

JESUS CAME TO CALL SINNERS

Matthew 9:1-17

Key Verse: 9:13

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

In this passage Jesus tells us clearly his purpose in coming to this world. Jesus came to call sinners. Sin is the real problem of mankind. We have no solution for the sin problem. But Jesus does. Jesus has authority to forgive our sins. Moreover, Jesus gives us new life with purpose. Jesus can transform us, making us dynamic and powerful. Jesus’ ministry of forgiveness and mercy cannot be contained by legalistic systems; it breaks them to pieces. Today let’s accept Jesus’ forgiveness and Jesus’ call to follow him.

First, Jesus said, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven” (1-2).

Jesus had done a great work of driving out demons in the region of the Gadarenes, but the people there, deceived by demon mischief, asked Jesus to leave. So Jesus stepped into a boat, and crossed over to Capernaum, his own town (1). There, Jesus was welcomed and many came to him for help.

Look at verse 2a. “Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat.” Most likely this man was a quadriplegic—a man who did not have the use of any limbs. We can only imagine how he became that way. Once, he may have been a high school student who excelled in academics and basketball. But on the way home from a drinking party, he crashed his car into a tree and broke his neck. His body

was paralyzed from the neck down for life. Also, his psyche was shocked. Self-condemnation and fatalistic thoughts tortured his soul. Modern medicine can cure many illnesses. However, paralysis is still incurable. There was no hope anywhere in the world. But there was hope in Jesus. Jesus had already begun to heal every disease and sickness among people (4:23). Some men brought the paralyzed man to Jesus.

Verse 2b begins, “When Jesus saw their faith...” Jesus saw their faith. They had faith that Jesus could heal the paralyzed man. They did not say anything. But their actions of faith spoke louder than words. They brought their friend to Jesus to be healed. Jesus was pleased by their faith. Jesus was willing to help them. Jesus blesses the helpless through those who have faith. Elijah Ushomirsky was tall, handsome and paralyzed. Maria Ahn cried out for him in prayer again and again. After some time, her face was paralyzed. She seemed to be carrying Elijah’s paralysis. Through her faith and prayer Jesus blessed Elijah, first by forgiving his sins, and next by giving him a most beautiful woman of God, Ruth, as his wife. Jesus blesses others through our faith.

Look at verse 2b. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus knew the heart of the paralyzed man. Jesus is concerned about the heart, while man is often concerned about outward appearance. This man had lost heart; he had fallen into depression over his situation. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly ten percent of all Americans suffer from clinical depression during some period of every calendar year. We may take depression lightly, especially in a person who looks strong. But Jesus ministered to this man’s depressed heart as of first importance. When Jesus said, “Take heart, son,” his powerful and loving words melted the

man's depression and planted new and living hope. Jesus expressed great affection for the man by calling him "son." Jesus saw him as a dear and precious human being. Jesus is tender and compassionate, especially to the broken-hearted.

Jesus did not say, "Your paralysis is healed." Jesus said, "...your sins are forgiven." Everyone thought that this man's problem was paralysis. But Jesus thought sin was the most urgent problem. We must learn that our real problem is not caused by someone else or by our situation, but by our sin. One woman missionary suffered from inner fear. A shrewd businesswoman made use of this to entrap her with an unfavorable labor contract. The real problem was that God's servant had fear in her heart. Through fasting prayer, and by the help of her husband, she is overcoming. Jesus wants to solve her fear problem completely. Sinsickness paralyzes our souls, be it fear, laziness, selfishness, or whatever. When Michael Wang went to Utah he prayed to offer his family for campus mission. He found a beautiful suburban residence to use as a house church. But strangely, he began to take care of his yard with all his heart and strength. He pulled weeds from the soil in his yard, but they began to grow in the soil of his heart. They were weeds of yuppie desires to enjoy a life without mission. When Michael was paralyzed, Jesus intervened in his life. His company is transferring him from Utah to Sacramento, where he will have missionary coworkers. Jesus is helping him to overcome the paralysis of sin.

Why did Jesus point out the man's sin problem? It was not to make him more depressed. It was to forgive him. Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." At that very moment, the man's burden of sin was taken away. He became a child of God. From now on, God would look upon him with pleasure, bless him with mercies ever new, and love him tenderly until he entered the kingdom of God. It was the best news that this man could hear. At the staff conference, David Brogi

encouraged us with his personal testimony of Jesus' grace. To him, graduating from college was impossible, like being healed from paralysis. But through Dr. Samuel Lee's faith and encouragement, David began to take one class per semester and has done so for 20 years. At last, he finished his undergraduate study. We can take heart in Jesus who forgives us.

Second, Jesus proves his authority to forgive sins (3-8).

Jesus words of forgiveness brought new life to a paralyzed man. The same words evoked a very different response from the teachers of the law. Look at verse 3. "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" They perceived that Jesus' words were a divine proclamation. Jesus did what only God can do: Jesus forgave the man's sins. The Pharisees recoiled, saying to themselves, "You are not God, so you cannot forgive sins."

Look at verse 4. "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?'" Jesus knew the hearts of the teachers of the law. They were full of evil thoughts. So Jesus rebuked them. As teachers of the law, they should have disciplined their thought world with the word of God. They should have meditated on the word of God day and night. Instead, they entertained evil thoughts in their hearts. So they had no spiritual discernment. They became enemies of Jesus, disregarding the marvelous grace of forgiveness of sins.

Jesus rebuked them to bring them back to their senses. Then Jesus reasoned with them. Look at verse 5. Jesus said, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" The religious leaders must have thought it was easier to say "your sins are forgiven," for it is not verifiable. They were used

to using empty words. However, Jesus never used empty words. When Jesus said, “your sins are forgiven,” he knew he must go to the cross and die for this man. Jesus had to pay the price to forgive this man.

Finally, Jesus demonstrated his power. Look at verses 6-7. “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” Then he said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ And the man got up and went home.” Jesus’ point in this part is crystal clear. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins. If Jesus says that our sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. Jesus heals paralysis in our souls and enables us to serve God. Look at verse 8. “When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.”

Third, Jesus says to Matthew, “Follow me” (9-13).

Look at verse 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.” As a tax collector, Matthew collaborated with the Romans to collect taxes from Jews. Jews hated this. They believed that God alone was their King and that they should pay taxes only to God. Tax collectors were utterly despised, regarded as traitors, and branded as unclean. Still, tax collectors were men of ability. They could read and write, and had skill with numbers. But they used their ability to get rich at the cost of their suffering people. They can be compared to some CEOs who rob pensions to live in luxury. Matthew had decided to be a tax collector, thinking that money would make him happy. However, money did not make him happy. Pursuing money, had made him selfish. All of his

relationships with people were broken. No one wanted to be his friend. Matthew was lonely and fatalistic inwardly.

When Jesus saw Matthew, he knew everything about him. Yet Jesus was not at all fatalistic about Matthew. Jesus saw him with great hope. Jesus believed he would be healed from his selfishness. Jesus believed he would use his ability for the glory of God. Jesus believed he would become the best man who ever lived. When Jesus said, "Follow me," Jesus' hope, faith and love poured into Matthew's heart. Jesus was accepting Matthew as a disciple, one of his closest followers. From now on, he would learn from Jesus and grow to be like Jesus. Matthew could taste the love in Jesus' words. He got up and followed Jesus. As he stepped away from the tax booth, his burden of sin lifted. Freedom and peace come into his soul.

Jesus took a risk on Matthew. It was totally unacceptable in that society for a Jewish religious leader to have close contact with a tax collector. Yet Jesus called Matthew to follow him. Jesus loved Matthew first. Then, love for Jesus began to sprout in Matthew's heart. Suddenly, love was overflowing and Matthew had a desire to give generously to Jesus. As he surveyed Jesus and his disciples, he found they looked hungry. Matthew remembered all the gourmet food that was stored in his house. He offered it all to Jesus and the disciples. So he invited them for a delicious dinner, sparing no expense. There was great joy in the house. Jesus was there, and the fruit of repentance was flowing from Matthew's heart. Matthew's several friends, who were also tax collectors, and their lady associates joined the party. Soon the house was full and laughter from inside was spilling out into the streets. Jesus is truly Immanuel, God with us. Jesus brings the joy of heaven to the hearts and houses of sinners.

When the Pharisees heard the sound of joyful laughter, they immediately thought something was wrong; someone was having too much fun. They approached Jesus' disciples and said, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" They thought Jesus lacked spiritual discernment. They thought Jesus was not strict enough with the company he kept. They imply that Jesus was a sinner and that he was with sinners because he liked to sin. They did not understand Jesus at all. Jesus had to die on the cross to save men from their sins. Jesus hated sin more than anyone else did. But Jesus loved sinners. Jesus accepted sinners as they were and had fellowship with them. Jesus ate with sinners and laughed with sinners. Jesus never thought he would be contaminated by sinners. Rather, Jesus was sure that sinners would be healed and cleansed by being with him.

How did Jesus answer the Pharisees? Look at verse 12. "On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.'" Jesus was sorry to hear the Pharisees legalistic words. Legalism prevented them from understanding other human beings. But Jesus did not give up on them. Jesus taught them basic human compassion. Sick people need a doctor. Sinners need a Savior. As a human being, our first response toward a sick person, with physical or spiritual sickness, should be to show compassion and to bring healing.

It seems that the Pharisees totally ignored Jesus' teaching on compassion. But Jesus did not give up. Jesus next spoke to them on the basis of the Bible. Look at verse 13. "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" Based on Hosea 6:6, Jesus taught them the heart of God. God desires mercy. God wants men to acknowledge him as God and acknowledge themselves as sinners and receive his mercy. God delights in extending mercy toward helpless sinners. God gave us the law to lead us to his mercy. God wants us to experience his forgiveness

and his love and to grow in mercy. God did not practice legalistic justice toward sinners. If he did, all mankind would be judged and condemned. Instead, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus as a ransom sacrifice for our sins. Let's acknowledge our need and ask God for mercy.

Fourth, new wine into new wineskins (14-17).

Look at verse 14. "Then John's disciples came and asked him, 'How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?'" They probably felt sorry that Jesus' disciples were having all the fun, while they were fasting. Look at verse 15. "Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.'" Jesus equated himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to his friends. Jesus also equated fasting with mourning. A wedding is a time of joy and celebration, not mourning. When we are with Jesus we have great joy, like the joy of a wedding in our hearts. It was not time for the disciples to fast, but to enjoy Jesus' company and learn from him. Jesus does not want his disciples to be people of ritual, but people who follow him with joy and learn his love and mercy from their hearts.

To further explain that his gospel ministry did not fit into the legalistic structure of Judaism, Jesus used two parables. Look at verses 16-17. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." The gospel is like new wine. It has power and it needs room to expand and grow. It cannot be

contained by brittle old wineskins. In the same way, Jesus' gospel ministry was life-giving. It was the expression of God's boundless mercy. Those who receive it must be free from legalism to follow the person of Jesus with trust and love.

Today we learned that Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins. We learned that God is merciful and he wants to help us in our time of need. We do not have to remain in the paralysis of sin. Let's come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Then we can follow Jesus and practice mercy toward all people. We also learn that Jesus blesses helpless people through the faith of others. Let's pray for the healing of all spiritual paralytics on our campuses through our faith in Jesus.