brings new wine wants them to stop pouring His new life into old, self-made forms. And the same Jesus whose heart broke over the harassed and helpless crowds wants to break their hearts too, until they pray for and become laborers in the harvest.

So aim for both head and heart. Let your class marvel that Jesus does what only God can do, that He delights in mercy, and that He has ushered in a new and better covenant. Then let that wonder move them to receive His mercy more deeply and to carry it, with compassion and urgency, into a world of sheep without a shepherd.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the paralytic is brought to Him, Jesus says, “your sins are forgiven,” and then heals him so that they may “know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (9:2, 6). The scribes were right that only God can forgive sins, so what is Jesus claiming about Himself, and why is His authority to forgive the most important thing in this account?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open with the audacity of what Jesus says before He heals anything. Friends lower a paralyzed man before Him, and Jesus, “seeing their faith,” says, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven” (9:2). The scribes immediately think, “This man is blaspheming” (9:3). Help your class

see that, on their premises, the scribes were entirely correct: only God can forgive sins. The question is whether Jesus has the right to do it.

Watch how Jesus answers. He poses a shrewd question: which is easier, to say “your sins are forgiven” or to say “rise and walk” (9:5)? It is easy to claim to forgive sins, since no one can see whether it happened. So Jesus does the visible, verifiable thing, healing the man, “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (9:6). The healing is the proof of the deeper claim.

Make the doctrinal point unmistakable. By forgiving sins and then validating it with a miracle no one could deny, Jesus is claiming a prerogative that belongs to God alone. This is one of the clearest assertions of His deity in the Gospel. He is not merely announcing that God has forgiven; He is exercising the authority to forgive, on earth, in His own person.

Then help students feel why this is the most important thing in the account. The man came for his legs; Jesus first gave him his soul. Our deepest problem is not our circumstances but our sin, our broken relationship with God. The greatest news in the world is that the One with authority to forgive has come, and that this same authority is exercised today as the gospel is preached and obeyed (Acts 2:38; 5:31).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ authority to forgive sins as a claim to deity, since only God can forgive (9:2–6; Mark 2:7)
- The miracle as visible proof of the invisible authority to forgive
- Sin as humanity’s deepest need, deeper than any physical affliction
- Forgiveness offered through Christ and received in the gospel by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Acts 2:38; 5:31)
- The Son of Man exercising on earth the prerogative of God

Discussion Prompts

- Why were the scribes right that only God can forgive sins, and what does that make Jesus’ words a claim to?
- Why does Jesus deal with the man’s sin before his paralysis?
- How does it change your view of Jesus to see Him exercise the authority that belongs to God alone?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus dealt with the paralytic’s deepest need, his sin, before his obvious need, his paralysis (9:2–6). In your own life, where are you tempted to ask God mainly to fix your circumstances while overlooking the deeper work He wants to do in your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question follows the paralytic's story into our own priorities. The man and his friends came for one thing, healing, and Jesus gave them something deeper first. Often we come to God with our circumstances at the top of the list and barely a thought for the condition of our hearts.

Help students name the pattern honestly. We pray most fervently about the job, the diagnosis, the relationship, the finances, the things we can see and feel. These are real and worth bringing to God. But Jesus' order in this story exposes how easily we treat the surface problem as the main thing while the deeper work, repentance, surrender, the healing of the heart, goes unrequested.

Invite reflection on a specific area. Where is each person asking God mainly to fix a circumstance, when He may be far more interested in forming Christ in them through it? Sometimes the unanswered prayer about the circumstance is God's patient way of getting at the deeper need.

Lead toward a richer way of praying. Encourage students to keep bringing their circumstances to God, but to add the prayer the paralytic never had to ask: "Lord, do the deeper work in me too." The goal is to want what Jesus wants most for us, the health of the soul, even more than relief in the situation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priority of the heart's healing over the relief of circumstances (9:2; Matthew 16:26)
- The danger of treating God mainly as a fixer of problems
- God's use of circumstances to do deeper formative work in us (Romans 5:3–5)
- Praying for inner transformation, not only outward change

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you mainly asking God to fix a circumstance right now?
- What deeper work might He want to do in your heart through that situation?
- How could you add the prayer for inward change to your requests this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector, then eats with "many tax collectors and sinners," and answers His critics, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (9:9–13). What is Jesus teaching here about the heart of God toward sinners, and what does it mean that He desires mercy more than mere religious performance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move into one of the great scenes of the Gospel: the call of Matthew and the dinner that follows. Jesus walks past a tax booth and says to Matthew, "Follow me," and the man gets up and follows (9:9). Remind your class who tax collectors were: collaborators with Rome, often dishonest, despised as traitors and sinners. That Jesus would call such a man is already scandalous.

Then Jesus reclines at table with "many tax collectors and sinners" (9:10). Table fellowship in that world signaled acceptance and friendship, so the Pharisees are appalled: why does your teacher eat with such people (9:11)? Their question assumes that holiness means separation from sinners. Jesus is about to redefine it.

Unpack His answer, which has two parts. First the proverb: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (9:12). A doctor goes toward disease, not away from it. Then the rebuke, quoting Hosea 6:6: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (9:13). God values mercy over mere religious correctness, and Jesus came precisely for the people the religious had written off.

Draw out the heart of God here. This is the gospel in miniature: the Savior seeks the lost, the sick, the sinner. The Pharisees' "sacrifice," their scrupulous religion, had become a substitute for mercy rather than an overflow of it. Help your class see that mercy is not God lowering His standards; it is God reaching down to rescue those who could never reach Him. And note the quiet warning in "the righteous": those who think they need no physician will never come to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart of God revealed in Christ seeking and calling sinners (9:13; Luke 19:10)
- Mercy as something God desires above mere religious performance (9:13; Hosea 6:6)
- True holiness expressed in moving toward sinners to save, not merely separating from them
- The danger of a self-righteousness that believes it needs no physician (9:12-13; Luke 18:9-14)
- Grace that reaches down to rescue, not a lowering of God's standards

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus' choice to eat with sinners reveal about the heart of God?
- What does it mean that God desires mercy more than mere religious performance?
- Why is it so dangerous to count ourselves among the 'righteous' who need no physician?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus deliberately spent time with the people the religious crowd avoided. Who are the “tax collectors and sinners” in your world that you find it easiest to look down on or stay away from, and what would the mercy of Jesus look like in the way you treat them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the mercy of Matthew’s table toward our own attitudes. Every one of us has a category of people we quietly look down on or instinctively avoid, our own version of “tax collectors and sinners.” Naming that honestly is the first step.

Help students see how subtly this works in a religious heart. Like the Pharisees, we can dress our avoidance in the language of holiness, telling ourselves we are simply keeping our distance from sin, when in fact we are keeping our distance from sinners whom Jesus loves. The Pharisees were not wrong to hate sin; they were wrong to despise the people Jesus came to save.

Ask each person to identify a specific group or individual. It may be defined by lifestyle, politics, addiction, reputation, social class, or simply by being hard to love. Then ask what the mercy of Jesus would actually look like toward them, not approval of sin, but the kind of presence, welcome, and friendship Jesus extended at that table.

Move toward one concrete act of mercy. Encourage a specific step this week: an invitation, a conversation, a kindness, the choice to draw near rather than to keep a careful distance. We become like the Jesus we follow by going where He went, toward people, in mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to imitate Christ’s mercy toward those the world and religion avoid (9:13; Romans 15:7)
- The difference between hating sin and despising sinners
- Self-righteousness disguised as holiness as a barrier to love
- Concrete mercy, welcome, and friendship as the shape of Christlike love

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ you find easiest to look down on or avoid?
- How can you tell the difference between hating sin and despising people?
- What is one concrete act of mercy you could show such a person this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

When asked about fasting, Jesus says the wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, and that He is that bridegroom (9:14–15). What is Jesus revealing about who He is and about the new joy that has arrived with Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John's disciples ask why Jesus' disciples do not fast as they and the Pharisees do (9:14). Jesus answers with a wedding image: "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (9:15). Help your class catch how much Jesus is claiming in this gentle picture.

In the Old Testament, the bridegroom of God's people is the Lord Himself (Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 2:19). By calling Himself the bridegroom, Jesus is quietly taking up that divine role. His presence is the arrival of the long-awaited joy, the wedding feast of God with His people. No wonder His disciples are not fasting; the celebration has begun.

Note the tender realism Jesus adds: "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (9:15). He foreshadows His own death. There is a place for fasting and mourning, but the dominant note of the new age He brings is joy, the joy of the bridegroom's presence.

Draw out the doctrinal richness. Christianity is, at its heart, a wedding, not a funeral. The gospel is good news of a Savior who has come to rejoice over His people. Help your class feel that the new thing Jesus brings is not a heavier religion but a deeper joy, the joy of belonging to the Bridegroom who gave Himself for His bride (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the divine Bridegroom of God's people (9:15; Isaiah 62:5; Ephesians 5:25–27)
- The presence of Christ as the arrival of long-awaited joy
- The proper place of fasting and mourning within a life centered on the joy of Christ
- The gospel as fundamentally good news and celebration, not mere religious duty
- Christ's foreshadowing of His death in the bridegroom being 'taken away' (9:15)

Discussion Prompts

- What is Jesus claiming about Himself by calling Himself the bridegroom?
- How does the wedding image reshape your picture of what following Jesus is like?
- Where do you most need to recover the joy of the Bridegroom's presence?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus says no one patches an old garment with new cloth or pours new wine into old wineskins (9:16–17). Where are you tempted to try to pour the new life Jesus offers back into old habits, attitudes, or self-made religion, and what needs to be made new instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the parable of the patch and the wineskins and makes it personal. Jesus says you do not sew unshrunk cloth onto an old garment, or the patch tears away and makes the tear worse; and you do not put new wine into old wineskins, or the skins burst and both are lost (9:16–17). The new cannot simply be added to the old.

Help students apply this to the spiritual life. We are often tempted to take the new life Jesus offers and pour it into old containers, to add Jesus to a life still run by old habits, old resentments, old self-made religion, without letting Him make us new. The result, Jesus warns, is rupture and loss. The new wine of His life needs new wineskins.

Invite honest naming. Where is each person trying to patch rather than be remade? It might be a besetting habit they keep managing instead of surrendering, an attitude of bitterness they have never let Christ change, a private religion of appearances rather than a transformed heart. The new will not be contained in the old.

Lead toward genuine renewal. The gospel does not merely improve the old self; it makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Encourage students to name one old wineskin that needs replacing and to ask Christ not to patch it but to make that part of them new.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incompatibility of Christ's new life with the unchanged old self (9:16–17; 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- The gospel as transformation, not mere addition or improvement
- The danger of self-made religion that keeps the old forms while resisting renewal
- New creation in Christ as the proper 'new wineskin' for new wine

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you trying to pour the new life of Christ into old habits or attitudes?
- What old 'wineskin' in your life most needs to be made new rather than patched?
- What would it look like to ask Christ to remake that part of you this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Through the parable of the new wine and new wineskins, Jesus signals that He is bringing something that cannot be contained in the old forms (9:16–17). What is the "new wine" Jesus came to bring, and how does the New Covenant in Christ differ from the Old Law it fulfills and replaces?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, so give it your fullest attention, because in two brief images Jesus announces nothing less than the dawn of the New Covenant. "No one

puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment... Neither is new wine put into old wineskins" (9:16–17). The point is that what Jesus brings is genuinely new and cannot be poured back into the old structures of the Mosaic system.

First, identify the new wine. It is the new life and new relationship with God that Jesus brings, the gospel of grace, the forgiveness of sins through Him, the indwelling life of the Spirit, and ultimately the New Covenant He would seal with His own blood (Matthew 26:28; Jeremiah 31:31–34). This is the long-promised covenant written not on stone but on the heart, in which God remembers our sins no more.

Then explain, carefully and graciously, the relationship between the Old and the New. The Old Law was given by God and was good, but it was always pointing forward, a tutor leading to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Jesus did not come to destroy it but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), and in fulfilling it He brought it to its appointed end as a covenant. The New Covenant is not the old patched up; it is new. The New Testament is explicit: in Christ the first covenant is made obsolete, the certificate of debt nailed to the cross, and we now live under a better covenant with a better mediator (Hebrews 8:6–13; Colossians 2:14–17).

Help your class see the practical weight of this. The old wineskins were the structures of the Mosaic age, its sacrifices, its priesthood, its dietary and festival laws, its temple. The new wine of the gospel cannot be poured back into them. This is why Christians worship under the apostolic pattern of the New Testament rather than the Old, why we keep the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day rather than the Old Covenant feasts, and why the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath bound by Old Covenant rules. The completed New Testament, not the old code, is our pattern (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Close with wonder, not just information. The reason the old cannot contain the new is that the new is so much greater. The shadow has given way to the substance; the promise to the fulfillment; the law that condemned to the grace that saves. Lead your class to marvel that they live in the age of the new wine, members of the New Covenant, with their sins remembered no more, and to handle the Old Scriptures rightly as the inspired story that pointed all along to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new wine as the gospel of grace and the New Covenant in Christ's blood (9:17; Matthew 26:28; Jeremiah 31:31–34)
- The Old Law as God-given, good, and a tutor pointing to Christ (Galatians 3:24)
- Christ fulfilling, not destroying, the Law, and bringing it to its end as a covenant (Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4)
- The first covenant made obsolete and the believer now under a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6–13; Colossians 2:14–17)
- The new life of the gospel that cannot be contained in the old forms of the Mosaic system

- The completed New Testament as the pattern for the church's worship and life (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Acts 20:7)
- The Lord's Day as the day of Christian worship, not an Old Covenant Sabbath

Discussion Prompts

- What is the 'new wine' Jesus came to bring, and why can it not be poured into the old forms?
- How does the New Covenant differ from the Old Law that it fulfills and replaces?
- How should living under the New Covenant shape the way the church worships and lives today?

Question 8

Student Question:

A ruler whose daughter has died, and a woman who had bled for twelve years, both come to Jesus in raw desperation, and He honors their faith (9:18–22). When you are desperate, do you tend to bring your need boldly to Jesus, or to hide it and try to manage alone, and why?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws on the intertwined stories of the ruler and the bleeding woman (9:18–26). A synagogue ruler falls before Jesus, saying his daughter has just died, but “come and lay your hand on her, and she will live” (9:18). On the way, a woman who had suffered a flow of blood for twelve years touches the fringe of Jesus' garment, thinking, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well” (9:21). Both are acts of raw, desperate faith.

Note how Jesus responds to desperation. He does not scold either one for the rough edges of their faith. He goes with the ruler, and He turns to the woman and says, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well” (9:22). Desperation that runs to Jesus is welcomed, not despised. He honors the faith that simply comes.

Now press the mirror gently. Many of us, when we are most desperate, do the opposite of these two. We hide our need, manage it alone, put on a brave face, and only come to Jesus once we have it under control, if at all. Pride, shame, or self-sufficiency keeps us from the bold, reaching faith this passage commends.

Invite honest reflection. Ask students whether they tend to bring their desperation to Jesus or to bury it. The woman's twelve years of suffering, and the ruler's impossible grief, remind us that there is no need too long, too shameful, or too far gone to bring to Him. Encourage one specific need each person has been hiding, and one step toward bringing it boldly to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Desperate, reaching faith welcomed and honored by Christ (9:22; Hebrews 4:16)

- No need too long-standing or too shameful to bring to Jesus
- Pride, shame, and self-sufficiency as obstacles to bold faith
- Coming to Christ in our weakness as the path to His help and healing

Discussion Prompts

- When you are desperate, do you bring your need to Jesus or try to manage alone?
- What keeps you from coming boldly to Him with your hardest needs?
- What is one need you have been hiding that you could bring to Christ this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Matthew says that when Jesus saw the crowds, “he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” and He said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest” (9:36–38). What does this reveal about the heart of Christ for lost people, the urgency of the harvest, and the responsibility this lays on His church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this question to let the climactic verses of the chapter do their work on your students’ hearts. After all the healings, Matthew pulls back to show us Jesus’ inner life: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). The word for compassion is visceral; it means He was moved in His depths. This is the heart of God toward lost people.

Help your class feel the diagnosis. The crowds were “harassed and helpless,” worn down and scattered, with no true shepherd to lead and feed them. That is still the condition of the world without Christ, no matter how busy or self-assured it looks. People are tired, lost, and shepherdless, and the Lord of glory looks on them not with annoyance but with compassion.

Then hear the call. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (9:37–38). Jesus reframes the lost not as a problem to avoid but as a harvest to gather. The harvest is plentiful, meaning there are far more ready to respond than we imagine. The shortage is not of receptive people but of workers willing to go.

Press the responsibility this lays on the church. Notice that Jesus first commands prayer, “pray earnestly... to send out laborers,” and in the very next chapter He sends out the Twelve as the answer to that prayer. We cannot pray this prayer honestly and remain on the sidelines. To care about what Christ cares about is to pray for the harvest and to make ourselves available as laborers in it (Romans 10:14–15).

Close by joining compassion and action. The same Jesus who forgives sins, shows mercy, and brings the new wine looks out over the weary crowds and asks His people to share His heart and His work. Lead your class to ask the Lord to give them His compassion, and then to send them, in their own neighborhoods and relationships, into the plentiful harvest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The compassionate heart of Christ for lost and shepherdless people (9:36; Matthew 18:11)
- The lost as a plentiful harvest ready to be gathered, not merely a problem (9:37; John 4:35)
- The shortage of laborers as the church's urgent concern (9:37-38)
- Prayer for laborers joined to personal willingness to be sent (9:38; 10:1; Romans 10:14-15)
- Evangelism as sharing the compassion and mission of Christ Himself
- The responsibility of every Christian to participate in the harvest

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus' compassion for the crowds reveal about His heart for lost people?
- Why does Jesus say the problem is too few laborers rather than too few who are ready?
- How can you honestly pray for laborers without making yourself available as one?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the forgiveness, the mercy at Matthew's table, the new wine, the desperate faith, the plentiful harvest. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to receive His mercy more deeply or to carry it to others this week, and what is your next concrete step?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole sweep of Matthew 9 and turn it toward the heart. The chapter has shown us a Jesus who forgives sins, who shows mercy at the table of outcasts, who brings new wine that bursts the old skins, who welcomes desperate faith, and whose heart breaks over the harassed and helpless. Two great movements run through it all: receiving mercy and carrying mercy.

Help students hold both together. Some in your class most need to receive His mercy more deeply, to stop performing and let the Physician heal them, to bring the hidden need, to let the new wine make them new. Others most need to carry that mercy outward, to move toward the people they avoid, to feel compassion for the crowds, to step into the harvest. Most of us need both.

Invite a specific, concrete response. Ask each person to name one way Jesus is calling them this week, either to receive His mercy more deeply or to carry it to someone else, and the very next

step they will take. Vague intentions fade; a named step can be taken. Give a moment of quiet to let each person settle on one thing.

Close with worship and sending. The wonder of Matthew 9 is that the One with authority to forgive sins, the divine Bridegroom, the bringer of the New Covenant, looks on weary sinners like us with compassion, and then trusts us to carry that same mercy into the world. Lead your class to marvel at the mercy they have received and to go out as laborers in the plentiful harvest of the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dual call of the chapter: to receive Christ's mercy and to carry it to others
- Transformation that moves from being healed to becoming a healer of others through the gospel
- Specific, concrete obedience as the fruit of encountering the mercy of Christ
- Worship and gratitude as the engine of mission
- The believer's place as a laborer sent into Christ's harvest (9:38)

Discussion Prompts

- Is Jesus calling you mainly to receive His mercy more deeply or to carry it to others right now?
- What is the one concrete step you will take this week in response?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?