

As we look around, both locally and globally, it is quite easy to draw up a list of things that our world needs... just consider for a moment the number of displaced people who need a home, the number of illnesses that require medical attention, the number of war zones that need peace, or the number of people who live each day in poverty. There can be no denying the many pressing needs.

At the beginning of Matthew chapter 9, Jesus identifies the greatest need of every human being whether rich or poor, in good health or bad, and demonstrates how he is the only one who can meet that need.

#1 - Jesus has the authority to forgive sins (vv1-8)

On encountering the paralysed man, Jesus surprises everyone with his response. Understandably, the crowd might expect to see another healing, but instead Jesus says, "your sins are forgiven," and in doing so identifies that the greatest need of this man is forgiveness, even more than being able to walk.

This causes consternation amongst the religious leaders, and an accusation of blasphemy towards Jesus. They would be right, if Jesus were not God, because forgiveness of sins is God's job alone. In order to silence his accusers, Jesus heals the man of his physical paralysis, proving his authority to forgive sins, and so healing the man of his spiritual paralysis.

But as we read on we realise this was not a one-off. In fact, Jesus describes spiritual healing as his mission...

#2 - Jesus has come to call the sin-sick (vv9-13)

Jesus' calling of a disreputable tax collector like Matthew, and then sitting down to share a meal with him and his friends, again raises accusations against Jesus (v11). Jesus takes the opportunity to explain that just as a doctor seeks to heal sick people, so Jesus' mission is to heal people who are sick with sin. In quoting the prophet Hosea, Jesus urges his accusers to realise that although they consider themselves good enough for God, because of their religious observance of the law, God is more concerned with the state of their hearts. The tragedy is that they are blind to the sin-sickness in their hearts and their need for forgiveness. They consider themselves righteous (morally superior to Jesus' dinner guests), and so they see no need for the 'doctor' themselves.

What about you? The great news is that Jesus has come to offer full forgiveness to those who recognise our great need for it.

#3 - Jesus' faithfulness brings great joy (vv14-17)

In this final section, Jesus emphasises that who he is and what he is doing is a cause for celebration... for feasting not fasting. After all, why would his disciples be fasting (mourning their sin) when the one who can forgive their sins is amongst them?

Just as a wedding banquet is a time for celebration, Jesus explains that he is the faithful bridegroom (an Old Testament description of God - Isaiah 62v5; Hosea 2v19-20) who has come to earth, and his arrival is a time for rejoicing.

In an allusion to his death on the cross (his necessary work to pay the penalty for our sins) Jesus says there will be a time to mourn, but the emphasis is on the joy a Christian will know in the present, as we look forward to the heavenly banquet.