

*9:1 He entered into a ship-* The Gospels record the Lord entering into a boat around 15 times. The visual image of Him entering the boat remained deeply with the Gospel writers. It's an incidental proof of the veracity of their records as eyewitness accounts. There must've been something about His body language as He climbed over the boat's side which lodged deeply within them. Perhaps because it is awkward for a man to climb over a boat's side, especially for one who had not grown up as a fisherman, messing with boats from childhood. Perhaps that proof of His utter humanity remained with them all, and is artlessly reflected in their later write-up of their time with Him.

*His own city-* Another essay in the Lord's humanity. The same term is used about Joseph going to be taxed in "his own city" (Lk. 2:3).

*9:2 Behold-* Another encouragement for us to play 'Bible television' with the record, inviting us to 'Look' at Him, imagining the Lord in a particular situation which is being described.

*Brought to Him-* The term is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame.

*Sick of the palsy-* Gk. paralyzed.

*Lying-* The Greek *ballo* suggests they had thrown him onto the bed / stretcher in their haste to bring him to Jesus.

*Bed-* Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

*Their faith-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others.

The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

*Be of good cheer-* The same term is used later in the chapter, when the sick woman is told that because of *her* faith, she can be of good comfort because the Lord will heal her (9:22). Note too that the woman "said within herself" (Mt. 9:21), using the same phrase as used about the scribes talking 'within themselves' (9:3). The parallel in the situations is surely to underline the lesson that the faith of *others* can be as effective as the faith of an individual in leading to healing and forgiveness.

*Your sins are forgiven-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

9:3 *Behold-* We are invited to imagine the faces of those men, and likewise perceive as Jesus did what they were thinking within.

*Said within themselves-* Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)

- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spake within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4)

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

*Blasphemes*- The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

9:4 *Knowing their thoughts*- Matthew says the same about the Lord in Mt. 12:25. Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for

intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]... these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts..." (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

*Think-* The Gk. means 'to ponder', to dwell upon- which is how the word is translated in its two other occurrences in the New Testament (Mt. 1:20; Acts 10:19). The human heart is a fountain of evil thoughts, but the sin is to dwell upon them as the Jews were doing. We note again how the root cause of the Jewish plot to murder the Son of God is located as attitudes within their hearts which grew into the final sin of the crucifixion.

*Evil-* What evil did the Lord have in mind? The use of *poneros* here rather than any word carrying the idea of sin would suggest the Lord had a particular evil act in mind; and surely, He could foresee the evil of the crucifixion. He perceived that this was beginning as a jealous thought brooded upon within their minds. The Lord may have had the same idea in mind when He taught that the Jews would bring forth evil things from their evil hearts (Mt. 12:34,35). The 'evil things' may have been an intensive plural for the greatest evil- the crucifixion. A review of the passages listed in the commentary on 9:3 will reveal that He perceived it was the state of

their mind which would lead them to kill Him; there is therefore a great appropriacy in the language of 'satan' being used about both the Jewish opposition, and the mind of the flesh.

9:5 *Easier*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier *for Me*'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:6).

*Arise and walk*- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:6 *That you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publically known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man

before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

*The Son of Man-* The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

*Power on earth to forgive-* He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "all power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

*Then He said-* As if He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

*Take up your bed-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

*Go unto your house-* The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

*9:7 Arose and departed to his house-* Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him in :6.

*9:8 The multitudes-* A word used about 150 times in the Gospel records. The crowds were a major feature of the Lord's ministry, and they must have been a great trial to Him. We sense Him seeking to avoid them, to stop them gathering, and yet being so compassionate towards them, despite their often superficial grasp of His works and message. It makes an interesting exercise to consider whether on balance the Gospel writers take a positive view of the crowds or not. John seems to be more negative about them, whereas Matthew seems to emphasize their wonder, naivety, weak understanding and fickleness. But all the Gospels seem to present a clear pyramid structure beginning with Jesus, then an inner circle of disciples, then the twelve, then the crowds, and then the unbelieving, aggressive Jewish leadership. There are certainly similarities with Moses on Sinai and in his relationship with Israel, but they cannot be pushed too precisely. The crowd here in Mt. 9:8 is contrasted favourably with the Scribes- the opening "But..." suggests that they marvelled at the Lord's authority, whereas some of the Scribes became bitterly jealous.

*Unto men-* See on 9:6 *Son of Man*. There may be significance in the plural *men* rather than *a man*. They marvelled that one of them could have such power to forgive and remove the consequences of sin. It is all an essay in the Lord's evident humanity.

9:9- see on 4:16.

*As Jesus passed forth from there-* Towards Matthew, the author of the account. Such close up detail makes sense if this is indeed an eyewitness account. It's almost as if Matthew had a video camera on his desk and captures the Lord walking towards him after healing the paralyzed man.

*Matthew-* Matthew's preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi (see Mark and Luke's record), strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (9:3).

*Sitting at the receipt of custom-* It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

*Sitting-* It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

*Follow-* The Greek means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as



to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

*He arose and followed-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (9:6). It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

9:10 *In the house-* Matthew's record is purposefully ambiguous. Whose house? His own house, where He was living? For Capernaum is called "his own city" at that time (9:1). Or the house to which the healed paralytic had returned (9:6)? Or Matthew's house? However, the other Gospels say that the house was Matthews, and the presence of other publicans supports that. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

*Publicans-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. See the digression about the significance of eating together, and the Lord's open table. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

9:12 *Heard-* Did He overhear? Or simply perceive, as in 9:4?

*A doctor-* Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are* whole'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table.

This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13).

*Whole-* The Greek word is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

*Need-* Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

*That are sick-* The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness.

9:13 *Go-* The Lord was telling them to literally get out of the house, and do some Bible study. Of course, the Pharisees spent their time doing this. The Lord's point was that if they really meditated upon the implications of God's love of grace over sacrifice, then they would understand that it is therefore actually necessary to eat with sinners to call them to repentance.

*Learn-* The Pharisees saw themselves as only teachers, not pupils. The Lord had diagnosed this problem, for He told them as a teacher would tell a pupil: "Go ye and learn what that means...". He sent them away to do some homework. And there is a warning for speaking brethren here; the repeated experience of teaching can take away from the eternal sense of student-ship which the true believer will ever feel.

*What it means-* Literally, 'what is'. The same two Greek words have just been on the Lord's lips to the Scribes- "*What is* easier..." (9:5). Capernaum was a small place, and probably the incidents recorded in Matthew 9 featured the same group of opponents.

*I will have mercy and not sacrifice-* This was some kind of proof text for the Lord, for He says exactly the same words in Mt. 12:7: "If you had known what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *chesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give

the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *chesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshipping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt. 12:7).

*To call-* It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). Matthew again is showing that he considered himself a sinner, one of the sick who needed a doctor.

*The righteous-* Those who *thought they were* righteous.

*To repentance-* The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

9:14 *Then came to Him-* Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

*Fast often-* The Greek for 'often' can just as well mean 'largely', i.e. they abstained from food for long periods.

*Fast not-* Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And

again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

9:15 *Children of the bridechamber*- John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

*Mourn*- The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord here in Mt. 9:15 is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

*The days*- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22)

*Taken from*- The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pauro* which has just been used in 9:6 ("take up your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old

garment (9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

*Fast-* There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return- Mt. 9:15]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by

going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes “your voice to be heard on high”. Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.