

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – PART TEN

As Jesus' 'Sermon on the Job' continued, word began to spread, the momentum continued to build and the demands of the needy increased. In chapter nine, Jesus returned to His base at Capernaum. The chapter describes what appears to be just one day in His busy ministry by the end of which a new approach was needed.

Jesus' reputation as a healer of paralytics(8:5-13) led to a new case. On the previous occasion He had been willing to do a house call; this time the patient was brought to Him by his friends or family. Jesus saw the opportunity to teach that there was more to walking than just a healing touch from Him. He shocked the listening religious teachers by telling the paralysed man that his sins were forgiven. He combined the two messages of 8:1-13. Forgiveness through the cross must precede walking in the power of His risen life. The scribes recognised rightly that only God could forgive sin so they accused Him of claiming to be God. He answered them by a miracle which only the Creator could perform. Ordinary people got the message. The religious people waited for their opportunity to hit back.(9:1-8)

Just down the road in the Tax Department was Matthew, the future writer of this gospel. In a very simple command to follow Him, Jesus added an unlikely new recruit to His small band of disciples. As a servant of Rome, the colonial power, and therefore a traitor to his own people, Matthew would have been a complicated mixture of success and rejection, of affluence and guilt, but for Jesus the only issue was not where he had been but where he was prepared to go. As an indication of his change of heart, Matthew immediately opened his home not only to his old friends but to Jesus and His followers. He wanted the two groups to come to know each other. It must have been an exciting dinner table conversation but it was quickly interrupted by the religious people keen to take revenge by passing judgement. They did not approve of believers mixing over a meal with unbelievers. His answer was twofold; only the sick need to go to the doctor; and then quoting Hos.6:6, He reminded them that God cares about our compassion for sinners, not what we have given up.(9:9-13)

While the Pharisees retreated to think of another tactic, a new group came forward to criticise. John had pointed his disciples to Jesus(Jn.3:28-30) but some had continued to claim to be John's followers even after his death. They preferred John's austere lifestyle which had given up the ordinary comforts of life to be more spiritual. Why, they asked, did not Jesus tell His disciples to show they were different by what they did not do? He gave them three quick powerful pictures of what a relationship with Him was about. It is a reason for rejoicing not mourning, a wedding not a funeral. It is a totally new life not the old one patched up. Like wine in wineskins, it is new life inside shaping new life outside, not a re-cycling of the old life.(9:14-17)

Having dealt with the second interruption to the dinner party, there came a far more urgent request from one of the religious people, who as a group were so critical. His daughter had just died but he was confident Jesus could restore her to life. Without hesitation, because of the man's faith that He could do the impossible, Jesus went with him at once. On the way the new interruption was interrupted, this time by a woman whose need hardly seemed urgent because she had had her, presumably gynaecological, problem for twelve years. Medically she would have been anaemic,

breathless and tired; her marriage would have been greatly affected,(Lev.18:19) and financially she was broke and frustrated with doctors.(Mark 5:26) Surprisingly Jesus stopped to identify her, and encouraged her faith which had reached out to Him, before moving on to the dead child's home. He recognised that although the problem was 12 years old her faith was brand new and needed immediate affirmation. Outside the home where the child had just died was the usual crowd of mourners loudly expressing their grief according to their culture. When He announced to them that the girl was only asleep they roared with laughter, exposing their insincerity. He therefore excluded them from the miracle which was about to take place, and went in with only the parents to command the girl to arise. She did and His fame spread faster than ever.(9:18-26)

On His way back to Matthew's house, Jesus was followed by two more patients who also showed a simple and remarkable faith. They were blind and He restored their sight. Jesus commanded them not to talk about what He had done but they just could not keep quiet. Presumably His purpose was that they should wait until they really understood who He was. As they left the house, a dumb, demon-possessed man was brought in whom Jesus also cured. The religious people again objected that He must be using the Devil's power to do this. By doing this they demonstrated that they were the ones who were really blind because they could not see the truth,(Jn.9:39-41) and dumb because they had nothing worthwhile to say.(9:27-34)

Jesus resumed His itinerant ministry, moving around the big cities and the little villages. His priority was to teach and preach the gospel, starting in the synagogues with those who should have been most eager to learn. The demands of the needy continued to grow and He met their needs, but it was obvious that in one human body He could not have adequate individual time with each troubled person. Motivated as always by compassion, He began to set out a new plan, that the task be shared. First He asked His disciples to pray. Where would they fit into the new plan?(9:35-38)

If they truly listened to God with open hearts, chapter 10 described the outline of the plan which He would unfold.

Q.1 10:1-4 What did the apostles have to do before they received authority? What small pieces of information are we given here about the background, relationships and future of the twelve?

Q.2 10:5-15 What did the apostles have to receive before they could be sent by Jesus? Where were they to go, and what were they to say and do? How were their instructions different from those they received before Jesus left them in Matt.28:18-20? How were they to be supported? What was to be their strategy for reaching a city or village? How were they to handle rejection?

Q.3 10:16-23 What kind of trouble were they to expect? Why would they be treated in this way? How were they to handle opposition? How are we to handle persecution?

Q.4 10:24-33 What is the most common inner reaction we have to persecution? Why is it unnecessary? How instead can we respond? What will Jesus do when we refuse to be silenced?

Q.5 10:34-42 What is the most hurtful kind of opposition? How are we to respond to it? What kind of sword was Jesus describing? Put verses 38 and 39 into your own words. What encouragement did Jesus give in the last three verses of the chapter?