

Matthew 9:9–13

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[0 : 00] As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. I want to title this message. There's room yet at the table for you.

There's room yet at the table for you. That title is taken from the center cut of our text.

[1 : 26] Two verses on either side. There it is. Verse 11. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

It would seem that Matthew in these weeks is concerned to throw before the reader through a series of questions, things that might interest us in Jesus, things that we might actually rediscover for ourselves who he is.

This is another question that now comes concerning Jesus. We've seen many of them, haven't we? The wise men ask, where is he?

John the Baptist asked, why are you coming to me? The disciples asked, what sort of man is he?

The demons said, why do you torment me?

The scribe says, how dare he? And now, why does he? And each of these questions that have been walking through this part of the narrative are revealing to you things about Jesus.

[2 : 40] Today, it's going to reveal that there's room yet at the table for you. First of all, look at the kind of people Jesus chose to lead.

I'm using the word lead there for Matthew, even though the calling on Matthew is to follow. But the word about following me is actually where you and I get the phrase an acolyte.

I don't know what your religious traditions are, but there were people that were attendants to the service, people that were assisting in things that they might lead.

And so, when we look at verses 9 and 10, we're seeing the kind of people, particularly Matthew, that Jesus chose to lead.

And believe me, if he chose this kind of guy, there's room at the table for you. My Bible reads, as Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, follow me, and he arose and assisted him.

[3 : 57] And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

What kind of person does Jesus choose to form his new family? What kind of community is he going to establish?

And who might he select to lead that movement for successive generations? Well, evidently, a man by the name of Matthew.

What do we know about this man? Well, he must have had an extraordinary amount of significance in the early church. Mark relates this story about Matthew.

So unusual was this man. Luke retells the story about Matthew. So, three of the gospel writers are saying, if you want to know who's at the table with him, I want to talk to you about the day that Matthew met him.

[5 : 04] What do we know about him? Well, it says here he was a tax collector. And then, in a pejorative way, two other occasions in the text, the tax collector is connected to the word sinner.

Did you notice that? Three times in the text, sinners are reclining with Jesus. Let me put it differently. Jesus is reclining with sinners.

Wow. Well, the tax collector. It's tax season. You're probably filling yours out. I don't know what you think about the IRS.

I remember when my children got their first paycheck. They looked at it and saw the money that had been withdrawn. And one of them came to Lisa and said, Mom, who's FICA?

FICA's walking away with a lot of my effort here. Tax collectors aren't normally liked in that they hate that which is needed for the welfare of the whole.

[6 : 17] In the scriptures, the tax collectors then were people who had signed up to bring in a certain amount of revenue to Rome.

And as long as they covered the revenue that was required, given the arena in which they worked, well, believe me, they figured out ways to make a little more.

The tax collectors in the scriptures, in a sense, were both wealthy and worldly. Jesus chose him. I get a kick out of it.

He says, I'm going to grab one from the 1%. I'm going to grab one that probably doesn't drink any bourbon less than 50%. I'm getting the rich and the worldly to lead my mission.

Now, that's a surprise. Not the most likely of candidates to be called to lead. But there it is. So who does Jesus choose?

[7 : 24] Who gets a seat at the table? Well, an irreligious businessman. He gets a seat at the table.

A man who had gained great wealth. And he had gained wealth on the back of other people through overcharging.

You just call that an aldermanic shakedown, if you will. It's fascinating.

I love reading the Bible. It surprises me. It all turns. So we find him here. It says he's at the tax booth. It's almost as though Jesus comes along and he's at work.

I know you don't work at work anymore. You work from your homes and the privacy of your computer screens. But back then, people went to work as they should. And they were in the public sphere.

[8 : 26] And so you're almost meeting Matthew when he's in his cubicle or he's in his place of employment. He's at the office. Somehow Jesus walks by him as the world of commerce is swirling around him.

And when he sees him, you have a man who literally has ungodly success. In all likelihood, this isn't the first time they met.

It reads with incredible brevity. And Jesus passed on from there. He saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him.

And there's this just immediacy. But in all likelihood, he had come under his teaching. He had become intrigued by his message.

He had thought perhaps of God's kingdom rather than his own. I don't know what went on in his mind. But what we do know is that he rose and followed him.

[9 : 28] He rose to assist him. He rose to eventually lead for him. This man of ungodly success. And not only that, verses 10 and 11 indicate that he had a really unholy social network.

Did you see that in verse 10 and 11? As Jesus reclined at the table in the house, and Luke will tell you this is Matthew's house. This is Levi's house. He went by two names.

There were many tax collectors and sinners came. And they were reclining with him and his disciples. There were many tax collectors and sinners. It's like the guild had shown up.

The uber wealthy who had made a living on the backs of the common working man were in.

Oh, together. And sinners. What an unholy social network.

[10 : 33] And they're all convened now in Matthew's house. Can you imagine showing up at that party? Wow. I mean, somebody would be like, I'm not going to that party. But at any rate, if you got invited to that party and you showed up, you'd open the door.

Place is already buzzing. Music's kind of blaring. The produce spread on the table is overwhelming. The wine is already flowing. The smoke rings are rising. And it's just happening. People are there that have connections to the government.

Bunch of MBAs are in the house. Even some lawyers, perhaps. Men and women of lesser or loose sexual mores.

Horace and the place is just got a vibe. It's what he wants you to see. It's what he wants you to hear.

[11 : 36] It's what he wants you to sense. And that little phrase is so wonderful, isn't it? Jesus and his disciples were reclining there.

They'd pulled up a couch, perhaps over on the side, just taking it all in. I mean, you can imagine the other followers. We don't know how many disciples were here, but we do know a little bit about four of them that had already been chosen.

We saw them earlier in the gospel. Peter and Andrew, James and John, these two sets of brothers. They were on the other end of the scale. They weren't the tax collecting types.

These were, well, these were fishermen. They kind of controlled the market in that arena. They were, if they were part of a guild, it would have been the guild of the, the gill guild.

These were, at the least, small entrepreneurial family businessmen. A family business. I'm going into business with my brother. These are hardworking men who knew what it is to get up early and to come home sometimes without.

[12 : 48] This is a man that would put things on his table and then sell his produce in the market so that in that agrarian world, there was fish to eat and they prospered. And they were the hardworking common man of the city.

And now they're in the home of Matthew. I can't wait to get their take on the party.

But there they were. I wonder if Matthew's gospel is trying to tell us there's room at the table for this guy and this guy.

That Jesus somehow defies religious convention. Well, if there's room at the table for these guys, I'm just trying to tell you this morning, there's got to be room at the table for you.

Isn't that good news for anyone here? Yeah. Yeah. There's really good news. If you're an ungodly, successful businessman.

[14 : 03] Might be some hope for you yet. It's really good news for the working person who just keeps putting it on the table, even though the others take it from you.

There's room for you yet. In fact, Jesus somehow brings the extremes together and says, I'm going to do a new family here. I'm going to create a new dining room table here.

Wait till you hear the stories of some of these guys that are here. And by the way, when I leave, I'm putting this whole mission in their hands.

Wow. That's what we're rediscovering about Jesus. He can reach into the business school as well as the trades.

Of course, that might. Well, it was a bit disquieting for some. I mean, let's just take a look at it.

[15 : 06] I mean, the pious persons who were present began to think that these kind of people only should receive judgment.

That's where the question came in. Verse 11. And when the Pharisees saw this, notice it says it saw this. They didn't see this.

It doesn't indicate they were reclining along with these guys. My guess is they were. They just saw it. They didn't go in. They just. Wow. Here he comes out of that smoke filled, haze filled, music blaring room.

I wonder what's he doing in that guy's house. We know that guy's house. So when the publicly pious saw this, they had a predisposition that people like Matthew are worthy of God's judgment, not worthy of God's mercy.

It says that these guys are Pharisees. That's an interesting word. Earlier, we had seen a question that came from the Sadducees. And if the Sadducees were kind of the studious types who looked into the law, the Pharisees were the public advocates of the law.

[16 : 20] I mean, these were the men who said things like, you know, I am. I'm a self-conscious follower of God.

These are the ones that tell you I am a practicing believer of sorts. And not only that, they were the ones who felt very clearly that their role was to help others.

They were far enough down the line to get you straight with God. And in one sense, then, these were the self-congratulators.

These were the ones that are eager to tell you where you've gone off the rails. You ever meet any of these people? I've met them. I've met them. Eager to let you know where your activity is inappropriate in regard to what God really wants.

You know. And they go on their way. And Luke actually tells you they're grumbling at this point. So it isn't just like, hey, what's going on over there?

[17:29] Why didn't they get the invite? No, it's like, that's all wrong over there. And so they don't come to Jesus directly. They come to the disciples.

And they ask the question, why does he? Of course, we've already seen part of the answer. The answer is because there's room at the table for Matthew.

This is the second part of the text, right? It kind of turns over. And the second half is really, and yet there's still time for religious people to learn something.

There still could be room at the table for you too, says Jesus. Look at verses 12 and 13. This is how he answered the question.

But when he heard this grumbling, this why does he? He said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means.

[18:32] I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Evidently, religious people who are public practitioners have something they need to go and learn, which had to be a rebuke to them.

I mean, that was a phrase that the teacher would tell the student. Hey, go and learn something this week. I'll see you next week. And Jesus now says to those who think they're assisting the others in their relationship with God, they're the public practitioners of religion that'll tell you everything that's wrong about you with never actually experiencing or examining anything in regard to themselves.

These are the self-appointed leaders. And he goes, hey, you need to go and learn something. Go back to square one. I think that's the way it must have sounded. Go and learn what this means.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. He's quoting here a verse that the Pharisees would have known.

This word here that appears kind of almost with parentheses in your text, if you put your eyes on it, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, is actually from an Old Testament prophet by the name of Hosea.

[19:51] You can look them up later. And chapter six and verse six. And back then, Israel had become very religious, but Israel was not very merciful.

They were religious, but they weren't relational. They were pious, but they didn't have much pity.

They were devout, no doubt about it, but they weren't compassionate.

And Hosea is kind of hammering this piety without compassion. And he's speaking in the voice of God saying, you know, God desires mercy, kind of what he's on about.

Kind of what Milton was leading us in worship on today. Maybe why he had us repeat the refrain.

Our sins are many. His mercy is more because we got to remember both halves of that.

Israel had become a worshiping people that no longer truly love God or other people.

[21:08] Can I put it like this? What Jesus tells them is they were all about worship and the worship service. And especially about their predetermined contribution that they would make at that worship table.

Matthew will later say, Matthew 23, that they had hammered out their menth tithes, what they were going to bring to God, the contribution that they would make in the family.

It was all like this. It was all just narrowly confined for these guys. They were all about worship.

They were not on about the spiritual condition of this world filled as it is with tax collectors and sinners who stand in the need of forgiveness.

They weren't not about the people. They were self-justifiers. They were not thinking that Jesus had to justify them.

Let me tell you something. If that's true today, then the first time visitor in this place today who knows yourself to be an ungodly success and with an incredibly powerful and potent unholy social network.

[22:30] There's like really good news for you today. Whereas perhaps some that are in most danger of missing out on Jesus are those who have been self-consciously followers for so long.

That the danger is in thinking and presuming one's spiritual condition. Only Jesus can bring about what's needed.

I don't know how to put the text any cleaner than half number one. Isn't it good that there's room at the table for anyone who needs a relationship with Jesus?

And isn't it important to know that there's yet some room at the table for anyone who's succumbed to religion? And he sits in between, ready to dispense his mercy to all.

Nobody beyond his reach. If the hardened religionist in our midst, the self-justifying pious one, can still go learn and be invited to the table.

[23 : 49] And the uber ungodly one can still be invited to the table. Then I'm telling you there's room at the table for you.

Yeah. I mean, this is what I found. This is what I found. In Jesus. Room at the table for me.

You don't know me. Not the interior of my soul. Who knows you? Who knows the muck and the mire.

The places where religiosity and the world have hung you up. And Jesus is sitting here going like, can I, I even like the word recline.

Can I hang with you for a bit? You got a futon I can get down on for a bit? Yeah. What kind of man is this?

[25 : 03] Why does he? Because he's bringing in a new kingdom. Yeah. He's creating a new family.

He's going to build a community wherein the spiritually disadvantaged can have immediate health. And the long time spiritually disadvantaged can yet go learn. How do I know?

How do I know? That there's room at the table for you and me? If Matthew can get home before dark.

Yeah. And those religious types still got time. Then maybe there's a meal left for me. Our heavenly father.

[26 : 01] Father. We all need mercy. So whatever lesson each one is to take today.

I pray that they would have heard good news. That Jesus wants to recline. With us. Help us to rise up and follow him.

In Jesus name. Amen. Let's get on our feet. Walgust.