

Homiletics Analysis: Matthew 9

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Matthew 9 is a sustained demonstration chapter. Following the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7) and the authority narratives of chapter 8, chapter 9 continues and intensifies the display of Jesus’ sovereign authority — now extended explicitly to forgiveness of sins, social boundary-crossing, and the restoration of the dead. The chapter moves through nine distinct acts of authority: the healing of the paralytic with the pronouncement of forgiveness (vv. 1–8); the call of Matthew and the controversy over table fellowship with sinners (vv. 9–13); the dispute about fasting (vv. 14–17); the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the bleeding woman (vv. 18–26); two blind men healed (vv. 27–31); a mute demoniac restored (vv. 32–34); and a closing summary statement about the harvest and the need for workers (vv. 35–38). The chapter is not a miscellany — it builds a cumulative case. Jesus has authority over sin, disease, death, social exclusion, religious tradition, and spiritual blindness. The Pharisees’ counter-narrative (vv. 3, 11, 34) runs throughout as a dark thread: they attribute Jesus’ authority to blasphemy and demonic power. The chapter ends not with a final healing but with a harvest summons — Jesus’ compassion for the harassed and helpless crowds generates a missional imperative.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking through this chapter to produce *confident, worshipful allegiance to Jesus* as the one who has authority over every dimension of human need and ruin. The cumulative effect is not merely cognitive — it is not a theology lecture about Christology. The intent is that the reader will be so confronted with the scope of Jesus’ authority that three responses become impossible to avoid: wonder, the recognition of personal need, and the summons to join the missional movement Jesus inaugurates. The Pharisees function as a foil — their hardened rejection demonstrates that the only alternative to worship is the self-protective attribution of Jesus’ power to something other than God. The harvest cry of verses 35–38 is not an appendix — it is the intended destination: Jesus’ authority displayed in compassion generates workers who pray and go.

Subject Sentence: Jesus displays sovereign authority over sin, disease, death, and exclusion — and calls workers for the harvest.

Primary Claim: The Jesus of Matthew 9 has authority over everything that ruins human beings — sin, sickness, death, social rejection, and spiritual blindness — and His

compassion for the harassed and helpless is not a spectator event but a summons to prayer and mission.

Interpretive Evaluation

The forgiveness pronouncement in verses 1–8: The most theologically contested moment in the chapter is Jesus’ declaration, “Your sins are forgiven,” before healing the paralytic. Roman Catholic interpreters have sometimes read the scribes’ objection (“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”) as a warrant for the Church’s mediating role in absolution — Jesus’ authority to forgive, extended to His priests. This reading must be *refuted*: the text argues in precisely the opposite direction. The scribes are correct that only God can forgive sins, and the healing of the paralytic is Jesus’ demonstration that *He* — personally, directly, in His own name — exercises divine prerogative. There is no institutional mediation in view. The crowd glorifies God “who had given such authority to men” (v. 8), which some read as a transfer to the community; but the referent is Jesus himself, and Matthew’s larger argument (7:28–29) is that Jesus teaches and acts with His own authority, unlike the scribes. The crowd’s response reflects their astonishment that a human being speaks with divine prerogative — not an ecclesiological conclusion.

The call of Matthew and table fellowship (vv. 9–13): Wesleyan and some Baptist interpreters tend to read verse 12–13 (“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”) as a straightforward invitation that depends on human initiative — the sinner must decide to come. This partially holds: there is genuine invitation in the text. But the weight of the narrative is on *Jesus seeking* (He calls Matthew; He enters the house; He reclines with sinners), not on sinners seeking Jesus. The Reformed reading is to be *preferred*: the initiative is Christ’s, and “I came to call sinners” frames the mission as a divine summons, not merely an open offer awaiting human response. The Hosea 6:6 citation (“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”) is not a critique of OT ritual as such but a prophetic indictment of religiosity that uses correct form to avoid genuine engagement with the needy.

The fasting dispute (vv. 14–17): Dispensational interpreters have sometimes read the “new wine / new wineskins” saying as a categorical break between the old covenant era and the new — the church as a wholly new structure incompatible with Israel’s forms. This reading *qualifies*: Jesus is indeed announcing eschatological newness, but the imagery is not about institutional discontinuity between Israel and the Church (a Dispensational import). The point is about the incompatibility of old-covenant mourning patterns with the presence of the Bridegroom. The fasting of John’s disciples (and by implication the Pharisees) was appropriate to an era of anticipation; now that the Bridegroom has arrived, the form of devotion must match the reality. The bridegroom-language is the hermeneutical key — this is a realized-eschatological claim about Jesus’ presence, not a dispensational scheme.

The raising of Jairus’ daughter (vv. 18–26): The interweaving of the bleeding woman’s healing within the Jairus narrative is sometimes treated as two parallel healing stories with

independent applications. The structure is deliberate: both the woman (twelve years of hemorrhage, social and ceremonial exclusion) and the girl (twelve years of age, dead) represent the extreme of helplessness. Together they form a single claim about Jesus' authority over chronic, hopeless conditions and death itself. Moralizing applications that treat the bleeding woman primarily as a model of "reaching out in faith" misread the weight of the text: the point is not her technique but His power. Faith here is the instrument, not the achievement.

The harvest saying (vv. 35–38): Pentecostal and charismatic readings often focus on the healing ministry of the chapter as the template for Spirit-empowered signs ministry today, with verses 35–38 as a confirmation that this ministry should continue and expand. This *acknowledges* something genuine — the compassion-to-mission movement is genuinely in view. The text, however, does not supply a doctrine of charismatic continuation here; the mission Jesus assigns is a harvest mission requiring *sent workers*, not primarily a healing mandate. The prayer of verse 38 is the Reformed pivot: the workers are not self-mobilized or gifted-and-deployed — they are *prayed for*, emphasizing divine initiative in mission from first to last.

Key Canonical Support

- **Isaiah 53:4–5** — “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.” Matthew quotes this explicitly in 8:17; it governs the healing chapter that follows. The healings in Matthew 9 are not raw demonstrations of power but the fulfillment of the Servant’s vocation to bear human suffering. The authority Jesus displays is inseparable from the substitutionary bearing that grounds it.
- **Psalms 103:2–5** — “Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases... who redeems your life from the pit.” The Psalm clusters the same actions Matthew 9 narrates — forgiveness, healing, redemption from death — and attributes them to the LORD’s covenant mercy. Jesus’ actions in Matthew 9 perform the Psalm, making the identification of Jesus with the LORD explicit.
- **Hosea 6:6** — “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Jesus cites this twice in Matthew (9:13 and 12:7), and in both cases against religious leaders who use correct form to avoid mercy. The citation locates Jesus’ table fellowship within prophetic tradition and against a pattern of religious self-protection that excludes the needy. The Pharisees’ religion produces exclusion; Jesus’ mission produces inclusion through forgiveness.
- **Ezekiel 34:4–5, 11–12** — The scattered, harassed, and helpless sheep of Israel, abandoned by false shepherds, whom the LORD Himself will seek and tend. Jesus’ compassion on the crowds in verse 36 (“harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”) is a direct echo of this passage — Jesus is doing what the LORD promised to do when Israel’s shepherds failed. The mission is divine, the

compassion is covenantal, and the workers are instruments of the LORD's own shepherding.

- **John 5:21–27** — “The Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it... the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” The raising of Jairus’ daughter (and Lazarus later) is given its theological ground in John’s Gospel: Jesus gives life because the Father has granted Him to have life in Himself. Matthew 9’s display of authority over death is not a detached miracle — it is the exercise of a life-giving prerogative that belongs to the Son by the Father’s grant.

Aim: To confront the reader so thoroughly with the scope of Jesus’ authority that the only remaining questions are whether to worship Him, whether to harden against Him, and whether to pray and go as He commands.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
9:1	Jesus crosses back to “his own town” (Capernaum) by boat	Geographical marker; “his own town” links to 4:13; Jesus’ home base of Galilean ministry
9:2	A paralytic is brought on a mat; Jesus sees their faith and pronounces forgiveness of sins	Faith is the faith of the carriers as well (note “their faith”); forgiveness precedes healing
9:3	Scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy — “This man is blaspheming”	Internal accusation, not spoken aloud; Jesus perceives their thoughts (v. 4)
9:4–5	Jesus perceives their thoughts; poses the rhetorical question: which is easier, to forgive or to heal?	The question is deliberately unanswerable by human standard — both are impossible; both require divine authority
9:6	The healing is performed as proof that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins	“Son of Man” — Daniel 7:13–14 background; authority-claim is explicit
9:7–8	The man rises and walks; the crowds are filled with awe	“To men” reflects the crowd’s limited

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	and glorify God for giving such authority to men	understanding — they glorify God, not yet recognizing Jesus as God himself
9:9	Jesus calls Matthew (a tax collector) from his tax booth — “Follow me”; Matthew rises and follows	Immediate, unconditional response; mirrors the call of the first disciples (4:18–22)
9:10	Jesus reclines at table with many tax collectors and sinners; disciples present	“Reclining” — the posture of covenant fellowship; the setting is Matthew’s house (implied by Luke’s parallel)
9:11	Pharisees challenge the disciples: Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?	They address the disciples, not Jesus — perhaps unwilling to confront Him directly
9:12–13	Jesus answers: the sick need a doctor, not the healthy; He desires mercy not sacrifice; He came to call sinners, not the righteous	Hosea 6:6 citation; “righteous” is ironic — those who think they need no physician are self-deceived
9:14	John’s disciples ask why Jesus’ disciples do not fast as they and the Pharisees do	Fasting question comes from John’s disciples — not hostile, but confused; a genuine theological question
9:15	Jesus answers: the wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is present; the days are coming when he will be taken — then they will fast	Bridegroom imagery; anticipates the passion; fasting is not abolished but relocated eschatologically
9:16–17	Two parables: unshrunk cloth on old garment; new wine in old wineskins — both illustrate incompatibility of new-era forms with old	The point is the eschatological newness that has arrived with Jesus, not institutional replacement
9:18	While Jesus is speaking, a ruler (synagogue official; named Jairus in Mark/Luke)	“Just died” — beyond the reach of medicine or prayer

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	kneels before him, reports his daughter just died, asks Jesus to lay hand on her	by conventional expectation
9:19–20	Jesus rises and follows; a woman who has hemorrhaged for twelve years approaches from behind and touches the fringe of his garment	Twelve years: same as the girl's age (Mark 5:42); the woman is ceremonially unclean; her touch should defile
9:21	The woman reasons: "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well"	Faith expressed in inner reasoning; she does not yet speak — the touch is the act of faith
9:22	Jesus turns, sees her, says "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well"; the woman is healed instantly	"Daughter" — Jesus claims her; her exclusion ends; the healing confirms and ratifies her faith
9:23–24	Jesus arrives at the ruler's house; sees flute players and the crowd wailing; says the girl is not dead but sleeping; the crowd laughs at him	"Sleeping" — not denying death but naming it from the perspective of what He is about to do
9:25	The crowd is put outside; Jesus takes the girl's hand; she rises	Physical contact with a corpse (unclean); Jesus is not defiled — He reverses the defilement
9:26	The report spreads through all that district	Fame grows; the scale of public awareness increases with each healing
9:27–28	Two blind men follow Jesus, crying "Son of David, have mercy on us"; Jesus enters a house and asks if they believe He is able; they affirm	"Son of David" — messianic title; Jesus tests the faith before acting
9:29–31	Jesus touches their eyes, restores sight "according to your faith"; sternly warns them to tell no one; they	The charge of silence is disobeyed — messianic news is too large to contain; ironic: healings multiply

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
9:32–33	spread the news anyway A mute demoniac is brought; Jesus casts out the demon; the man speaks; crowds marvel: “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel”	witnesses The crowd’s verdict is cumulatively significant — this is unprecedented in Israel’s history
9:34	Pharisees: “He casts out demons by the prince of demons”	The definitive Pharisaic counter-claim; a descent into attributing divine work to Satan; the blasphemy escalates
9:35	Summary: Jesus goes through all the towns and villages — teaching, preaching the kingdom, healing every disease and every affliction	The summary mirrors 4:23 almost word-for-word — Matthew 9 closes where chapter 4 opened; the section is bookended
9:36	Jesus sees the crowds and has compassion — harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd	Ezekiel 34 echo; compassion (<i>splagchnizomai</i>) is gut-level, visceral; not mere sympathy
9:37–38	Jesus tells His disciples: the harvest is plentiful, the workers are few; pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers	The missional summons; prayer precedes and generates mission; the authority displayed through the chapter now generates a harvest mandate

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	9:1–8	Authority to Forgive: The Paralytic and the Blasphemy Accusation
2	9:9–13	Authority to Include: Matthew’s Call and Table Fellowship with Sinners
3	9:14–17	Authority to Redefine: The Fasting Dispute and the

Division	Verses	Label
4	9:18–26	New-Era Parables Authority over Death and Chronic Suffering: Jairus’ Daughter and the Bleeding Woman
5	9:27–31	Authority over Blindness: The Two Blind Men
6	9:32–34	Authority over Demonic Muteness — and the Pharisaic Counter-Verdict
7	9:35–38	Authority Generates Compassion, Compassion Generates Mission

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus displays sovereign authority over sin, disease, death, and exclusion — and calls workers for the harvest.

Primary Claim: The Jesus of Matthew 9 has authority over everything that ruins human beings — sin, sickness, death, social rejection, and spiritual blindness — and His compassion for the harassed and helpless is not a spectator event but a summons to prayer and mission.

Applications (Five)

1. (*Mind/Belief*) Stop limiting your category of need to what feels addressable. The paralytic’s friends brought a man whose legs didn’t work — but Jesus addressed his sins first, then his legs. The Pharisees thought this was a confusion of categories; Jesus thought it was precision. The reader who has been carrying a spiritual wound under a physical complaint, or a relational rupture under a practical crisis, needs to hear that Jesus’ authority is not limited to the presenting problem. Bring the whole person — including the part you are afraid to name — to the one who sees beneath the surface and addresses the deeper ruin first.

2. (*Affections/Worship*) Let the cumulative weight of Matthew 9 produce genuine awe rather than familiarity. The crowd’s verdict in verse 33 — “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel” — is a response to what they have just witnessed. Modern readers have read these stories so many times that they have lost their explosive force. Read the chapter as if encountering Jesus for the first time: a paralytic walks, a dead girl rises, a

woman unclean for twelve years is named “daughter,” and blind eyes open. These are not illustrations of principles — they are eruptions of divine authority into a ruined world. Let the chapter produce what it was designed to produce: wonder, awe, and the instinctive bending of the knee.

3. (Will/Behavior) Examine who you are willing to eat with — and who you are not.

Jesus reclined at table with tax collectors and sinners as a deliberate act, not an accident of hospitality. The Pharisees’ objection was religious self-protection masquerading as doctrinal fidelity. The question this passage puts to the reader is concrete: whose company makes you uncomfortable, and is your discomfort shaped more by Pharisaic categories of the acceptable or by Jesus’ pattern of seeking the excluded? The application is not abstract — it is the lunch table, the dinner party, the conversation with the person others have written off.

4. (Affections/Worship) Let Jesus’ compassion for the harassed and helpless move you from spectatorship to intercession. Verse 36 does not say Jesus noticed the crowds — it says He was *moved in His gut* (*splagchnizomai*) at the sight of them: harassed, helpless, shepherdless. The immediate movement is to prayer: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.” Jesus’ compassion is not a feeling He keeps to Himself — it generates intercession and then mission. The reader who sees genuine human need and feels nothing has not yet been shaped by Jesus’ compassion. The reader who feels something but stops at emotion without prayer has not yet followed the chapter’s movement. The harvest summons begins not with recruitment but with petition.

5. (Mind/Belief) Recognize that hardness toward Jesus is not a neutral option — it requires a counter-narrative that becomes increasingly desperate. The Pharisees move from “He is blaspheming” (v. 3) to “He eats with sinners” (v. 11) to “He casts out demons by the prince of demons” (v. 34). Each response is more extreme than the last because the evidence is accumulating and the self-protective counter-story must become proportionally larger to contain it. The reader needs to see this as the spiritual logic of unbelief: refusing to worship does not produce neutrality, it produces an escalating alternative account of Jesus. There is no comfortable middle ground in Matthew 9 — only the crowd’s awe, the disciples’ following, or the Pharisees’ darkening counter-narrative.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Matthew 9 is a sustained Christological argument presented in narrative form. What the chapter teaches about God is this: the God of Israel, who promised through Isaiah to bear His people’s infirmities and through Ezekiel to shepherd His scattered, harassed flock, has arrived in the person of Jesus to do exactly what He promised. Jesus’ authority is not a new divine project — it is the fulfillment of the old one. The chapter insists on the full scope of Jesus’ dominion: He exercises authority over the spiritual (forgiveness of sins), the physical (disease and death), the social (the excluded and the ceremonially unclean), and the demonic (the mute demoniac). Nothing that ruins a

human being falls outside His reach. And the chapter refuses to separate power from compassion: the gut-level compassion of verse 36 is not an afterthought — it is the affective ground from which the entire ministry flows.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Matthew 9 embodies the Reformed insistence that salvation is initiated and accomplished by Christ alone, from the outside in. Every person healed in this chapter is brought to Jesus, found by Jesus, or addressed by Jesus before they have done anything to merit or secure the outcome. The paralytic does nothing — he is carried. Matthew is called before he has offered any credentials. The bleeding woman reaches out in desperation, not achievement. The dead girl does nothing at all — she is raised. This is grace in narrative form: the ruined are sought, addressed, and restored by the one who has authority, not by the effort or merit of those in need. The harvest saying (vv. 37–38) reinforces the Reformed axis: the mission depends on workers sent by the Lord of the harvest in answer to prayer — not on strategic initiative or self-mobilized effort. Sovereignty governs the mission from beginning to end; the appropriate human response is prayer and obedience.

Main Takeaway

Jesus has authority over every form of ruin — your sin, your body, your death, your exclusion, your blindness — and the only question Matthew 9 leaves open is whether you will let that authority produce worship and obedience or whether you will construct an increasingly desperate story about why He is something other than what He appears to be. The chapter ends not with a final healing but with a harvest prayer: the compassion Jesus has for the harassed and helpless is now His claim on you — pray, and go.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the healings as isolated miracle stories rather than a cumulative Christological argument.** The most common failure in preaching Matthew 9 is to select one healing episode (often the paralytic or the bleeding woman) and treat it as a self-contained text with its own moral or spiritual application. This misses Matthew's architectural intention: the chapter is a sustained demonstration, and its force is cumulative. A preacher who takes only the bleeding woman's story and preaches "reach out to Jesus in faith" has generated a true application from a true text but has stripped out two-thirds of what gives it theological weight. The chapter rewards being preached as a whole.

- **Moralizing the call of Matthew.** It is tempting to preach the call of Matthew (vv. 9–13) primarily as a model of decisive discipleship — “Matthew left everything immediately; do the same.” This is not wrong but is radically incomplete. The weight of the text is on Jesus’ initiative, not Matthew’s response. Jesus sees him, calls him, and eats with sinners in his house. Matthew’s response is the effect, not the cause. Preaching the call as a model of human decisiveness produces admirable commitment without gospel roots.
- **Extracting the bleeding woman’s healing as a technique of faith.** “If I just touch His garment, I will be made well” (v. 21) is the woman’s inner reasoning, not a formula for effective prayer or a model of the right faith-posture. Sermons that treat this as instruction in how to approach Jesus (“touch the hem of His garment in faith”) have turned a demonstration of Jesus’ power into a lesson in the reader’s technique. The focus must remain on Jesus, who turns, sees, and names her “daughter” — the healing is His act, and her faith is the instrument, not the achievement.
- **Neglecting the Pharisaic counter-narrative as a preaching element.** The Pharisees appear in verses 3, 11, and 34, and their responses trace a darkening arc from “blasphemy” to “prince of demons.” Preachers often pass over this thread or treat it as background color. But the Pharisaic response is theologically essential: it demonstrates that the accumulating evidence of Jesus’ authority does not automatically produce faith; it can equally produce hardened counter-narrative. This has direct application to the reader and should not be omitted.
- **Spiritualizing the harvest saying into an abstraction.** Verses 37–38 are sometimes preached as general encouragement about church growth or evangelistic opportunity. The harvest saying is grounded in Jesus’ specific compassion for specific crowds (v. 36) and generates a specific command: *pray*. The preacher should resist the move from “the harvest is plentiful” directly to mission strategy and recruitment. The text’s first move is intercession — “ask the Lord of the harvest” — and the workers who go are sent in answer to that prayer. Preaching that mobilizes without first grounding in prayer has inverted the text’s movement.
- **Failing to connect the healing chapter to the Passion.** The bridegroom saying in verse 15 (“the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them — then they will fast”) is a quiet but load-bearing anticipation of the cross. Jesus’ authority to heal and forgive is inseparable from His coming suffering. The healings in Matthew 9 are not simply displays of divine power — they are the Servant bearing human suffering on the way to bearing it definitively at Calvary (Isaiah 53:4–5 / Matthew 8:17). Omitting this connection produces a triumphalist Christology that lacks the cross at its center.