



Rejoicing in Jesus: Jesus vs sin

9 studies on Matthew 8 to 10

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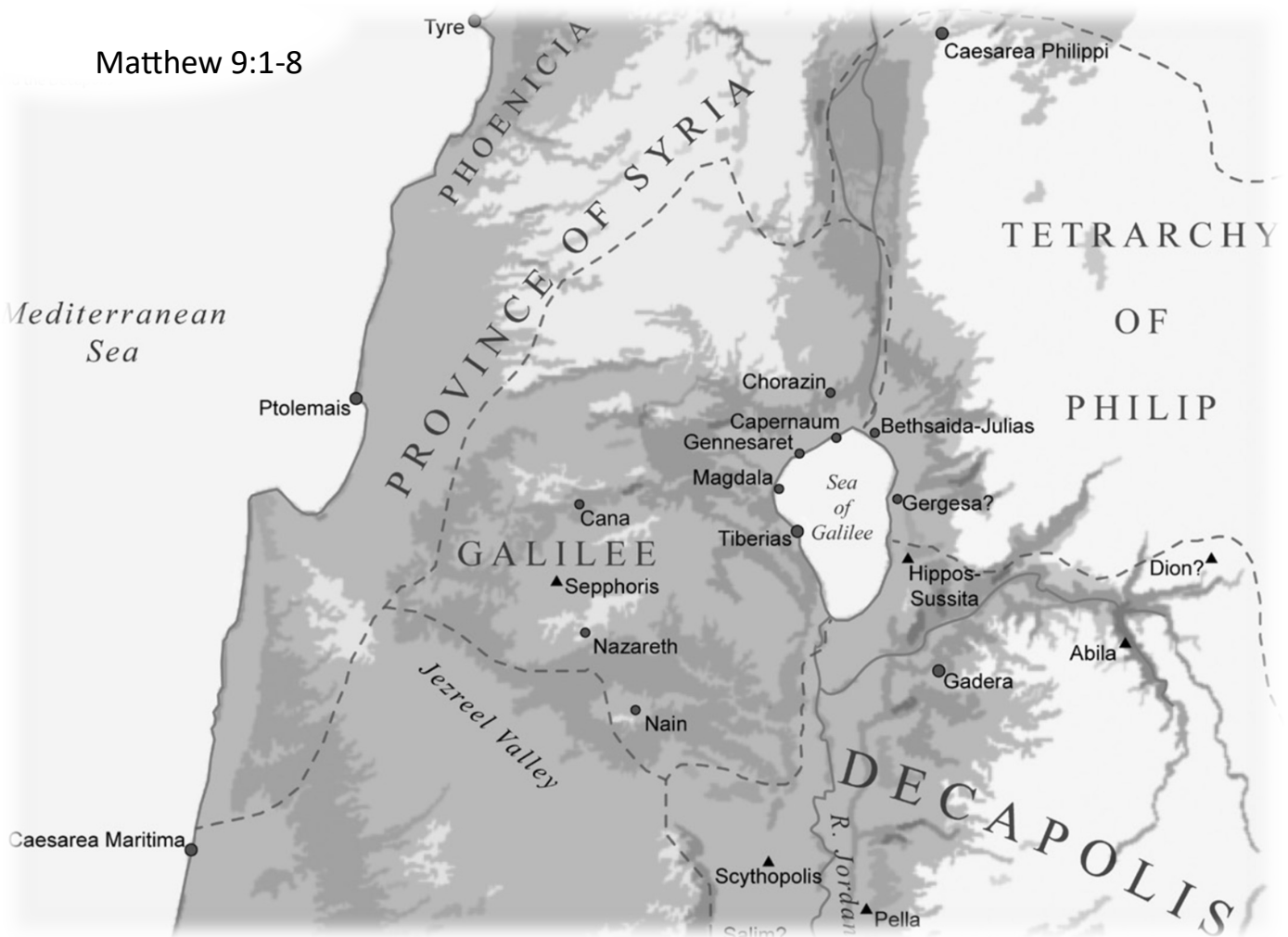
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Introduction

According to Rico Tice, the narrator of *Christianity Explored*, *'the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart'*. In other words, the world is the way it is because we are the way we are. Since Genesis 3 our life—our world—has been warped by sin.

Throughout the Old Testament, God works at his plan to deal with sin and its consequences. He makes huge promises to restore a people who will no longer sin or experience its consequences. It's not always clear how he's going to do this. As the Old Testament unfolds we think it could be the gracious gift of the law given through Moses. After all, the law showed Israel how to live as the people of God and enjoy his blessing. But that's not it. Despite the goodness of the law, it ends up showing sin all the more clearly.

God's plan to deal with the heart of the human problem narrows in on a promised king (in Hebrew called 'Messiah'). This king will be in the line of David. According to the prophets it seems like somehow this king will bring in 'the kingdom' of God. He will be as God himself among the people, the land will be renewed, and the consequences of sin will be no more. The lame will leap, the blind will see and the mute will be restored!

When Jesus arrives in Matthew we are told in chapter 1 that he is in the line of David. We are told that he is Immanuel/'God with us'. We are told he is to be given the name Jesus, because he will save his people from sin. Matthew sees Jesus as God's solution to sin and its consequences.

But is he really the Messiah with God's power and authority to defeat sin? How will he do it?

In chapters 1 to 4 of Matthew we have reason for optimism. Jesus resists temptation in the wilderness and seems like a better version of all humans before him.

In Chapters 5 to 7 as Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount—like a greater Moses—it could seem like he's giving people a second chance to obey the law. Except it's different. He claims he has come to fulfill the law. And he makes the audacious statement that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom. The sermon on the mount could leave us thinking, 'has he just come to remind us we're too sinful to enter the kingdom of God?'

From chapter 8, Jesus begins to give us a new hope. He does the impossible. He confronts sin and he seems to win! He shows he has power over sickness, nature, death and even power to forgive sins. He starts doing things only the Messiah with God's power and authority could. He speaks of a whole new way for sinners to enter God's kingdom. That is, by putting their faith in God's King.

Although we are yet to see the full picture of Jesus power and authority, in chapters 8 to 10 we see enough of Jesus authority over sin and sin's consequences to give us confidence. He is the one to deal with our sin. He is the one to deal with the problem of the human heart.

The question we need to ask ourselves as we read this is, do we trust Jesus is the one to deal with the heart of all our problems? Do we trust Jesus is the one to deal with our sin? My prayer for these studies is that they would help us all to trust Jesus is the one who can deal with our sin.

1 The impossible

Matthew 8:1-4

Getting started

What's the most impossible stunt/trick you've ever seen anyone pull off?

Pick a verse each and read Matthew 5:20, 22, 28, 32, 42, 48; 6:15, 24; 7:1, 24-29

Chapters 5 to 7 are Jesus' 'sermon on the mount'. He's teaching his disciples (5:1-2) but everyone is listening (7:28). The people Jesus is speaking to would have had a sense of what the righteous life God required was like from the 10 commandments and what they saw in the lives of the religious rulers/ pharisees. In this section, Jesus says the righteousness God requires is so much more than that—it's nothing less than perfection!

1. Which of these verses do you struggle to put into practice? Share with the group.

2. Imagine reading the sermon on the mount for the first time and having no idea that at the end of Matthew Jesus was going to die to pay for sin. How would you feel about your own righteousness and the possibility of you entering the kingdom of heaven?

For 3 chapters Jesus made it clear that God requires nothing less than perfect obedience. The crowds must have thought it was impossible for anyone to enter the kingdom. In this context, from chapter 8, Jesus begins to show his authority to make the impossible possible.

Read Matthew 8:1-2

3. What is the setting for this healing, and who is with Jesus as he does it?

4. Read Leviticus 13:45-46. What would someone with a defiling skin disease like leprosy understand about their place in God's people?

5. In 2 Kings 5 the king of Syria writes to the king of Israel asking him to cure his servant Naaman of leprosy. Read 2 Kings 5:6-7. What hope was there of anyone being healed of leprosy according to the king of Israel?

6. Considering what we've read in 2 Kings and Leviticus, how would the man in Matthew have felt as he fell to his knees before Jesus? What's at stake for him?

7. Consider the king of Israel's response to the request to cure Naaman. What might the man with leprosy's statement in verse 2 tell us about his view of Jesus (see Matt 4:23-24 & 7:28-29)?

Read Matthew 8:3-4

8. In verse 3 Jesus touches the man with leprosy, tells him he is willing and immediately heals him by speaking. These three things tell us three things about Jesus—what are they?

9. On several occasions in the gospels Jesus tells people not to tell anyone what he's done. Why do you think he does that here?

Leviticus 13 and 14 tell us priests were the official declarers of 'clean' and 'unclean' for people with skin diseases. They would never have seen leprosy cured, and if by some miracle they had, Leviticus 14 says there's a stack of sacrifices to be made before they can be considered clean.

10. Jesus asks the man to obey the law of Moses here, but what/who will this testify about?

11. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said he came to fulfill the law. How is he doing that here?

Jesus makes the impossible possible, he fulfills the law for us, taking our sin upon himself and making the unclean clean. Like the man with leprosy, all we need to do is have faith in him.

12. How can you remind yourself of the hopeless position you would be in on the day of judgment without Jesus?

13. Sometimes Satan tells us that we've sinned too greatly or too often to ever be allowed access to the kingdom of heaven. How can you remember that Jesus makes clean even the vilest who come to him in faith?

2 Ultimate authority

Matthew 8:5-17

Getting started

When do we see people use their authority?

Read Matthew 8:5-7

Centurions were the military backbone of the Roman Empire. They maintained discipline and executed orders. Non-Jews were recruited to fulfil these roles in Palestine. Like the man with leprosy in the last passage, this man would've been seen as 'outside' of God's people.

1. What do we learn about the centurion in these verses?

2. Does Jesus seem willing to help the centurion?

Read Matthew 8:8-9

3. In the last passage the man with leprosy fell to his knees before Jesus—he was desperate. What else do we learn about the centurion in verse 8 (see also Matthew 5:3)?

4. The centurion calls himself a 'man under authority'. Whose authority is the centurion under? What impact does this authority have when the centurion speaks?

5. The centurion thinks Jesus can just 'say the word' and his servant will be healed. To whom or what does he attribute this authority?

6. Many people struggle to believe Jesus' miracles—healing by a word, calming the storm, mass catering. They're certainly not usual to our ordinary experience! How does the centurion help us see that it makes perfect sense for Jesus to be able to do these things?

Read Matthew 8:10-13

7. Jesus tells those following him (8:1) that he's amazed. What is Jesus amazed about?

8. In chapter 5:20 Jesus told the crowds that unless their righteousness *exceeds that of the Pharisees* they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Here in 8:11 he seems to imply that a man like this non-Jewish centurion may take his place in the kingdom of heaven. How can Jesus say this? How might the centurion's righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees?

9. In contrast, who will be thrown out of the kingdom according to verse 12? What do you think will be the basis of their exclusion?

10. How does Jesus confirm that the centurion was right to trust in Jesus authority?

11. We might tell ourselves that if our good outweighs our bad then we'll be okay on the day we stand before God for judgment. How does this idea stack up with what we have learnt here?

12. If recognising Jesus' authority is the only way to enter the kingdom, how should this impact our lives?

Read Matthew 8:14-17

13. Jesus continues to show he has God's authority over sickness, which Matthew links to what Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:4. If you have time, read Isaiah 53:4-6. How did Jesus ultimately demonstrate his authority over sicknesses and death, and his authority to let sinners/outsideers like this centurion into the kingdom of heaven?

Pray

3 Costly, but worth it

Matthew 8:18-27

Getting Started

What's something you've bought that you've regretted because the cost ended up being greater than you realised?

Read Matthew 8:18-20

1. Why do you think the crowds are gathering around Jesus (see 8:16 to help)?
2. What does Jesus do when he sees the crowd? Why do you think he responds this way?
3. How would you describe the teacher of the law's approach to Jesus? How does it compare to Peter's commitment to Jesus in Matthew 26:33, 35?
4. Why do you think the teacher of the law was so keen to follow Jesus wherever he went?
5. According to verse 20, what does Jesus want the man to carefully consider before he follows through on his enthusiasm?
6. There can be no question that Jesus wants people to follow him (see his parting words to his disciples in Matthew 28:19). What do we learn here about the kind of followers Jesus wants?
7. Don Carson has a saying in his commentary on this part of Matthew, "fast ripe, fast rotten". We know from the tale of Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10 and the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:18-23 that some who jump on board, quickly jump off again. How does this passage help guard against that happening to us?

Read Matthew 8:21-22

8. The teacher of the law hadn't realised there was a cost to following Jesus. Is this disciple similar or different? Explain your answer.

9. Jesus isn't teaching that it's ungodly to bury your parents here. He's calling this reluctant man to realise there is a cost to following him. How does this reluctance to follow Jesus because of the cost play out in your life (see also James 4:13-17)?

Read Matthew 8:23-27

10. What are the disciples afraid of losing in this account?

11. Why do you think Jesus tells them they are of little faith for being afraid in v 26?

12. How does Jesus prove to the disciples that they had nothing to fear?

13. The disciples ask a question in v27. How would you answer that question (see Psalm 107:25-31)?

14. Jesus has shown he has great power and authority over storms. How does this help us to see that following him is worth it for us, no matter the cost?

15. What are some things in your life that you may struggle to give up in order to follow Jesus? Share with the group.

16. Are there times when you remember thinking, 'this is totally worth the cost'?

Pray

4 Not worth it?

Matthew 8:28-34

Getting Started

Is there anything you regret *not* buying because it's ended up being worth more than you thought?

Read Matthew 8:28-29

Jesus is leaving Jewish territory here. The region of the Gaderenes (or Gergesenes or Gerasenes depending on which translation you have) was on the eastern side of the lake—in Gentile territory. Matthew wants us to see that Jesus' authority extends beyond the borders of Israel.

1. Describe who Jesus encounters as he arrives.
2. How do these men help answer the question that the disciples asked back in v 27?
3. Many people find the mention of demons in the Bible a bit weird and a reason not to take the Bible seriously. Discuss your response to this in the group.
4. What does the second question put to Jesus in verse 29 tell us the demon possessed men believe about Jesus and his authority (see Jude 6 and Revelation 20:10)?

Read Matthew 8:30-32

5. Why, in verse 30, would the demons have assumed Jesus was going to drive them out of the two men? What do they know about Jesus that we're yet to learn (see Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32)?

6. When he was in Jewish territory, Jesus calmed a storm by speaking—demonstrating his power and authority over nature. How does Jesus show his power and authority isn't limited by physical borders here?

7. Why do you think the demons wanted to destroy the pigs (see Job 1:9-11)?

8. Demons are real and they really want people to reject God and his Son. But, they are also subject to the authority of Jesus. How could knowing these two truths help us in our day to day life?

Read Matthew 8:33-34

9. Notice the order/priority of reporting by those tending the pigs. What was their primary concern when they went back to town? What was secondary?

10. What does this priority of pigs over people tell us about those tending the pigs?

11. How does the whole town respond to the report from those tending the pigs?

12. Jesus drove out the demons because they were destroying the two men. Why do you think the town's people weren't amazed and thankful?

13. They can't see it, but Jesus is of far greater worth to the whole town than a large herd of pigs! His ultimate worth will be demonstrated when he lays down his life for those who have rejected God. But for these people, Jesus was less valuable than losing their livelihood. How might your priorities mirror/reflect this?

14. How can we ensure that we don't lose sight of the incomparable worth of Jesus to us and to those we live among?

Pray

Want to read more on what the Bible says about demons?
"Did the devil make me do it" by Mike McKinley is only 80 pages and a brilliant resource on Satan, evil spirits and demons.

5 Can he really say that?

Matthew 9:1-8

Getting Started

Can you think of an example of someone over promising and under delivering?

Read Matthew 9:1-2

1. Where has Jesus been, and where is he now? Explain the difference in the reception he received between verse 8:34 and 9:2.

2. Why do you think these men brought their friend to Jesus?

3. What did Jesus do, and not do, for the man?

4. Do you think this means Jesus prioritises forgiveness over healing (see 8:16-17 to help with your answer... it's a big question!)?

5. Jesus 'saw' something that prompted him to help this man? What did Jesus see?

6. Do you think this passage teaches us anything about praying for people who are sick or far from God? Explain your answer.

Read Matthew 9:3-5

7. Blasphemy is inappropriately using the name of God or demeaning God by claiming to do what he alone can do. What has Jesus said that's made the teachers of the law accuse him of blasphemy (see Isaiah 43:25)?

8. What are the 'evil thoughts' that Jesus is accusing the teachers of the law of having?

9. Jesus asks the teachers of the law a question in verse 5. Why might the teachers of the law have thought it was easier to heal someone than forgive their sins?

10. For us today, why do you think saying 'your sins are forgiven' seems so much easier than saying, 'be healed'?

11. How can we help ourselves to better fathom the impossibility of any human telling us our sins are forgiven (see for example Nahum 1:3; Job 10:14; Numbers 14:18)?

Read Matthew 9:6-8

12. How does Jesus demonstrate his authority over the impossible?

13. So far in this section (from the start of chapter 8) Matthew has shown us that Jesus has power over sickness, over nature, over demons and now over sin. What does Matthew want us to see about Jesus?

14. How do the crowds react to Jesus and what do they conclude?

15. To what extent are the crowds right in their assessment of Jesus, and to what extent are they still not quite seeing the whole picture (see Matthew 1:21 and 1:23)?

16. How can we help ourselves and each other to realise/remember that Jesus really does have the power to forgive the sins of those who come to him in faith?

Pray

6 Sinners, rejoice!

Matthew 9:9-17

Getting Started

Think of a time you've been sick and medicine quickly made you better. How'd you feel?

Read Matthew 9:9-11

1. So far in Matthew it seems like everyone has been trying to get close to Jesus (8:1, 16, 18; 9:8). Why hasn't Matthew already left his tax collector's booth to join the crowds?

2. Why does Matthew eventually follow Jesus? What's significant about this?

3. Where does Jesus find himself having dinner? Who joins him?

4. "You can tell a person's character by the company he keeps" is a popular secular saying. What do you think the Pharisees are concluding about Jesus' character here?

5. Do you think there are undesirable people that we may not feel comfortable having at church or around to our house for dinner? Explain your answer.

Read Matthew 9:12-13

6. Jesus says it is not the righteous he has come to call, but sinners. At first glance we could think Jesus is telling the Pharisees he hasn't come for them. But who are the righteous according to Jesus (see Matthew 5:20 and Romans 3:10)?

7. Jesus tells the Pharisees to go and learn the meaning of Hosea 6:6. Read Hosea 6:4-10. Why does Jesus want these Israelite Pharisees to go and learn this?

8. What do you think Jesus wants for the Pharisees—or ‘what is his heart’ for the Pharisees?

9. How do you think most Australians see themselves, as ‘righteous’ or ‘sinners’ - or ‘healthy’ or ‘sick’? Why? (Maybe the rest of Hosea 6:6 that Jesus leaves off will help)

10. How can we help ourselves and others to realise we all need a doctor; we all need to hear Jesus call?

Read Matthew 9:14-17

11. Jesus tells John’s disciples the reason his disciples are not engaging in their mournful religiousness is because the bridegroom is here. Read Hosea 2:16-20 and John 3:28-29. Who is Jesus saying claiming to be, and why is this not the time for mourning?

12. When does Jesus say it will be time for mourning/fasting? What does he mean?

13. Jesus seems to be saying he’s bringing in a whole new garment and completely new wineskins—not just patching over the old ones. Why is Jesus doing this (see Matthew 5:20, 48)? And how will he do this (see Matthew 5:17 and Matthew 20:28)?

14. Although the bridegroom was taken away, we learned in Ephesians last term that he has been raised and we have been seated with him in the heavenly realms—even though we were dead in sin! We are inseparably bound to the bridegroom forever. It’s not time for mourning for us—but time for rejoicing. How can we help ourselves and each other to rejoice in Christ?

Pray

7 Power over death

Matthew 9:18-26

Getting Started

Have you ever been saved from seemingly certain death? Share with the group.

Read Matthew 9:18-19

1. What was Jesus just saying (see particularly v 15)?
2. Synagogue rulers were quite prominent members of the community, but under the influence of the Pharisees may not have been super keen to acknowledge Jesus. What makes this one come to Jesus?
3. What understanding do you think he has of Jesus?
4. After all the opposition Jesus has faced from religious rulers in Matthew, how might we expect him to respond to this ruler's request? How does he actually respond?
5. What do we learn here about the character of Jesus? Where else have we seen this aspect of his character in Matthew?
6. What comfort, if any, is this aspect of Jesus character to you?

Read Matthew 9:20-22

7. What does this woman have in common with the synagogue ruler?
8. What is her understanding of Jesus' power and authority?

9. How does Jesus respond to this woman?

10. What does Jesus mean when he says 'your faith'?

11. How is the way Jesus deals with this woman be a comfort to us?

Read Matthew 9:23-26

12. What does Jesus see when he enters the house in verse 23?

13. What bold declaration does he make in verse 24? Based on what we've seen in Matthew so far, what should we expect when Jesus speaks?

14. What happens with the little girl?

15. How is Jesus able to do this so confidently (see Matthew 9:15 and 28:5-7, 18)?

16. For Jesus, helping those who seem desperate and beyond hope is as easy as rousing someone from their sleep. How can we let Jesus 'take us by the hand' (figuratively speaking) in the face of our hopelessness... and even death?

17. Could this passage offer us any comfort when we're sick—or when our loved ones have died? Explain your answer.

Pray

Want to read more on what the Bible says about healing?

"Do miracles happen today" by Tim Chester is only 96 pages and a good resource on whether healings happen today.

8 3 different responses

Matthew 9:27-34

Getting Started

Why doesn't everyone love country music?

Read Matthew 9:27-28

1. What do we learn about the two men in this section?

2. How do they compare to the synagogue ruler and the sick woman in verses 18-26?

Read Matthew 9:29-31

3. How does Jesus reaction to these two men in verse 29 differ to his response to the sick woman in verse 22 and the paralysed man's friends in verse 2?

4. What happens for the men and why do you think Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about this?

5. Usually when Jesus speaks, things seem to happen. What happens when Jesus speaks to the blind men in verse 31?

6. What do you think these blind men understood about Jesus?

7. How might we sometimes see Jesus as someone who exists to grant our wishes, but not to obey?

Read Matthew 9:32-34

8. What is the difference between the blind men and the mute man in their approach to Jesus?

9. What bit of detail does Matthew want us to know about the healing of the mute man?

10. What is significant about the crowd's response? See Isaiah 35:3-6 to help with your answer.

11. While the crowd may be beginning to wonder if Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to rescue his people—perhaps the Messiah of God, what do the Pharisees think of Jesus at this stage? Why do you think they respond like this?

12. Jesus has consistently shown that he acts in the world with God's power, authority and compassion. Yet people respond differently. Can you relate to any of the responses we've seen in Matthew 8 and 9, e.g. the Synagogue ruler, the blind men, the disciples or the Pharisees?

13. How does seeing the way different people respond to Jesus help us as we seek to point the people of Bathurst to who Jesus is and what he has done?

Pray

9 The King's workers

Matthew 9:35-10:15

Getting Started

Who's the most important person you've ever worked for?

Read Matthew 9:35-38

1. Matthew gives a summary statement of what Jesus has been doing for the last few chapters (verse 35). Look at Isaiah 35:1-10 and Hosea 2:16-23. How do these passages help us to understand what Matthew means when he says "Jesus was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom"?

2. What do we learn in verse 36 about Jesus' character and the reason he was so fixed on bringing the crowds the good news?

3. What action flows from Jesus' character and his perception of the condition of the crowds?

4. Often when Matthew tells us about the things Jesus does, he's being descriptive—he's describing something Jesus did so we can better understand who he is and why he came. So Jesus calming the storm, feeding 5000—it's descriptive. Sometimes Matthew tells us something Jesus did and it can be prescriptive—in other words it prescribes a certain action or response for us. Here Matthew shows us Jesus' character and how he responds to the condition of the people—it would be fairly safe to say it prescribes a certain response from Jesus followers. What response do you think this passage is calling us to?

5. Discuss how your own compassion and understanding of the condition of the people causes you to feel/act. What practical steps could you take to pray like Jesus asks?

Read Matthew 10:1-4

6. From what we've seen in Matthew 8 and 9, how is it possible for Jesus to give the twelve apostles such authority?

Read Matthew 10:5-8

7. Remembering the passages we looked at earlier in Hosea and Isaiah, why do you think Jesus wants his workers to focus on Israel?

Read Matthew 10:9-15

8. In verses 9 to 13, what kind of reception does Jesus tell his workers to look for as they go among the lost sheep of Israel?

9. What kind of reception might they receive instead according to verse 14?

10. Jesus is pretty clear with his disciples that they are to go to the lost sheep of Israel first. What will be the consequences for the lost sheep of Israel if they don't receive the good news of the kingdom?

11. If being part of the lost sheep of Israel is not a guarantee of entering the kingdom of heaven—what is (see verse 32 and 33)?

12. How does this passage help us to understand what we might encounter as we speak to people about Jesus today?

13. How can we help people to enter the kingdom of heaven?

Pray

