

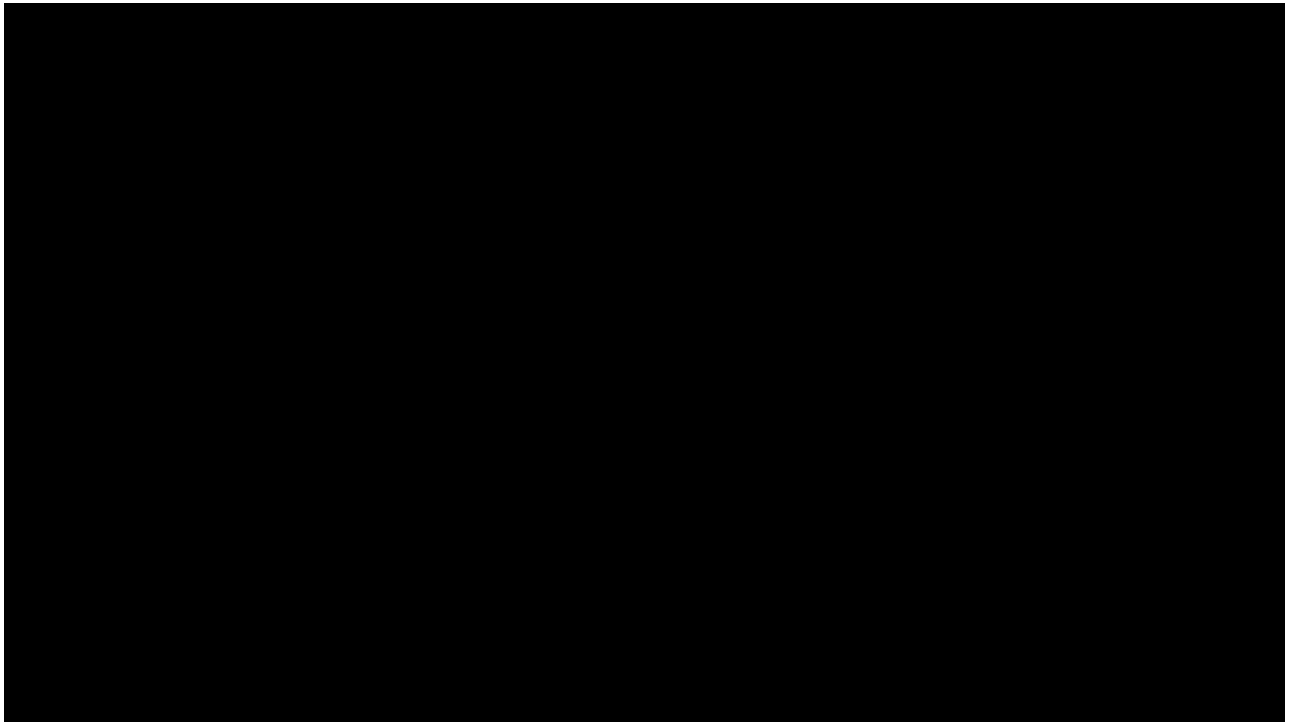
<sup>1</sup> A few days later, word got out that Jesus was back in Capernaum, <sup>2</sup> and so many people crowded into the house where he was staying that they spilled out onto the street as he spoke. <sup>3</sup> Four men brought a paralysed friend on a stretcher <sup>4</sup> and, unable to force a way through the crowds, climbed on to the roof, dug through it, and lowered their friend down to Jesus' feet. <sup>5</sup> Seeing their belief and determination, Jesus looked at the paralysed man and said, 'Child, your sins are wiped away.'

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the religious elite were there and Jesus' words incensed them. <sup>7</sup> 'Who does he think he is?' they thought to themselves. 'What arrogance! Only God can forgive sins. Is that who he's claiming to be? That's blasphemy!'

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**8** Jesus sensed this in his spirit and said, 'I know what you're thinking: **9** "Words are cheap: it's easy to tell someone they're forgiven because the reality can't be proved one way or the other. Much easier than telling a paralytic to get up and walk ... **10** Well, you need to understand that I have power to release people from everything which holds them captive, so watch this.' He said to the paralysed man, **11** 'Stand up, roll up your begging mat, and go home'. **12** As they all watched in disbelief, the man did just that. 'We've never seen anything like this before,' they said.



**13** One day, Jesus was walking by the lake, with a crowd hanging on his every word. **14** Spotting one of the hated local tax collectors, Jesus called out: 'Follow me.' The tax collector, Matthew, left his booth and joined Jesus and his friends.

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**15** That evening, Jesus and his followers ate at Matthew's house. The place was full of tax collectors and others the religious elite would have crossed the street to avoid. **16** 'What on earth's he doing with riff-raff like that?' sniffed the Pharisees. **17** Overhearing them, Jesus asked, 'Does a doctor avoid the sick and only visit the healthy? No more will the saviour avoid those who need saving! I've little time for those who think themselves above needing any help from God. Give me those who recognise their need any day.'

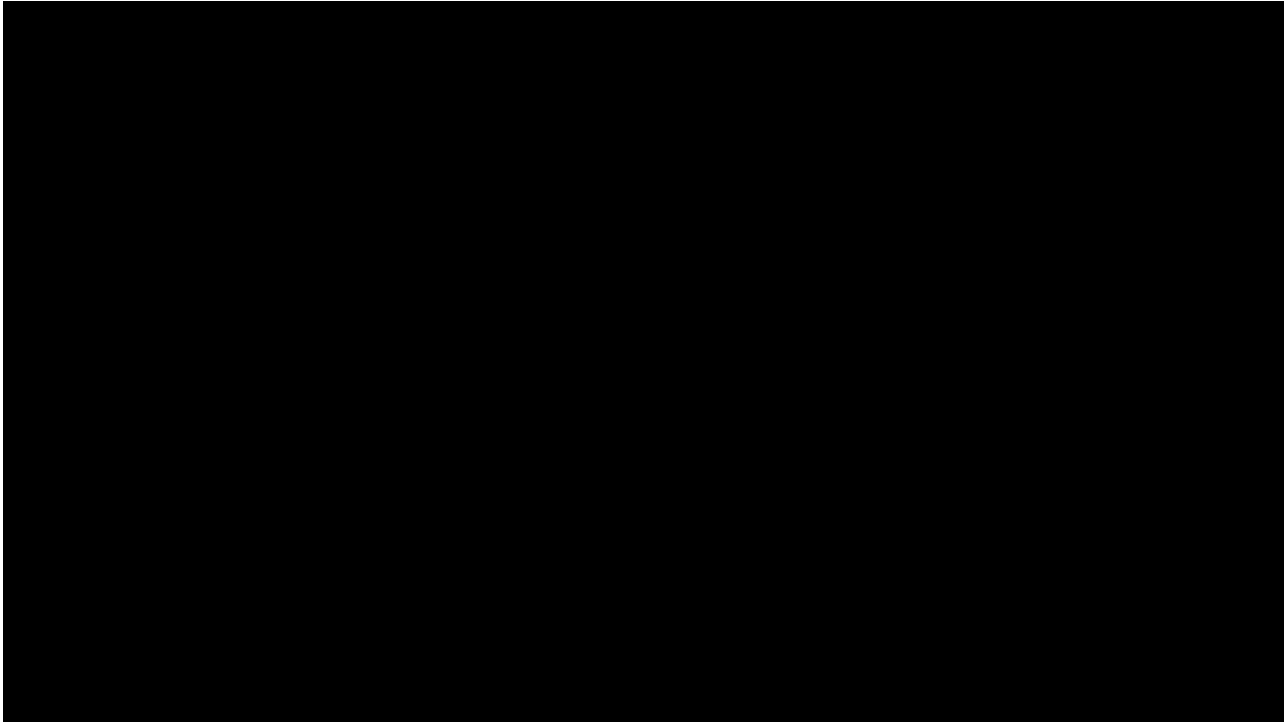
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**18** Going without food was a commonplace religious discipline in those days. Jesus was asked, 'How come those who follow the Pharisees and John the Baptist abstain from food as part of their spiritual discipline, but you and your followers don't?'

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**19** 'Because it wouldn't be a fitting response to what God is doing,' Jesus replied. 'Do wedding guests refuse the food laid on at the reception? Of course not – they tuck right in! My guests can't be expected to behave as if I wasn't around. **20** I'll be taken from them soon enough – they can go without food then.'

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**21** 'If you've got a jacket which needs patching, do you patch it with material which doesn't match? Of course not! It would look dreadful and might even make the original tear worse. **22** And who would put new wine into dirty old bottles? No one! New wine needs brand new bottles to keep it fresh. Your cracked religious systems can't hold the new life of God's Kingdom.'

10

**23** On another Day of Rest, Jesus was walking through a cornfield and his friends pulled off some corn. **24** The Pharisees pounced; 'Why are your followers breaking the rules?' **25** 'How petty you are, and ignorant about the things of God. Don't you remember the stories of King David?' **26** When in need, he once took bread from the temple, even though it was only lawful for the priests to eat, to stop his men starving to death. **27** When God gave humankind a weekly day of rest, he meant it to be a blessing, not a burden. It was made for them, not the other way around. **28** One greater than the Day of Rest stands among you.'