

Gospel of Matthew



Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 9:1-38

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. In the Old Testament, sickness and disease were considered to be caused by sin. In Psalm 107:17, it's written: "Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction." Isaiah 33:24 records this prophecy: "And no inhabitant will say, 'I am sick'; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity." Judging by their religious practices, the scribes and Pharisees believed that impurity was stronger than purity and that holiness required separation from anything unclean or impure. Jesus rejects the Pharisees' ideas and touches lepers, consorts with Gentiles and tax collectors, approaches the demon-possessed, permits himself to be touched by menstruating women, and touches the dead. Instead of the impure contaminating Jesus, power flows in the opposite direction—what's unclean is made clean—sin is conquered and death is defeated. Paragraph 1503 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that 'God has visited his people' and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician that the sick have need of."
2. Paragraph 2148 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Blasphemy is directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God—inwardly and outwardly—words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; in failing in respect toward him in one's speech; in misusing God's name." The scribes believed that Jesus was blaspheming because he said to the paralytic: "Your sins are forgiven," thereby equating himself with God, since only God can forgive sins. In Psalm 103:8-12 it's written: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger for ever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." In Isaiah 43:25, God speaks through the prophet, saying: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." In Mark 2:6-7, the reaction of the scribes is more clearly spelled out. Readers of that Gospel learn that the scribes are questioning in their hearts: "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
3. Paragraph 1441 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the Church teaching that only God forgives sins: "Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, 'The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins' and exercises this divine power: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name." Paragraph 1440 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the Church

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enacts this authority through the sacrament of Reconciliation: “Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.” Paragraph 1454 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* urges Catholics to prepare for the sacrament of Reconciliation “by an *examination of conscience* made in light of the Word of God. The passages [of Scripture] best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments, the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.”

4. When the Pharisees criticize him for sharing a meal with tax collectors and sinners, Matthew 9:12-13 records that Jesus responds: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Paragraph 588 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the Pharisees “trusted in themselves and despised others” and that “since sin is universal, those who pretend not to need salvation are blind to themselves.”
5. John 3:25-29a recounts how, when “a discussion arose between John’s disciples and a Jew over purifying,” John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the bridegroom and to himself as “the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, [and] rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. . . .” The Old Testament prophets depict God as the husband of the Israelites. In Isaiah 54:5 it’s written: “For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” In Jeremiah 3:20, God speaks through the prophet: “Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD.” In Hosea 2:14-20, God says: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. . . . And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me ‘My husband.’ . . . And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.” If Jesus is the bridegroom, then the Church is his spouse. In Ephesians 5:25 St. Paul teaches: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” In Revelation 19:7, the apostle John writes: “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his Bride has made herself ready.” Paragraph 796 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the relationship of Jesus and the Church “is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. The Lord referred to himself as the ‘bridegroom.’ The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride ‘betrothed’ to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit in him. The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb. . . . He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body.”
6. The image of an old garment is found elsewhere in Psalm 102:26, where it’s written: “They will perish, but thou dost endure; they will all wear out like a garment.” In Hebrews 1:10-12, the author teaches: “Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are

the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.”

7. Jesus’ many miraculous healings connected to forgiveness of sins point to the fact the he is the promised Messiah. Isaiah 33:24 contains this prophecy: “And no inhabitant will say, ‘I am sick’; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.”
8. Jesus attributes the healing of the woman who’s been suffering from hemorrhages and the two blind men to their faith. In Matthew 9:22, Jesus says to the woman: “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” To the two blind men in Matthew 9:29, Jesus says: “According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.” Matthew 9:34 records the Pharisees saying that Jesus “casts out demons by the prince of demons.” As the mystery of Jesus’ healing grace unfolds, the mystery of evil intensifies.
9. The scribes and Pharisees are harassing the people of Israel. Jeremiah 23:1-2 prophesies: “‘Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!’ says the LORD. Therefore says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: ‘You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.’” In the Old Testament, Moses, Joshua, and David all are described as shepherds. Exodus 3:1a describes Moses as “keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. . . .” Numbers 27:15-18 recounts: “Moses said to the LORD, ‘Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd.’ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him.’” In 2 Samuel 5:2, the 12 tribes of Israel tell David: “In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” Jeremiah 23:3-6 points to Jesus as Messiah because Jesus fulfills the prophecy it contains: “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more. . . . Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” In Ezekiel 34:22-23, God promises: “I will save my flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.” In the New Testament, Jesus claims the title shepherd for himself in John 10:11, where he teaches: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” In 1 Peter 2:25, St. Peter writes to early Christians: “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

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10. In Luke 10:2, when Jesus asks his disciples to “pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest,” he’s emphasizing that they dispose their hearts to do the will of God. Paragraph 2611 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The prayer of faith consists not only in saying ‘Lord, Lord,’ but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan.”

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.