

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: When we began this series a few weeks ago I impressed you by quoting Shakespeare! I told you how the Earl of Kent approaches King Lear and asks for permission to follow him. King Lear is taken aback that this stranger would ask such a thing so he asks what he really wants. The Earl of Kent says he wants to serve the King. The King says, “*Do you even know me?*” to which the Earl of Kent replies, “*No, sir, but there is something about you that makes me want to call you Master.*” “*What’s that?*” asks the king. And the Earl replies, “*Authority.*” [paraphrased]
- B. I remind you of that because it is very nearly a duplicate of the story we’re looking at today in the Bible. Turn to **Matt. 9:9-13**. Matthew has been establishing the extraordinary authority of Jesus Christ. First, he recorded Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the thing that the crowds said afterward was not how *interesting* it was, or how *deep*. Matthew said, “*the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had **authority**, and not as their teachers of the law.*” In other words, when Jesus taught the overriding sense was that his words were to be *obeyed*! Jesus’ teaching came with a line in the sand.

Then Matthew told us stories that emphasized the authority of Jesus’ acts, in healing, calming the storm at sea, and driving out demons. Finally, he told us of a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus and Jesus proved that he not only had the authority to heal the man, but also to forgive his sins—an act that only God can do; that no human being in his right mind, before or since, would presume to do. But Jesus did it.

C. Now we come to **Matt 9:9**, “*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.*” Wait! **Matthew??** You meant the writer of this book is telling us his story? Yes, we have been reading the testimony of Matthew. He didn’t up and follow Jesus out of the blue. Most of the things we’ve learned about in this book are things Matthew knew about first-hand. He lived and worked in Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus had been teaching and doing these miracles. Matthew had heard about all these things. He may well have heard and witnessed them for himself.

But the thing was, I don’t think Matthew could believe that Jesus would have a follower like him. Matthew wasn’t a nice man. He was a corrupt government official who lined his pockets by over-taxing his own countrymen. He was regarded as a traitor to his people because he worked for the Romans. And since he dealt with sinners and Gentiles, he was always regarded as ceremonially unclean and, thus, unwelcome among God’s people. A tax collector’s reputation was so bad that they were prohibited from giving testimony in court—even if they witnessed a murder!

In the story just before this, Jesus proved that he had the authority to forgive the sin of the paralyzed man. Now he showed just how far his forgiveness would reach.

D. What was it that drew Matthew to Jesus, so that at Jesus’ simple invitation, “*Follow me,*” Matthew left everything, (as Luke tells us) and followed? **Authority.** Matthew **tells us his story so we’d know that Jesus has the authority to forgive and call the worst of sinners.**

I. JESUS HAS THE AUTHORITY TO CALL YOU TO FOLLOW HIM
(9:9)

- A. I think that when Jesus stopped at Matthew's toll booth, Matthew already believed in Jesus. There wasn't some mystical sudden conversion when Jesus said, "Follow me." What those words meant to Matthew was that Jesus welcomed him. We talk about accepting Jesus. But here, Jesus accepted Matthew, the sinner, and that's all Matthew needed to leave everything and follow Christ.
- B. Jesus doesn't ask all who follow him to leave their jobs or families, but he *might*. He *can*. He can also ask us to leave our riches or resentments, our dreams or achievements. I cannot imagine any Christian whom Jesus has not asked to leave something behind. Jesus' authority means that to follow him, we leave behind all that hinders us from following Christ.

Illus.: Ancient stories say that after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Matthew remained in Jerusalem and preached the gospel there for 15 years. Then, say some stories, he went to Persia (Iran) and also to Ethiopia, where he may have been martyred. Whatever he did involved bowing to the authority of Jesus.

- C. Everyone who follows Jesus has a story of unexpected paths, dying, and invaluable treasures gained. One time, Peter said to Jesus,

"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Jesus said to them, "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." [Matt 19:27-29]

We often say that Jesus is always with us. But his disciples must also be able to say that we are always with him.

It wasn't long before Matthew brought Jesus to his friends, a large gathering of the notorious. V.10...

II. JESUS ALWAYS WELCOMES OUTCASTS TO FEAST WITH HIM (9:10)

- A. Mark tells us that many of these people had been following Jesus—probably not as disciples but simply as folks who couldn't get enough of him. But now they get an invitation to dinner—Luke calls it a great banquet—with Jesus.
- B. They didn't realize it but this meal was a forecast and foretaste of an even greater banquet. Do you remember Jesus' story about the wealthy man who prepared a great banquet but most of the guests he invited gave lame excuses? So he told his servant, "*Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.*" That's the story here. The respectable people wouldn't have Jesus but when the invitation went out to tax collectors and sinners they were thrilled to be included.

Sometimes we talk about bringing people to Jesus, but in this story Matthew brought Jesus to the people. We can do that, too. We ask each of you who follow Jesus to create a "Guest List" of people you would like to see come to the Lord's Great Banquet. We pray that God would open doors for us to introduce them to Jesus.

Illus.: Many years ago **Keith Miller** told about an attorney named Joe whom he had led to Christ. About a year later Joe wrote Keith a letter expressing some of his frustrations—claiming that he had told a few people about what was happening to him, but he didn't feel they understood him. Joe wrote that if Keith would agree to come to his city and to his church, he would get these people together for a

discussion about living for Christ as a businessman. Miller related what happened next.

This was a very busy time in my life, but I had gotten Joe into this; so I felt compelled to go... His friends would only know me as 'a friend of Joe's.' As we arrived at the church, the pastor said that he was glad I'd come and that Joe had really helped him personally. By this time, we were a few minutes late. We went through a door at one end of the church to meet the friends who were curious about Joe's life. I stopped for several seconds...looking into the faces of over 800 people crowded into every corner and aisle of that church and adjoining rooms.

I realized in that moment that all of the promoted programs and plans in the world will be virtually worthless to motivate people to become Christians—unless they see some ordinary person like Joe who is finding hope and a new way to live in Christ. And then they will listen.ⁱ

The banquet that Matthew threw was certainly as wonderful as that story. But trouble was brewing. Matthew's sinful friends weren't Jesus' only audience. **Vv.11-13...**

III. ALL WHO FOLLOW JESUS MUST LEARN THAT GOD DESIRES MERCY MORE THAN SACRIFICE (9:11-13)

- A. Were you taught the adage, “*You're known by the company you keep*”? Or, “*Bad company corrupts good morals*”? And, of course, there's truth in that. When Jesus ate with truly sinful people that signaled acceptance and friendship. No one eats with someone who can ruin their reputation! The Pharisees were aghast. **As far as they were concerned, Jesus was contaminated!**

B. **Vv.12-13**, *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.”* Jesus makes **three important statements**.

1. *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”*

Everyone knew Jesus was the great healer, but none of the Pharisees regarded sin as sickness in need of God’s healing. To them, sinners were weak-willed spiritual losers, who, having made their bed of God’s judgment, now had to lie in it. None of them thought of the Messiah as a healer of souls, even though **Is. 53:5** promised, *“the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

No one is ever so sick as a sinner and there is no malady so resistant to treatment as our sinfulness. No one ever gets better. People can only get worse as our sins compound and mutate. We are sick beyond the reach of help, *except for Jesus*, the Great Physician.

Jesus wades into the contagion of sinners that he might bring them the medicine of God’s mercy.

2. Then Jesus says, *“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”* That is a quote from **Hos. 6:6** where God accused his people of love as fleeting as the morning mist. They put on a good religious show, with their sacrifices, tithes, fast days and ceremonies, but their hearts were unchanged. In the midst of that indictment, God says, *“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice...”* Jesus will quote this same line again in **Matt 12**. The point is this. Those who criticized him for eating with sinners and for contaminating himself with their fellowship were proud of their religious sacrifices.

They counted on these evidences of devotion as proof of their righteousness. Like people who point out how righteous they are because they go to church or give to charities. They regard their sacrifices as their righteousness.

Sacrifices have their place in worship, but mercy is how we imitate God. Jesus told us, “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*” Do not exclude people from your life who need God’s mercy, even if their lifestyles or sins are offensive to you. **Mercy is the true measure of our righteousness.**

But this mercy is, you might say, medical. It isn’t simply a matter of not judging people. **It is bringing Jesus to them that they might hear the good news of forgiveness and restoration.**

3. Jesus concludes, “*For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*” That sounds nice but to religious people it was totally upside down. Everyone was sure that when the Messiah came he would gather the righteous and judge the wicked. If that’s *not* true, why would the Pharisees bother keeping all those rules? Of course, it never occurred to them that they needed mercy as much as the tax collectors did.
- C. Jesus’ disciples were there at that banquet. They were learning **the hospitality of mercy.** They were seeing the wonders of God’s grace as men and women whom the community knew primarily as “sinners” met Jesus and were healed at heart.

Illus.: My friends, Drs. Craig and Fran Blomberg, live in Denver. Craig is a renowned New Testament scholar and Fran is a missions scholar. They have long attended a church in the poor part of town called Scum of the Earth.

That church tries to be a home for outcasts—punks, skaters, ravers, homeless people—those who may feel they’ve been treated like scum. Their website also says, “*More important to us, however, the name implies that being people of faith does not mean we are better than anyone else.... The name is humble and we like that.*”

So our scholarly friends, Craig and Fran, go to this church. I wrote and asked Craig what their personal experience has been “eating with sinners” as Jesus did. He replied,

We eat regularly with folks after church. It’s a great way to get to know newcomers, many of whom are unbelievers, and to have more extended conversations. As people discover what Fran and I do and have done, they often ask us questions related to their pilgrimage to or away from faith. Sometimes they come to faith or come back to faith, though not always. I suppose one of the more dramatic experiences Fran had years ago was informally mentoring a young woman who claimed to be a Christian but was quite promiscuous and, as advised by our senior pastor, Fran’s task was to “just hang on to her.” In other words, other churches had given up on her; if we gave up on her, we’d probably lose her to the “nones”. As the two of them met, almost always over food, she became more and more chaste, though not entirely so. Finally, she married a childhood sweetheart.

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.”

ⁱ Keith Miller, *Habitation of Dragons*, p.103. Illus. # 3919