

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

The Remedy for a Sin-Sick World * Matthew 9:9-13

So, as we get into the Word today I have two questions for you. They are questions that I don't plan on answering directly, but I do hope you can answer them yourselves. Here they are. If Jesus were to come and live here in SE Iowa in 2013, where and with whom would He spend most of His time? That's the first question. And the second follows from the first. Given where and with whom Jesus would spend His time, what does that mean for you and me? So, you have it? If Jesus were to live in our community, where and with whom would He spend His time, and what does that mean for us? See if you can answer those questions for yourself from what we see in Matthew 9 today.

All right, on that note if you haven't already, please take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 9. I have to tell you that I have been looking forward to preaching our passage today for many, many weeks, and that's because I believe it is absolutely crucial for our understanding of what God is calling our Church to pursue in the days ahead. In fact, let me encourage you to make it a priority to be here over the next four weeks, because during this time we are going to give you the details of where we are headed as a church. These will be some of the most important messages you have ever heard at Harmony Bible Church. This week and next week we will lay the groundwork, and then on November 11 & 18 we will give the specifics of how, when, where, and what we will be doing. So, very exciting stuff, and you aren't going to want to miss any of it.

All right, let's read our passage for today, Matthew 9:9-13:

*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. **10** And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. **11** And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" **12** But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are*

well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13, ESV)

Now as a reminder we are currently in a long section where Matthew is detailing a number of the miracles that Jesus performed. However, as he does, he also intersperses some very important points about discipleship and here in this passage he takes a few verses to tell us about how he himself first became a disciple. And his story is pretty straightforward, at least on the surface. He is sitting at his desk in his office when Jesus walks by and says, "Follow me." In response, Matthew gets up, closes down his shop and joins Jesus' inner circle.

Now, that seems simple enough, right? However, there is much more to it than that, as the response of the Pharisees' just a few verses later clearly shows. The Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would associate with someone like Matthew, and it's likely that Matthew was at least somewhat surprised himself.

That's because tax collectors were the most hated people in 1st century Israel. They were Jewish agents of the occupying Roman Empire and used their authority and power to severely oppress their fellow countrymen. The tax booth that Matthew would have been sitting at would have either been on the major highway from Syria to Egypt or at a port on the Sea of Galilee, from which he would have exacted taxes on people for all kinds of things. It would have kind of been like an IRS tollbooth.

The Roman government stipulated a certain amount of tax to be excised which was bad enough, but on top of that the tax collectors were allowed to charge whatever they could get away with above this amount and keep it for themselves, with the full weight of the Roman Army standing behind them. This allowed them to practice extortion, to take bribes from the wealthy, and to exact proportionately more from the middle and lower classes.

The result of this was that most tax collectors ended up being extremely wealthy, but also tremendously despised. What's more, because of their constant interaction with Gentiles, they were considered unclean and were forbidden from having any religious or social contact with other Jews. They were viewed as little more than unclean animals such as pigs and were lumped together with thieves, murderers, and prostitutes. They couldn't worship at the temple and they weren't allowed to testify in court because their word meant nothing. In short, they were the lowest of the low, the untouchables of the 1st century, people that no one wanted anything to do with; no one, of course, except Jesus. And so as we get going today, I have to believe someone in the room needs to hear an underlying truth in this passage: even if you think that no one in this world wants you, Jesus does. He wants you so much that He was willing to come to this earth and die on the cross so that you could be His *forever*. Listen, if Jesus will take tax collectors, He will take you. Regardless of your past, present or even your future, Jesus says to you today, "I want you!"

Ok, so back to the text, because the most important part of our passage is yet to come. Look at verse 10:

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

Now Matthew doesn't include this, but Luke tells us that the house here is Matthew's, and this gathering is a great feast. It's not just an informal gathering; it's a big party. Matthew is so excited about Jesus that he wants all of his friends to get to know Him too.

However, the Pharisees happen to be watching what's going on, and when they find Jesus at the party they can't believe their eyes. Note their response in verse 11:

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

In other words they are saying, "Why in the world would He be hanging out with those people?" Now, it's easy to be critical of the Pharisees here, but the truth is that we might be inclined to react in a similar way.

To put this in perspective, it would be like finding Jesus in a bar with a bunch of drunks, criminals, and prostitutes. Let's try to be as transparent as possible this morning. Let's put aside pretense for a few minutes. If Jesus lived in SE Iowa we would expect Him to hang out with church going people right? Probably with us right here at Harmony. This is the place where all the godly people hangout, right? So if we were driving by a bar today on the way to church and found Jesus shooting pool and knocking back a few cold ones with the locals, we very well might react as the Pharisees did. And if you find yourself getting upset at what I am suggesting then I hope you realize that's the point.

But before you get too upset, note how Jesus responds in verses 12-13:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

To be honest with you there are a ton of things we could talk about from these verses, but today I would simply like to attempt to answer three questions. Number one, "What do we learn about Jesus?" Number two, "What do we learn about ourselves?" And number three, "What do we learn about discipleship?"

What Do We Learn About Jesus?

Let's start by talking about Jesus. We learn one primary thing about Him in this text, and it is extremely significant. In fact, John MacArthur says that Jesus' statement at the end of verse 13 is among the most important statements ever recorded in the Bible.¹ Look at it one more time:

¹ MacArthur, John (2001). Pg. 58. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

In short, we learn that the reason Jesus came to earth was to save sinners. Now, I know this is a simple, basic truth, but we have to realize that this is the first time Jesus is explicit about what He came to do. For the first time He is clear that He didn't come to be a political leader, or a religious leader, or even to perform miracles and make everyone physically healthy; no, He came for the express purpose of saving sinners. The Apostle Paul echoes these words in 1 Timothy 1:15:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

Let me ask you; are there any more wonderful words in Scripture than these? Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! Are you thankful that this is true today?

Let me tell you why this truth is so important. While there are a lot of problems and issues in our world, our greatest problem is a sin problem. Our greatest problem isn't the economy, or healthcare, or government, or the state of family. Our greatest problem is sin. In fact, all our other problems are the result of sin. Sin is the root, and all the other problems we have are the fruit. And because of this it's important to remember that the only remedy for our problems is Jesus. He is the only one who can save us from our sin.

Now, I want to point out something else that's important here, which Luke includes in his account of this story. Luke 5:32:

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32, ESV)

The way that Jesus saves sinners is through repentance. Listen carefully here. Jesus came to save sinners, and the way He does so is by calling them to repentance. To repent means to turn around. It means to stop walking in

rebellion against God and to turn and obey Him in faith. And so listen to me right now – if you have not repented of your sins and turned to faith in Jesus, He is calling you to do so today. He is speaking to you today and urging you to respond to His call to follow Him. Jesus came to this earth to save sinners – and that includes you.

What Do We Learn About Ourselves?

This leads us to the second question for today: “What can we learn about ourselves?” Well, we’ve already answered this question, but let me state it plainly to make sure you’ve got it. It’s clear that Jesus is trying to get across to us that we are all sinners. We are all included in the sinners He came to save. In order to get anything out of this passage today, you have to understand this truth. If you don’t recognize that you are a sinner, if you don’t see that you are in desperate need of a Savior, then this passage will mean absolutely nothing to you whatsoever.

You see the problem with the Pharisees is that they didn’t recognize they needed saving just as much as Matthew and his friends did. The term *sinners* in verse 10 isn’t Jesus’ or Matthew’s term, it’s the Pharisees. They considered anyone who didn’t measure up to their standards as sinners, but didn’t consider themselves to be such. However, the Bible is clear that every single human being is a sinner, and there are no exceptions. Here are a couple of passages that show this:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
(Psalm 51:5, ESV)

In other words, we are sinners from the moment of conception, every single one of us. From the moment your father’s sperm and your mother’s egg came together to form you, you were a sinner. And I am guessing that you have undoubtedly proved this time and time again over the course of your life.

Paul tells us in Romans 3 that this means none of us have the righteousness required to have a relationship with God:

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. (Romans 3:10-12, ESV)

You know, a great way to analyze ourselves this morning is to consider whom we identify with most in this passage. We have three choices: Jesus, the Pharisees, and the tax collectors. And since none of us are Jesus, it's either got to be the Pharisees or the tax collectors.

You know what my guess is? For many of us we probably struggle with this. Here's why. We know that the Pharisees are the bad guys in this story and so we don't want to go in that direction. But at the same time we probably hesitate to see ourselves as bad off as tax collectors. We probably readily admit we are sinners – but we also probably think we aren't as bad as "those people" – whoever those people may be. However, the Bible tells us that regardless of what or how much sin we have committed, we all stand guilty before a holy God. There is an old proverb that says, "the ground is level at the foot of the cross", and that is certainly true. I can't look at someone else and say, "I'm not perfect, but I am a lot better than they are." It doesn't work that way. Regardless of how "good" we are, we are sinners in need of a Savior. As Romans 3 tells us:

For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:22-23, ESV)

Let me put this in stark terms for you. Anyone know who this guy is? It's Charles Manson, serial killer and one of the most evil men of the last century. He's currently serving multiple life sentences in California. Here is another picture. This, of course, is Billy Graham. He is one of the greatest persons of the last century. When we consider these two people we naturally think of Charles Manson as bad and Billy Graham as good. However, the Bible says that in regards to how God considers them there is no distinction, because they both fall short of God's glory. Yes, Charles Manson falls much shorter, but that doesn't really matter. Both of them are

sinner which means neither of them meets God's standard, and therefore they need the same thing: they need Jesus to save them.

Now listen to me carefully because there are two important things I need to add here. First, as we talked about earlier, Jesus came for the express purpose of saving sinners. This means that if you have repented and turned in faith to Jesus then the penalty of your sin has been removed and you are righteous in God's sight. You have also been given a new nature that does seek after God and can, and does, do good.

Second, while believers do have a new God-seeking nature, we also still have a sin nature, which means that we still need to be saved on an ongoing basis. By this I mean that we still need to be saved from the ongoing power of sin in our lives. While faith in Jesus takes away the penalty of sin, believers still need His daily saving from the power of sin. This is the difference between justification and sanctification. In justification God removes the penalty of our sin and in sanctification He gradually frees us from the ongoing power of sin.

The practical application of this is that both believers and unbelievers stand in need of God's grace. Unbelievers need grace so they can be saved from the penalty of sin. They need to be restored to a relationship with God and given eternal life. But believers also need grace in order to be freed from the power of sin in the day-to-day of life. Paul explains these complementary truths in Titus 2:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (Titus 2:11-12, ESV)

You see, God's grace not only saves but also teaches, trains and empowers us to say no to sin and yes to godly lives. Grace both justifies and sanctifies.

Ultimately this means that we are all in need of God's grace. Not one of us is any better than anyone else. Without Jesus we are all incredibly helpless.

And so this passage shows us that whether we are a believer or an unbeliever – wherever we are today – sin is our problem and Jesus is the solution.

What Do We Learn About Discipleship?

All right, the third question for today is, “What do we learn about discipleship?” I think there are two primary things.

1. Discipleship is about mercy not religion.

One, following Jesus is about mercy not religion. By religion I mean a list of rules regarding what one does or does not do in order to be right with God. You see, the Pharisees believed that being a God-follower consisted of obeying a very long list of rules, many of which they had come up with on their own. What’s more, they believed they had to separate themselves from anyone who didn’t follow the same rules they did. However, note what Jesus tells them in verse 13:

Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice.’

Jesus is quoting from Hosea 6:6 and in doing so is giving the Pharisees a major rebuke. He is telling them they should know from the Old Testament that God is more concerned with their hearts than their outward forms of worship. And the specific type of heart He is looking for is one that has mercy and compassion for other human beings. It helps here to understand what the book of Hosea is all about. Hosea was a prophet whom God called to marry a prostitute in order to demonstrate the mercy He had for the people of Israel, despite their repeated spiritual adultery. And the point Jesus is trying to get across to the Pharisees, and to you and me today, is that because God has shown us incredible mercy we should have the same kind of mercy for others.

This truth has the potential to completely transform our Church and our entire community. The way that we comprehend, or fail to comprehend

God's mercy determines how we relate to Him and to everyone else. If we understand that we are a sin-sick people who have undeservingly received the wonderful mercy of God, then we will by default be merciful to others, regardless of what they have done. On the other hand, if we don't understand God's mercy, we will really struggle to show mercy to others.

I have to admit that this is a deeply convicting truth for me. I've got plenty of issues that I struggle with in the Christian life, but this has to be right at the top. Mercy would not be one of my strengths. Very few people have ever put the words Chris Carr and merciful in the same sentence. However, I can't get away from the fact that if I am truly worshiping Christ in all of life, I will be showing mercy to others. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

We've talked a lot in the last year about the fact that to be a disciple means to worship Jesus in all of life. That we are to worship Him in whatever we do. Well, here in this passage Jesus is telling us that a big part of worship is being people who are full of mercy and compassion. When we show mercy to others we are worshiping God as much or more than at any other time. So, yes, God wants us to come here on Sunday and worship Him with our voices and talents and resources and minds, but He also wants us to worship Him by showing love and compassion to a lost and dying world.

2. Discipleship is about inviting others to follow Jesus.

The second thing we learn about discipleship in this passage is that it includes inviting others to follow Jesus. What is the first thing Matthew does after responding to Jesus' call? He throws a big party so his friends, family, and co-workers can get to know Jesus too. Matthew is so excited about following Jesus that he wants others to have the same opportunity he does.

Let me try and summarize this text for you. Discipleship begins when we understand we are sinners in need of a Savior. That's where it starts. We can't be saved until we realize we are lost. From there it extends to an understanding and an acceptance of Jesus as our Savior. It's the recognition

that Jesus came to save *me*. The result of this is a mercy for others that compels us to point them towards Jesus so they can be saved and follow Him as well.

Now I'd like to take some time this morning to consider how Matthew goes about making disciples, because I think there is a lot we can learn from him. We have been talking a lot about making disciples in recent days, and here in this passage there are some important practical steps we can learn for how to go about doing so. Truth be told, we normally do almost the exact opposite of what we see Matthew doing in this passage.

Note that once Matthew follows Jesus he doesn't separate himself from his former associates, but rather continues in those relationships. It appears that Jesus was good with this, and I believe He even encouraged it.

Matthew also didn't begin by teaching, preaching, or handing out tracts. He didn't go to his old place of work to tell his friends that they were sinners on their way to hell. He didn't invite them to church so the pastor could tell them about Jesus. Instead, he began with hospitality. He invited people into his home. He shared a meal. He took his time, loved on his friends, and as he did so he introduced them to Jesus.

So, what does this mean for us? First, I think it means we need to engage in relationships with unbelievers. One of the problems in making disciples that many of us have is that we don't have any real relationships with people outside of our church and families. And this needs to be corrected. Some of us might need to stop spending so much time with believers and family members and start spending time with lost people. We need to become intentional about engaging unbelievers and inviting them into our lives. One of the best ways to do this is exactly what Matthew did – by inviting them into our homes and practicing hospitality. By starting to do life with them.

Second, as we develop relationships with unbelievers, we need to look for opportunities to tell them about the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

Relationships with unbelievers don't do any good if you aren't talking to them about Jesus. So, don't worry about having all the right words to say, just share with them what Jesus has done for you. Stories are a very powerful way of sharing your faith, and as people come to know that you care about them they will become much more open to listening to the story of what Jesus has done for you.

Third, we need to look for opportunities to minister to those in spiritual and physical need. An additional truth we can take from our text today is that people who recognize their need are much more open to receiving help. We are going to see again and again as we go through Matthew that Jesus has a lot more compassion and mercy for the down and out than He does for the proud and religious. Why? Because the down and out know they need help and are much more receptive to receiving it. Now, the truth of the matter is that the down and out and the proud and religious both need Jesus. The difference is that the down and out are much more receptive to Him. Do you see that in our story today? Both the Pharisees and the tax collectors needed Jesus, but it was only the tax collectors who realized this was the case.

Now let me conclude with this final challenge. I think we all realize our world is desperately sick. And it's pretty easy to diagnose what the problem is. But let's not simply be diagnosticians. Let's not just go around telling people what their problem is. Let's give them the remedy. Let's introduce them to Jesus.

Think of it this way. Does anyone want to go to a doctor who will tell you what your problem is but won't give you the treatment you need in order to get better? Well, for too long that's what the church has done. We've told people they are sick but we haven't been willing to give them the treatment they need in order to get better. We haven't been willing to show them mercy and do what we need to do to introduce them to Jesus. We haven't been willing to show people the mercy that Jesus has shown to us. Let me put it to you this way. October is breast-cancer awareness month. Imagine with me that you are the person who eventually is able to

develop a vaccine that would prevent women from ever developing breast cancer. If a woman took the vaccine she would be 100% guaranteed to never get breast cancer. What would you do with your vaccine? I imagine that you would do whatever you could to make sure that as many women as possible received that vaccine. You wouldn't just sit on it and pontificate about the dangers of breast cancer and how much damage it was causing. No, you would take the cure and you would give it to as many people as possible.

Friends, we have what the world needs. We have the cure. It's 100% effective. And so I want to ask you today, are we going to sit on it and pontificate about the dangers of sin and how much damage it is causing, or are we going to share the cure with as many people as possible? What will it be?

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