

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

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- [0 : 00] My church thinks I'm kind of weird because when I'm about to preach, I say good morning and I expect them to respond. So, good morning. Thank you very much for inviting me.
- The last time I preached at Advent, I was a floating event during the pandemic. So, it's good to be present in person. Today we're going to be looking at Matthew chapter 9, verse 9 to 13.
- We're going to talk about what Jesus does when he encounters stumfers. We're going to talk about what Jesus does when he encounters stumfers. Let me pray for us.
- Open your word for us, Lord God. Help us to see new things. Cause that the words of our mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, so that we will become more like your Son, Jesus Christ.
- Amen. Amen. Alright, what does Jesus do when he encounters scoundrels? That's what we're going to talk about today. And I use that word the way that the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, uses that word.
- [1 : 15] A mean, worthless person. A villain. Somebody without any integrity, honor, or virtue. And in our texts today, the scoundrels are the sinners and the tax collectors.
- Tax collectors were often wealthy men who collected customs and duties for the Roman Empire within our context.
- And there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with collecting customs and taxes. Of course not. But the reason that they were often wealthy was because they were also very greedy and weak in men.
- And in their dealings with people, they extorted them and that's where they got their wealth. Society hated them as a result of that. Sinners were people who flagrantly violated the cultural and religious norms of Judaism.
- They committed acts against the laws of God. So again, tax collectors, sinners, are the scoundrels in our passage. And rightly so.
- [2 : 19] But when Jesus comes to them, he doesn't treat them the way everybody else treats them. Earlier on in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee.
- And he sees Peter and Andrew and James and John. And he says, follow me. Those four men immediately draw what they're doing and they immediately follow Jesus.
- Now, that was a smart move on Jesus' part. Because he's calling strong, capable, hard-working men.
- Who know what it's like to be out in the sea, taking care of their family. But then in our passage, verse 9, Jesus is passing on from where he just healed the leper.
- And he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the taxi. But then he says, follow me. He's doing exactly the same thing. And he's passing by and he sees someone and says, hey, you, follow me.
- [3 : 21] But this is a tax collector. How is this a good thing for Jesus' ministry? Because wouldn't it tarnish his image and make people sort of turn away from him?

Well, the answer is at the end of our passage when Jesus says, I have not come to call sinners, righteous, sorry, but sinners to repentance. Jesus is intentionally looking for the outcasts, the scoundrel, to accomplish his purposes.

And so he calls Matthew. And that means he's not only calling those who are respectable. No. No. He's going to fulfill his purposes by also calling people who don't fit the normal categories, who are sinners and tax collectors.

Now imagine with me for a moment that you're a Matthew. And how did he feel when you heard that call? Follow me. Now, as a Jewish tax collector, he meant that you had betrayed your faith.

Because you were taking money from your fellow Israelites and putting it into the coffers of your enemies, your oppressor. You were unclean all the time because you were interacting with dentists.

[4 : 43] You worked on the Sabbath when you weren't supposed to. And when you took up the profession of becoming a tax collector, you shamed your family. And you were excommunicated from the synagogue.

This is the person that you are. And you hear those words. Follow me. For years, Matthew has been classed with prostitutes and murderers and robbers, sinners, living with rejection and shame and fear.

And like in the Garden of Eden, Matthew had sown fig leaves to cover up his sin. His niggas. He had a comfortable life, job security, power over his own people, and protection from assault.

But Jesus saw through those fig leaves. And he said, I want you as you are, naked as you are, terrible as you are, to follow me. And it was a pivotal decision for Matthew to make.

Would he ignore Jesus? Or would he surrender to the sweet vulnerability of being Jesus' disciple?

[5 : 57] And so Matthew chooses to follow Jesus. And suddenly, the clouds of shame dissipate. The cords of guilt lift from his shoulders.

All the thin leaves that he had used to cover up his nakedness before the Lord. All of a sudden, those went away. And he had a new identity in Jesus Christ.

Righteousness, holiness, glory of Christ covered him. Just like the bonds of slavery were broken. And Israel walked into a new salvation.

Just like Jesus touched the leper. Right? And the leper received his sight. Just like Moses. When he came down from the mountain, he had already been attracted to the glory of God.

Such as the glory of God was on him. Matthew coming into contact with Jesus was the breaking of chains from slavery. And the reception of God's glory and holiness.

[7 : 00] Now, when you get home today, I want you to do something. I want you to locate a scandal. I do not mean your children or your spouse or women.

Those tell me what the time you think of them as such. I want you to find the scandal that's in the mirror. The one that you see when you're in the mirror. And I want you to tell yourself this truth.

Jesus Christ sees me. Sees my demons. Sees how completely messed up I am. And he loves and cherishes me still.

He says, follow me. I want you to remind yourself that because of Jesus Christ, there is no shame anymore. There is no guilt anymore.

There is no fear anymore. He loves you. He wants you. He embraces you. He says, follow me. And just like Matthew.

- [7 : 59] Come in again. Rise up. Take up your cross. And follow Jesus. That's the first thing that Jesus does when he encounters sinners. He tells them to follow him.
- Matthew felt this freedom just crossing throughout his body. And he just had to celebrate Jesus in some way. He had to showcase him. So he throws a party.
- Similarly, you and I, when we encounter Jesus, our job is to celebrate him all the time. And showcase him to the world. Throw parties for Jesus Christ. But it's not always easy.
- And it can be uncomfortable at times. I mean, think about this. Jesus is lounging at the table. And the door is flinging open. And all these sinners and tax collectors come to sit at the table with Jesus.
- Now, one scoundrel was pushing him. Right? But not being surrounded by scoundrels. A whole room full of scoundrels.
- [9 : 03] Now, Jesus could have backed up. Certainly, he could have backed up. Because not even them, might have meant that he condoned what they were doing. Or even worse, other people looking in might be like, oh, he's friends and tax collectors and sinners.
- So he must be one of them. But Jesus doesn't do that. Use your imagination. You can't imagine that you were one of the disciples of Jesus sitting at that table.
- You're sitting there. You're feeling it. You're surrounded by all these sinners. Okay? What's going on through your mind? Are you perhaps thinking of Psalm chapter 1?
- Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. Nor stand in the way of sinners. Nor sit in the seats of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law, he meditates day and night.
- Maybe that's what you're thinking about. Or maybe you're thinking of Psalm 24, verse 4 to 5. I do not sit with men of falsehood. Ruth. Nor do I consort with hypocrites.
- [10 : 06] I hate the assembly of evil towards men. And I will not sit with the wicked. And yet that's exactly what you're saying. See, when the Pharisees asked Jesus, or asked his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?
- It's possible that they were also thinking about these Old Testament passages that said you shouldn't consort with wicked people. So, we shouldn't always think that the Pharisees were simply uptight religious dogmatists.
- Granted, some of them were uptight religious dogmatists. But that question could have come from a very good place. It's a fair question. If the law and the prophets and the Psalms say that we should shun evil people, why was Jesus consorting with them at the moment?
- This brings me to my second point. God's fellowship with the scoundrel aims to heal them of their sin. Look at verses 12 and 13.
- If you have your Bible speak to people. When he heard it, he said, Those who are wild have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means.
- [11 : 22] I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I can not to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus' response to the Pharisees is simple.
- Sin is a spiritual sickness. It means seductive. Jesus is the great physician who deals with sin in people. Now, because he is God incarnate and he is holy, whatever he touches becomes holy.
- He passes on his spirit. Because as the great physician deals with sin. Now, if you are not in Jesus' company, when you're hanging out, interacting with scoundrels, their company will corrupt your character.

But if you are hanging out with Jesus, like the disciples were, you stay in fellowship with Jesus. When you're interacting with the world with scoundrels and sinners, that doesn't happen to you.

That is the essence, the caution behind the commands to avoid ungodly people. But if you are with Jesus, when you interact with sinners, you become the medium through which Jesus, the great physician, heals the sick.

[12 : 37] And this is what Jesus was doing at the table. This party is thrown in his honor, but it was not a, come as you are and leave the way you can. He wanted them to be changed.

This is not one of the situations where, you know, you go to the barber and you get a haircut and you come out and people are like, oh, you look different. No, I stopped what this was. This was a complete makeover, a change in nature that was happening at that table.

At Matthew's table, he's declaring the gladness of deliverance, speaking of the faithfulness of God and his salvation, and enjoining his listeners to repent. Now, I would not be surprised if much of what he was saying was exactly what the Pharisees themselves were also saying.

The same thing that the Pharisees said to the tax collectors and sinners may have been what Jesus said as well. The difference is, Jesus was speaking from the table of fellowship.

That's the difference. I suspect that Pharisees often spoke from a pulpit of condemnation. I suspect that they preached the law of God with anger and disgust in their hearts rather than grace and love.

[13 : 50] And I suspect that they felt that they were better than the tax collectors and the sinners. No doubt their imperiousness seeped into their sermons, into the message, and bolstered their hypocrisy.

They were unbearably righteous. Now, if this sounds familiar, it may be because the conduct of too many Christians is just like that.

We're good at condemning the world for its sins, and we are often very good at doing that at the top of our lungs. Very long. We're skillful at vilifying all and stray away from biblical truth.

We're good at creating an us-versus-them dynamic. Those Democrats, those Republicans, those conspiracy theorists, those alumnus, those immigrants, those Black Lives Matter people, those white folks, on and on and on, there's so much up and going around.

We can be unbearably righteous. But Jesus didn't come to call them unbearably righteous. He came to call sinners.

[15 : 10] Now, pause for a second. What exactly was Jesus saying here? Was he saying that the Pharisees were righteous, and so therefore they did not need him?

Y'all are good. These are the ones that need my help, not even poor righteousness. Is that what he's saying? No. No. In the book of Matthew, there are people who are actually called righteous.

There's several examples. Joseph, the father of Jesus, earthly father of Jesus, was called a righteous man, same one that's used in this passage. Mary is the favored one.

We have Anna, the prophetess, who prays and fasts in the temple. We have Simeon, who sees Jesus. We have John the Baptist, who's a herald. All these people are righteous people.

Do they not need the great physician? There's a parable in chapter 18. Two men go into the temple to pray. One is a tax collector, a sinner, and the other is a Pharisee.

[16 : 12] The Pharisee comes to God, and he says, God, I thank you so much, that I am not like that. The person over there, mm-mm-mm. I fast twice a week, and I give a tithe of everything that I have.

Thank you that I am not like that person. To you beyond the glory, hallelujah. That's what the Pharisee said. The tax collector is unable to even look up to heaven.

He comes with his face bowed down. He stands far off, beats his breast, and says, Lord, God, please have mercy on me, a sinner.

And Jesus says, that the tax collector, when you can justify, that is, declared righteous, not the Pharisee.

Because everybody who humbles themselves will be exalted, and anyone who exalts themselves will be humbled. In gospel terms, those who are declared righteous are who should look up to God and say, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[17 : 25] And this did not describe the Pharisees. And far too many Christians believe exactly like the Pharisees. They pay live service, and when they say, Lord, be merciful to me, because I'm a sinner, and I'm a sinner.

We display false superiority that only makes us look atrocious in the eyes of the world. We need Jesus to open our eyes so that we can see that we too, without him, are scumbriils.

Let me let you in on the big secret. All Christians are sinners saved by grace. Did you know that?

All Christians are sinners saved by grace. Before Jesus, we are all scoundrels. And sometimes we act, and I include myself in this.

I know that people need Jesus more than we do. That's a problem. To this very day, our Lord Jesus Christ is constantly going to the table of sinners and task collectors, of scoundrels.

[18 : 34] Are we like the Pharisees who stand outside the door looking in and judge the disciples who were with him and judge Jesus for doing that? Or are we going to go there as well and attend to the sick?

Now, thankfully, Jesus can heal even our own self-righteousness. And that's what he does with the Pharisees. He tells them, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Now, it's one of those hyperboles in the gospel that when Jesus says that you cannot follow him unless you completely hate your mother, father, and brother, don't tell your kids that they should hate anybody. No, that's not what that says.

It's a hyperboles, hyperboles. Saying that Jesus desires mercy more than sacrifice. He's asking us to prioritize the mercy of God over beautiful obedience.

Remember the immense, gracious sacrifice of his life that opened up the kingdom doors and we need to learn to hold both grace and truth, mercy, and sacrifice.

[19 : 36] So Jesus encounters sinners and calls them to himself and then he fellowships with him. Now, when Matthew threw a party for Jesus, he likely did not know that Jesus was going to throw a party for him and for everybody else who would come to believe in his name.

That's where Isaiah passage, the end of it, talks about it. It paints this picture of a great banquet for all the people and all the peoples in the presence of God and attached to this is a promise that reflects the work of Jesus calling people to himself and fellowshiping with him.

And I want to end by reading this passage. On this mountain, he will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples. Even the veil which is stressful for all nations, he will swallow up death for all time.

And the Lord will wipe tears away from all faces and he will remove the reproach of his people from all the earth.

For the Lord has spoken and will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited.

[20 : 46] Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. Let us rejoice and be glad that Jesus calls us sinners to follow you and that he calls us to fellowship with him that he might heal us of our diseases.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.