

The Messiah's Works

Matthew 8–9 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Matthew follows the Messiah's words (chapters 5–7) with the Messiah's works: ten miracles arranged in three waves, showing the same authority the crowds heard on the mountain now touching lepers, commanding storms, expelling demons, forgiving sins, and raising the dead. They meet the centurion whose words the Church puts on our lips at every Mass, and they discover that Matthew ends the paralytic story with a sentence almost too Catholic to believe: God “had given such authority to men.”

Catholic Touchstone. Christ the physician of souls and bodies, the sacramental pattern of grace through touch and word and matter, and the roots of the sacrament of Reconciliation in the authority to forgive sins exercised on earth.

What You Need to Know

Chapters 8–9 gather ten miracles into three groups of three (with the ruler's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman interwoven as one story), separated by two interludes on the cost and call of discipleship. The arrangement is Matthew's own; he has collected works from different times into a portrait. After the Sermon's “authority” (7:29), each scene now demonstrates that authority over a different enemy: disease, distance, demon, storm, paralysis, death itself.

Notice how physical Jesus is. He touches the leper, whom the Law declared untouchable, and instead of uncleanness flowing into Jesus, cleansing flows into the leper. He takes Peter's mother-in-law by the hand. The hemorrhaging woman is healed through the fringe of his garment. Grace travels through matter and touch and spoken word. This is the sacramental pattern in seed: the Church's sacraments are not a departure from how Jesus works but a continuation of it.

The centurion (8:5–13) is a Gentile officer of the occupying army, and Jesus marvels at him, one of only two times the Gospels record Jesus marveling. His logic is a soldier's: authority does not need proximity, “only say the word.” Jesus responds with the first great announcement that many will come from east and west to recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the son-of-Abraham thread of 1:1 breaking into the open. The Church so treasures this man's sentence that she has placed it on our lips immediately before Holy Communion at every Mass: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.

Matthew 8:17 quotes Isaiah 53:4, “he took our infirmities and bore our diseases,” the Suffering Servant song. Matthew wants the healings read in the shadow of the Servant: this power will cost the Healer everything, a note that fully sounds only at the cross.

The stilling of the storm (8:23–27) ends with the question the whole Gospel is built to answer: “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” The Old Testament has an answer ready, and tonight the group will find it in Psalm 107. Do not give it away.

The paralytic (9:1–8) provokes the first open conflict. Jesus forgives the man's sins before healing him, the scribes silently charge blasphemy, and their unspoken premise is correct: only God can forgive sins. Jesus then heals the body precisely as visible proof "that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." On earth: not only at the throne of heaven but here, in the middle of human life. And Matthew's closing line is remarkable: the crowds glorified God "who had given such authority to men," plural. Writing decades later for a Church that knew the ministry of forgiveness among men, Matthew let that plural stand, and readers ancient and modern have heard the Church's own experience in it. Tonight's steelman lives here.

The call of Matthew the tax collector (9:9–13) gives the session its heart: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6), and "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." The evangelist is telling his own story in three verses. Finally, watch 9:27: two blind men cry out "Have mercy on us, Son of David." This is the first time in the Gospel anyone addresses Jesus by the genealogy's royal title, and it is the blind who see it. The Son of David thread planted in Session 1 begins to move.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 53:4.** The Servant who takes our infirmities; Matthew reads the healings as Servant-work that will cost the cross.
- **Psalms 107:23–30.** Who stills the storm so that the waves of the sea are hushed? The psalm's answer is the answer to the disciples' question in the boat.
- **Hosea 6:6.** "I desire mercy and not sacrifice": Jesus sends the Pharisees, and us, to go and learn this line, and he will quote it again in chapter 12.
- **Leviticus 13–14.** Background to the leper: the untouchability of leprosy and the priestly verification Jesus explicitly honors, "show yourself to the priest."

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermons on the Gospels)

Augustine loves the centurion's paradox: by declaring himself unworthy to receive Christ under his roof, he showed himself worthy to receive Christ into his heart. Humility is the doorway the Lord delights to enter, which is why the Church gives us this soldier's words at the threshold of Communion.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the paralytic, Chrysostom observes that Jesus answered the scribes' hidden thoughts, itself a divine act, and then gave the visible healing as proof of the invisible one. The easier thing to say was made the witness of the harder: the healed body walked out as evidence of the absolved soul.

Voices of the Church: St. Peter Chrysologus (Sermons)

Preaching on the woman who touched the fringe of Christ's garment, Peter Chrysologus marvels that she reached for the hem and touched heaven: faith made a border of cloth a channel of divine

power. God does not disdain to work through the smallest and humblest things his Son has touched.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1503–1505.** Christ the physician: his compassion toward the sick and his many healings are a resplendent sign that God has visited his people; he makes our miseries his own, and Matthew 8:17 with Isaiah 53:4 points ahead to the Passion.
- **CCC 1441–1442.** Only God forgives sins; because Jesus is the Son of God he says “the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Further, by virtue of his divine authority he willed that his Church continue this ministry of forgiveness and entrusted its exercise to the apostolic ministry.
- **CCC 1386.** Before receiving the Eucharist the faithful make the centurion’s words their own: Lord, I am not worthy. The Church canonized this Gentile soldier’s sentence into her deepest moment of prayer.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (first movement).** At 9:27 the blind men become the first people in the Gospel to address Jesus by the royal title of 1:1, and they pair it with a plea for mercy. Note who can see what the seeing cannot; the pattern will repeat.
- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** God-with-us is now God-in-reach: touchable, interruptible, sharing tables with tax collectors. Presence has become contact.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** Two more citations (8:17; the Hosea line commanded twice). Ask for the running count.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain how chapters 8–9 demonstrate in works the authority the Sermon claimed in words.
2. Participants recognize the sacramental pattern of grace through touch, word, and matter across the miracles.
3. Participants connect the centurion’s sentence to the Mass and his faith to the son-of-Abraham thread.
4. Participants discover Psalm 107 as the answer to the disciples’ question in the storm.
5. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to priestly absolution and can answer it from Matthew 9 itself, with honest hedges.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on the leper and the priest (saves about 4 minutes), then compress Build question 6 on Matthew’s call into a read-and-comment (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Psalm 107 discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 5 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Messiah's Works

Matthew 8–9 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, physician of souls and bodies, the crowds pressed in on you from every side and you turned no one away. We press in tonight with our own diseases, seen and unseen. Say the word, and your servants shall be healed. Give us the centurion's faith, the leper's boldness, and Matthew's readiness to get up and follow. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a moment when someone in authority used their power to help you when they did not have to. What did it feel like?
2. What is harder for you: asking for help, or admitting you need it in the first place?

Build (55 minutes)

The Touch That Cleanses

1. Read Matthew 8:1–4. Under the Law, what happened to anyone who touched a leper, and what happens here instead? Why might Jesus touch him when a word alone would clearly do? And what does Jesus tell the man to do afterward?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Law made the leper untouchable; contact transmitted uncleanness. Here the current reverses: holiness flows out and cleanses. Jesus touches a man who may not have felt a human hand in years, because the healing is aimed at the whole person. Then he sends him to the priest as the Law of Moses required for verification and restoration to the community. Notice the pattern that will fill this whole session: grace working through touch, word, and visible things, and the healed person sent into a public, communal act. Jesus works sacramentally before there are sacraments.

Dig Deeper: Show Yourself to the Priest

Jesus, who has just claimed authority above Moses on the mountain, still honors the public, priestly verification of the Law (Leviticus 14). This healing is not a purely private transaction; the Law completes it in the community. Hold the pattern; it returns when the Church hears confessions and anoints the sick.

2. Read Matthew 8:5–13. What is the centurion's argument for why Jesus does not need to come to his house? What does Jesus marvel at, and what does he announce about east and west? **For Catholics:** where have you heard this man's sentence before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The centurion reasons from authority: he commands and things happen at a distance, so the One with real authority need only say the word. Jesus marvels at faith he has not found in Israel, coming from a Gentile officer, and announces that many will come from east and west to the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the son-of-Abraham, all-nations promise of 1:1 breaking into the open. And the Church has placed his sentence on our lips at every Mass, right before Communion: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Every Catholic quotes this Gentile soldier just before receiving the Lord.

The Question in the Boat

3. Read Matthew 8:23–27. The disciples' closing question is the hinge of the scene: “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” **Live discovery:** the Old Testament already answered it. Have someone find Psalm 107:23–30 and read it aloud. Who, in the psalm, stills storms so that the waves are hushed? So what is Matthew showing us asleep in the boat?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Psalm 107 it is the LORD himself who commands the storm and stills the sea while sailors cry to him in trouble. No prophet ever calmed a storm by his own word; this is the Creator's signature. Matthew is showing the disciples' question already answered: the One asleep in the boat is the Lord of Psalm 107 in person. Do not resolve the sealed guess yet, but feel how the evidence is stacking.

Build Then Press: Can Any Man Forgive Sins?

4. Read Matthew 9:1–8 carefully before the steelman. What does Jesus say first to the paralytic, what do the scribes think, and what visible thing does Jesus do as proof of the invisible thing?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The scribes' premise is one every Protestant shares, and it is correct: only God can forgive sins. On the most common Protestant reading, this scene proves Jesus' divinity, full stop. The authority to forgive belongs to the Son of man because the Son of man is God; nothing here transfers it to anyone else. From this angle the Catholic confessional gets the scribes' charge exactly backwards: when a priest says “I absolve you,” he claims for a man what this very passage reserves to God. A Christian should confess directly to God, who needs no human middleman. This objection is serious, biblical, and motivated by honoring God's unique prerogative. Let it stand at full height.

Leader note: Protestant practice is not uniform here. Lutheran and some Anglican traditions retain confession and a declarative absolution, in which a called minister announces God's forgiveness. The objection above is the evangelical and Reformed form, which is the strongest one against the Catholic confessional; if someone raises the Lutheran practice, note that it concedes part of the Catholic point, that God forgives through the word of a man he sends.

5. Now press on Matthew's own conclusion. Read 9:8 slowly, exactly as written. When the crowds glorify God, what precisely do they glorify him for giving, and to whom? Why might Matthew, writing

years later for the Church, choose that plural?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Matthew writes that the crowds glorified God “who had given such authority to men,” plural. If the point were only that Jesus is God, the sentence is strange; you do not praise God for giving authority “to men” because one man is God. Matthew was writing for a Church that already knew the risen Lord had breathed on the apostles and said “if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven” (John 20:22-23). On a natural Catholic reading, one many commentators share, his readers would hear their own experience inside the scene: the authority exercised on earth by the Son of man now continues on earth among men.

Be honest about the hedge: Matthew 9:8 by itself does not prove the sacrament of Reconciliation; it is a seed, not the tree. But this reading has to explain the plural away, and it has to explain why this Gospel will twice hand binding-and-loosing authority to men (hold that thread; it arrives in Sessions 8 and 9). The Catholic claim is modest and strong: the priest forgives no sin by his own power; it is Christ who absolves through him, which is exactly authority given to men rather than possessed by them. The scribes' premise stands untouched: only God forgives sins. The question is whether God may forgive through the men his Son sends, and Matthew's Gospel keeps answering yes.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

6. Read Matthew 9:9–13. What is scandalous about the call of Matthew and the dinner that follows?

Live discovery: Jesus assigns homework: “go and learn what this means.” Do the homework; have someone find Hosea 6:6 and read verses 4–6. What is God saying through Hosea, and what is Jesus saying by quoting it at this table?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Tax collectors were collaborators with Rome, presumed thieves, religiously unclean company. Jesus calls one to the inner circle and then eats at his house with a roomful of his friends. Hosea's Israel offered plenty of sacrifice while its covenant love evaporated like morning dew; God wants mercy, steadfast love, more than religious performance. At Matthew's table Jesus tells the scrupulous that the sick need the physician and that he came to call sinners. Remember who is writing this Gospel down: the evangelist is telling his own conversion in three verses.

The Blind Who See

7. Read Matthew 9:27–31. Listen to the exact title the two blind men use. Where has this Gospel taught us that title, and what is striking about who uses it first?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Have mercy on us, Son of David”: the royal title of the genealogy (1:1), and this is the first time in the Gospel anyone addresses Jesus with it. The first to see the King are men who cannot see at all. Keep a quiet list from tonight forward of who calls Jesus “Son of David” and what they ask him for;

the pattern is building toward something at the gates of Jerusalem.

Send (12 minutes)

1. The centurion's words are on your lips at every Mass. What would it change to mean them completely this Sunday?
2. Jesus said the sick need a physician, and his authority to forgive still works on earth. How long has it been since you let him say "your sins are forgiven" to you personally, out loud, in the sacrament?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, pray the centurion's line slowly and deliberately, remembering the man who first said it.
- Make a plan for confession this month: pick the day and put it where you will see it. Bring the paralytic's four friends if you need courage.
- Show one act of mercy-not-sacrifice this week: choose a person over a performance.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. You touched the untouchable, praised the faith of an outsider, stilled the sea with a word, and proved on earth your authority to forgive. Say the word we need most tonight. Send us out like Matthew, quick to rise, glad to follow, and eager to set a bigger table. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 9:13 (RSV2CE): *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 5 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Messiah's Works · Matthew 8–9

Primary Text

• Matthew 8:1–4 · Matthew 8:5–13 · Matthew 8:17 · Matthew 8:23–27 · Matthew 9:1–8 · Matthew 9:9–13 · Matthew 9:27–31

Live Discovery Passages

• Psalm 107:23–30 (who stills the storm) · Hosea 6:4–6 (mercy, not sacrifice)

Background Passages

• Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy and priestly verification) · Isaiah 53:4 (quoted at 8:17) · John 20:22–23 (for the steelman) · Matthew 16:19; 18:18 (binding and loosing, held for later sessions)

Catechism

• CCC 1503–1505 · CCC 1441–1442 · CCC 1386

Memory Verse

• Matthew 9:13