



Chapter 9

Once upon a time, in the prehistoric, pre-selfie days, people did not use phones to take pictures (kids, ask your parents about it). Instead, a single-function device, known as a “camera,” was used. This “camera” required film and was what most people relied on to capture images—none of this moving picture stuff. Snapshots collected embarrassing memories of youth or that special family vacation. They didn’t recount every moment, but they helped us recall highlights from the past, jogging our memories of long ago.

Icebreaker:

1. You probably didn’t bring an old photo album with you, but take a minute to remember some of your favorite photos from the past. Why are they significant to you and what emotions, if any, do they stir up in you?

One way to understand chapters 8-9 is that Matthew is laying out a series of “snapshots” depicting what “the gospel of the kingdom” looks like. Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 are literary “bookends” signaling to us that everything in between them is about this gospel of the kingdom. *The Sermon on the Mount* described what God’s Kingdom Community looks like. Now, chapters 8-9 offer a glimpse of what happens when the Kingdom impacts people’s lives. In that sense, then, these snapshots are not so much a collage from the past; rather, *they offer a hint about the future* when God’s Kingdom comes and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven (6:10). Yes, we really are going *Back to the Future* (kids, ask your parents about this too).

Verses 1-8

Last week, Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee with a group of disciples in order to avoid the crowds. Now, Jesus has apparently honored the request of the locals “to leave their region” (8:34) by crossing back over to Capernaum. The healing of the paralyzed man is shocking because of Jesus’s order of business. First, he forgives. Then, he heals.

2. How can this sequence guide us as we think about the needs of others around us? Have you ever had an opportunity to point out someone’s greatest need while you were also addressing physical needs?

These verses also show us that we don’t just have to watch our words around Jesus, we have to even watch our thoughts! There’s nothing hidden from Him.

Verses 9-13

The previous encounter with the paralytic was scandalous because of who Jesus claimed to be—the Son of Man (see Daniel 7) who forgives sins. Now, we see another form of scandal as Jesus calls a tax collector to follow Him. You’ve probably heard how tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews since they served Rome and usually became rich in the process by defrauding their own people. Do you see the scandal?

3. Are there “tax collectors” of our day who we may have excluded as candidates for God’s Kingdom Community? Who is too despised to qualify for Jesus’s grace?

4. The religious leaders are shocked by the people Jesus associates with—possibly including pimps, prostitutes, thieves, etc. What barriers keep us from DRAWING NEAR TO or HANGING OUT WITH or SPENDING TIME WITH “sinners”?

Verses 14-17

Jesus is approached by John the Baptist’s disciples and what follows underscores two points. First, Jesus’s physical presence has a limited duration. While Jesus is with them, there is to be a spirit of celebration over His Kingdom-pointing words and deeds. Second, while Jesus’s life is a fulfillment of the Old Testament, it’s also a radical new chapter in God’s unfolding mission. This “gospel of the kingdom” cannot be thought of as an add-on to the “old wineskins” of Judaism. It’s like stepping into a new world.

5. N.T. Wright says, “The question for us is whether we are living in that new world ourselves, or whether we keep sneaking back to the old one where we feel more at home.” Can you relate to this tendency to slip back into the “old world”/“old wine” of something less than the gospel of the kingdom?

Verses 18-34

These verses are the final three of ten specific miracles in chapters 8-9. These healings, like those before, demonstrate Jesus’s desire and ability to restore life (the ruler’s daughter), to heal and purify the unclean (the woman suffering from bleeding), and to restore sight to the blind. These snapshots should encourage us as we wonder what Jesus’s coming Kingdom entails.

6. Each of these exemplifies faith in Jesus’s ability to heal. Which episode is most extraordinary to you, or which stirs up your faith the most?

Verses 35-38

These summarize all that has taken place since the end of chapter 4. Jesus is proclaiming a message—through both His words and deeds. The message is indeed good news (i.e., the gospel) about the Kingdom and all that it will bring. We also get to see how Jesus’s actions are motivated by a deep compassion over the plight of a humanity disconnected from its Creator. Jesus’s life is a mission to restore what has been lost, and these snapshots give us glimpses of it!

Jesus uses two metaphors of agriculture to describe our situation. First, we are like sheep without a shepherd.

8. In what ways does this metaphor accurately depict humanity’s situation?

Next, we are called to pray earnestly for laborers to harvest God’s fields. Grant Osborne, a NT scholar, has written that “The mission is God’s work, and our primary task is prayer...The church moves forward on its knees.” Prayer is foundational.

9. Take time to pray with your group according to verses 37-38. Ask the Lord to send out laborers into specific ministry areas at Calvary.

Tying the Bow

Did you notice what just happened? Jesus—the Shepherd and Lord of the Harvest—the Great Teacher and Miracle-Worker—the King of the Universe—just dropped a hint that He’s going to call a group of ordinary people to join Him in what He’s doing. Now that’s astonishing! This next week, commit to praying daily according to verses 37-38. Are you wondering how this prayer is going to be answered? Stay tuned.