

## Jesus, Friend of Sinners

(Matthew 9:9-13)

<sup>9</sup>And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, **Follow me**. And he arose, and followed him. <sup>10</sup>And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, **Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?** <sup>12</sup>But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, **They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.** <sup>13</sup>**But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

Beloved, this morning I want to speak to you concerning the sole purpose of the church, the reason we are here this morning, the reason we even exist in society...and that is, to the end, that we might reach out to lost and dying sinners out here, all around us, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we ever lose sight of that one thing, that one ambition, in my mind, we have ceased to be the Church of Jesus Christ. Since God's calling me away from here, I've had the privilege to preach in several different churches, and I can't begin to tell you, how troubled I am at the condition that many are in. (It confirms the call I felt to leave here and go out) Many churches today, have become nothing more than social clubs, reserved for the socially elite. I've noticed that in many churches, the majority of the so called ministry, is "Inward." In that, everything revolves around those of the church itself. Activities, social events, parties, sports, fellowships, etc...basically everything they do, is centered on and revolves around itself, instead of the focus being on the one thing, we are called to do, and that is actively involved in reaching out ministering to those outside the church, those that are lost and dying out here in sin.

But even more troubling to me though, is the mindset I'm finding in many of those towards sinners... A mindset completely contrary to that of our Lord, a mindset better described by these religious men here in our passage we just read. One of judging and condemning lost sinners, wanting nothing to do with them, distancing themselves from them. Beloved, I need you to hear me, that kind of mindset towards sinners reveals a misguided view and understanding of God, and what it means to be "godly." Matter of fact, some of the most "un-godliest people" I've ever met have been those who go to church regularly. They may live, good moral lives, and do what's right in terms of the moral laws of God...and have the appearance of being these righteous, godly men and women. But based on the fact they judge and condemn sinners out here, reveals they don't have a clue who He is. That is the most "Un-Godlike" treatment of sinners I can imagine. Listen, we are never more like God, than when we show love and compassion to sinners!

**Lets' look at this...** This whole passage revolves around an encounter Jesus had with a man, by the name of Matthew. If you're wondering, the Matthew here is in fact the same Matthew that penned this letter we are reading. This Matthew was one of the original 12 disciples and eventually went on to be an apostle of Christ. Matthew was very instrumental in the ministry of Christ and played a major role in establishing the kingdom of God as we know it today... But prior to heeding the call of Christ on this day, let's just say that Matthew was a less than desirable person. I don't think anyone would have ever guessed him to amount to anything, much less be used greatly of God...

Matthew was a publican...which to the Jews of his day, defined him as one of the most despised, vile, sinful men there was. The term publican is just another word for tax collector. Matthew worked for Rome, collecting taxes from his native people Israel. What made these men so despised by the Jews was the fact they were seen as traitors, having gone to work for the occupying nation of Rome, and how they often exploited them through less than honest business practices. Rome required a certain percentage of taxation on goods, and allowed for anything beyond that amount to be kept as personal profit. And given the fact he had the power of the Roman military behind him to back him, he basically had a license for extortion. He basically set the taxation amount, and if you resisted, he'd threaten you with legal action. Given that...lets just say these men were not looked upon by their fellow countrymen very favorably. (Jewish writings reveal that a Jewish publican was barred from the synagogue, and was forbidden to have any religious or social contact with his fellow Jews. He was ranked with the unclean animals, in the class

of swine, which a devout Jew would not so much as touch. And because he was a traitor and liar, he ranked with robbers, murderers, and was forbidden to give testimony in any Jewish court.)

That helps us to better understand the *animosity* expressed by the Pharisees here in this passage. <sup>11</sup>*And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* When you simply consider it from a human standpoint, it's easy to understand why the Pharisee's felt the way they did. If we'd be honest this morning, we all can probably say that we've played the role of the Pharisee on several occasions. Seeing someone whom we know is a crook, someone who's into all kinds of stuff, our natural response is to distance ourselves from them, wanting nothing to do with them. But beloved, this is where I need you to hear me...we must change the way we think. Beloved, here in this passage we have a "*clear picture*" of what it's all about. If you could somehow paint of picture of this scene, you'd be able to see what it's all about...and that is, as Jesus puts it, ministering to the sick. Here Jesus describes Himself as a physician, who has come to help the sick of this world...a reference to those out here lost and dying in sin. What a wonderful description that is of those out here in sin. It puts a whole different perspective on the way we look at people right? Instead of seeing them as thieves, harlots, drunkards, drugies, and low down scoundrels and so on...if you look at them the way Jesus did, you can look on them with pity and compassion, because what you're really seeing is the evidence of sin in their life. Instead of finding fault with them and condemning them, like these religious men did here in this passage, we need to see them like Jesus did, as terminally sick, thus spurring pity and compassion, instead of judgment and condemnation.

Well, here we a very, very sick man... Matthew was very likely, one of the most crooked, despicable people in the day. There was absolutely nothing about Matthew that the Lord would find appealing to make him a good disciple of his. But if you understand this passage, you realize that's what drew Jesus to him. Jesus saw his need... Now don't miss, here we have one of the most beautiful pictures of God in all the bible to me. Here we have God Himself, the holy and righteous Son of God, walking up to one of the most vile and wicked sinful men in all of Israel...and asks him to walk with Him. What a glorious picture that is of the God we serve...

We are told, upon accepting Jesus' invitation, Mark and Luke both tell us, that they went to Matthew's house. And, it is clear that Matthew had invited a lot of his closet friends, all of which had less than honorable reputations. Notice how he states that, "*publicans and sinners*"... No doubt the reference to sinners here refers to thieves, drunkards, prostitutes, etc. But Matthew says there was "*publicans and sinners*"...clearly putting himself and his associates in a class of their own. Sort of these "*chief of sinners*"...

**(Vs 11)** Well, that brings us to the heart of this passage... **the response of the Pharisees.**

<sup>11</sup>*And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

This entire passage revolves around that question... *Why eateth your Master with publicans & sinners?*

I want you to contemplate that question in your mind, for a moment... You can tell an awful lot about someone, by merely listening to what they say. Jesus said, "*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.*" Our words are like a barometer of the heart, they're very revealing. And when you consider what these men were saying here, you learn a lot about the heart of these men...

*Why eateth your Master with publicans & sinners?* That might be better translated, "*Why does your Master eat with such scum...why does He have anything to do with such people?*" That would be a more accurate translation, because that better reflect what they were saying. Those words are filled with disdain and disgust... They're like, "*I can't believe that He, claiming to be this great man of God, would have anything to do with the likes of these!*"

Those words say a lot about the mindset of these men, **which is the whole point of this passage!**

This whole passage is a rebuke of these men, and their erroneous ways of thinking about sinners. The question they asked revealed, not only were they “*spiritually blind*,” but that they had a misguided view of what it meant to be godly. You see, these men considered themselves to be righteous, based on their adherence to God’s laws. Resulting in superiority complex, meaning they saw themselves better than these folks. In short, they saw themselves as these “*righteous men*,” and in their mind, righteous people don’t have anything to do with such sinners as these...

In short...The *self-righteous* Pharisees did not think they needed God’s forgiveness and were certain that publicans and sinners did not deserve it! Their “*ministry*” was not to help sinners, but to judge sinners...not to restore, but to condemn!

Beloved, I need you to listen closely to me here... If there’s one thing that infuriates me, one thing that causes my blood to boil...it is for someone to think they are better than someone else. Someone who thinks they are superior to others. Listen, there is absolutely not room in the church of Jesus Christ, for that kind of spirit. According to the gospel, none of us are any better than any other. Just because a man or woman has cleaned up their life with religion...doesn’t make them the least bit better. We’re all in the same boat, were all sinners who stand in need of mercy and grace of the great Physician.

But like these men here, there’s some in our day who do see themselves as better, and it’s always easy to know who they are, because they look upon sinners out here, the same way these guys did...with disgust and disdain...wanting nothing to do with them. As I said earlier, it reveals a spirit of self-righteousness, and superiority... In their minds, godliness is staying away from such people, who live such lifestyles. But as Jesus is fixing to explain to these men, what true godliness, what true god-likeness is...and that is to go to these people, reaching out to them in grace and mercy...

**(Vs 12~13)** <sup>12</sup>*But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, **They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*** <sup>13</sup>*But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Even though they were speaking to his disciples, Jesus responded to their question... And he does so in a proverbial sense, in that He gives his answer in somewhat of a riddle, and tells them to go consider what he has just said, and when they understand the meaning, they’ll have their answer to their question, as to why he eats with publicans and sinners.

Now, it’s not difficult to understand his point, logically speaking, those who are healthy don’t need a doctor, but a doctor is there for those who are sick. The first part, “***they that be whole need not a physician...***” is a sarcastic remark about them, as is the remark, “*for I am not come to call **the righteous**...*” He was not saying they were truly whole, or righteous, but rather He was expressing the fact they thought they were. You see, these men considered themselves as being these righteous men of God, who lived in a way, that they had earned God’s favor and blessing...unlike these here whom Jesus is associating with. And in “*their darkened minds*,” there’s no way a “*holy God*” would have anything to do with such people, who clearly violate and transgress His Laws, by doing the sinful and vile things they do. Thus, the question...“*Why does your Master have anything to do with these vile and sinful people...who show absolutely no honor or respect for God and His commandments?*” You see that? Do you see how they come to that conclusion? Let me ask you something, if they didn’t think he should be eating with “*Such people*,” who then should He be eating with? “*People like us of course*”...they were thinking.

**(Vs 12b~13)** Well, the answer Jesus gives is absolutely amazing...*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* <sup>13</sup>*But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

That phrase, “<sup>3</sup>*But go ye and learn what that means...*” is very interesting... It was commonly used in rabbinic writings to rebuke those who did not know what they should have known. Here Jesus uses it to rebuke these “*self-righteous*” religious men for their ignorance of God’s true nature and their failure to follow His clear commandments. Jesus is quoting from Hosea 6:6...<sup>6</sup>*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;*

*and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* To understand this, you must know something about the worship that Israel offered to God. The worship offered in the temple, consisted mainly of animal sacrifices. They would bring their sacrifices and offering to temple, where they'd be offered up to the Lord, as an act of worship. Well here, Jesus makes it clear, that it was never about that. (They didn't know this, but the sacrifices were a foreshadowing of His sacrifice, where He would shed His blood for our sins... which was an expression of the mercy of God on our sin) The true worship, true service that God desires, Jesus says... is that of reaching out and showing mercy to sinners.

**The point of His analogy is simple...** *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

It's not the "whole" that need a "physician"... but rather, the "sick," right? The question of these "self-righteous, spiritually blind" religious men was... Why does He have anything to do with such scum, why does He have anything to do with these kinds of people? The answer... because the "sick" need a doctor! Just as a **physician** is expected to go among people who are **sick**, a savior should be expected to go among those who are sinful. *What sort of doctor would spend all his time with healthy people and refuse to associate with those who are sick?*

**Beloved, let me put this as simply as I can...** The worship in our day is much different than that of Israel's, but the point remains the same. It's not what we do in here, the rituals, the ceremonies, the traditions, the various activities, the form of worship that we offer Him... that God desires. I'm so sick of listening to churches argue about the "Worship service." Everybody's so focused on what we do in here, and the style of music, and so on... We can come in here and do all these "Churchy things," going through the motions of worship, and so on... and think we're doing good. And listen, don't take me wrong, I'm not saying that everything we do in here is pointless and meaningless, because it's not. But what I am saying is, the same thing Jesus is saying here in this passage. We can do all that and miss the whole point. What God really desires from us, is not empty sacrifices, empty rituals and so... what God really desires from us is, that we go out into the world and show mercy to those dying in sin... that we be found, following the example set forth by our Lord, by reaching out and ministering to those that are sick.

I don't think any of us have any trouble knowing who the sick are, there's sick people all around us. But that's only half of it, once we have diagnosed the problem with others, are we as quick to help them? The real question is, are we going to do anything about it, or do we sit back and condemn them, and watch them die? This passage teaches us, that we can do all the right things, keep all the commandments of scripture, and outwardly appear righteous before men. But unless we are out here ministering to the sick and hurting, we're not like god at all...