

September 21/22, 2024
"The Controversial Party"
Pastor Aaron Buer



SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2024 Challenge: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament

September: Read Ezekiel to see how people, situations and events point to Jesus

Day 1 [Matthew 9:9-17](#) | The Controversial Party

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. Matthew 9:10

The crowds swell as Jesus travels throughout Judea. Healing miracles and casting out demons raise Jesus's popularity. He is collecting more fans—people who think Jesus is a good guy because he has a heart for the poor and oppressed. But Jesus is looking for people who are followers, not just fans. A follower gives their whole life to Jesus's control to become like him. As the miracles continue, the question grows: "Is Jesus worth following?" Matthew answers, "Yes." He leaves the tax collector's booth and his old life behind to follow Jesus.

This is the same decision we must make, "Is Jesus worth it?" It is a question we answer once and for all when we accept Jesus's gift of salvation and new life. It's also a question we answer daily when deciding whether to surrender our will to Jesus. As the years roll on, this question repeatedly presents itself: when dreams go unfulfilled, when we struggle to get rid of a bad habit, when a marriage dissolves or when children abandon the faith. As we cry to God, "How long? How long?" we must answer the question again, "Is Jesus *still* worth following?" Being a fan or a follower hangs in the balance.

TODAY: Be honest about whether you are a fan or a follower. Where would you put yourself on the spectrum of fan to follower? Draw a horizontal line in your journal with the word "fan" at one end and "follower" at the other. Where do you place yourself and why? Ask God to help you grow to follow Jesus more this week.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Ezekiel 29-30](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus.

Day 2 [Matthew 9:9](#) | Follow Me

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. Matthew 9:9.

Matthew likely is set for life. His tax collector's job may have provided a nice house, plenty of money and protection given by the powerful Romans. Even though his fellow Jews consider him a traitor, he could be living large. Tax collectors could skim off the top and collect extra from their people. When Matthew responds to the call of Jesus and decides to follow him, he leaves behind much of his past. He leaves his security, the protection of the Roman military, his job and, as a result, his wealth. Yet, Jesus invites him to follow *before* Matthew leaves the booth. Jesus makes the first move to call people to salvation and follow him.

In much the same way, Jesus makes the first move to bring us to himself. God always makes the first move, and that first move is grace. We don't have to get our life together so that God will be impressed and ask us to follow him. Jesus first offers forgiveness and an invitation to follow. He already loves us and gave his life for us.

But when we move from a fan to a follower, we must respond as Matthew does. We leave things behind instead of asking what we can take with us.

TODAY: Identify what you need to leave behind. What keeps you from fully following Jesus? It could be an attitude, a behavior or some values. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal it to you and confess it to him. Accept the forgiveness he offers and then rely on the strength of the Spirit to resist the temptation to pick it up again.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Ezekiel 31-32](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Observe the warnings to powerful nations. Consider how Jesus teaches that true greatness comes through humility and service ([Matthew 20:25-28](#)).

Day 3 [Matthew 9:10-11](#) | Made Clean

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Matthew 9:10-11

The Pharisees take the Jewish laws of ritual cleanliness so seriously they added new laws just to be safe. It is no surprise, therefore, that they are shocked that Jesus eats with the hated tax collectors and various other "sinners" (those living lifestyles disobedient to the Jewish Scriptures). The Pharisees believe this behavior makes Jesus ritually "unclean" and unable to participate in religious practices. Not only is Jesus in contact with these people, but he also deliberately decides to be with them. It's as if Jesus is saying, "These are my people!" Their uncleanness doesn't rub off on him. His righteousness provides forgiveness to these former traitors, prostitutes and rebels. Nothing can make Jesus unclean. Jesus can make anyone clean.

This is good news for us. Jesus has the power to make us clean. He can give us new life. It doesn't matter what we've done or what's been done to us. No embarrassing or awful thing is too much for Jesus. This is the power of Jesus's gospel. His death and resurrection can purify us from everything in our past, present and future. Jesus has the power to do for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

TODAY: Join the Ada Bible Church Worship Team as they sing, "[Canvas and Clay](#)." Use the lyrics "You make all things work together, for my future and my good" as a prayer of gratitude for the work Jesus has done in your life.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Ezekiel 33-34](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Focus on the promise of a true shepherd. Reflect on how Jesus declares he is the good shepherd ([John 10:11](#)).

Day 4 [Matthew 9:12-13](#) | "I Desire Mercy"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:12-13

Jesus's dinner with tax collectors and sinners gets the attention of the Pharisees. As the religious authority of the day, they come to Jesus, seemingly to accuse him of not understanding God or the Old Testament Law. In response, Jesus tells them to go learn what it means that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. This had to be a slap in the face to these leaders, as they should know this better than anyone else.

Mercy can be defined as the gift of God's undeserved kindness and compassion. By contrast, while grace is God giving us what we did not and cannot earn (forgiveness and eternal life with him), mercy is his withholding of what we deserve (punishment and eternal separation from him). Understanding that we are sinful, cannot save ourselves and that Jesus is our only hope should cause us to extend mercy to others. Because we so desperately

need mercy, we should be willing to give it freely. Think of it as “Mercy in, mercy out.” The challenge Jesus gave the Pharisees is a challenge for us today, “Go and learn.”

TODAY: Consider the question, “Who needs my mercy today?” Understand that while they probably don’t deserve it, this is what makes mercy so important. Send them a note or text telling them you are praying for them (and make sure you do!).

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Ezekiel 35-36](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the promise of restoration and a new heart. Consider how Jesus provides spiritual renewal and the indwelling Holy Spirit ([John 14:26](#)).

Day 5 [Matthew 9:15-17](#) | The New Way

Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

Matthew 9:17

Concluding his conversation with the Pharisees and John’s disciples, Jesus uses a few illustrations to drive home his point: a wedding celebration, sewing and new wineskins. With these pictures, Jesus declares he is doing something new. And the old way doesn’t belong with the new way. The coming of Jesus, God in the flesh, fulfills the promises made to Israel long ago. He fulfills the old law and replaces the temple and the sacrificial system. His death provides the new (and only) way for forgiveness of sin and restoration with God.

We can easily miss this and think we can just attach Jesus to what we already do. We believe that if we add Jesus to the mix, he will help us achieve our goals, bring us happiness, and give us peace. But Jesus is doing something new, and it can be disruptive! To become a follower of Jesus means handing over total control of our lives to his authority. It’s to give him leadership over everything. He doesn’t want fans; he wants followers.

TODAY: If you have not yet given control of your life to Jesus, you can do so today. A good starting point is this simple prayer, “Jesus, I surrender. You are my king. You are my leader. I give you authority and leadership. I want to follow you.” If you have done this before but find yourself re-claiming authority in some area of your life, confess your sin to God and re-submit to his daily authority.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Ezekiel 37-38](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Pay attention to the vision of dry bones coming to life. Consider how this points to the resurrection and power of Jesus ([John 5:28-29](#)).