

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Matthew 9:9-13 at Victory of the Lamb on February 19, 2017.

**Series: What Jesus Said**

**Today's Focus: It's Not the Healthy Who Need a Doctor, But the Sick**

**"Go and Learn What Mercy Means"**

I did something this week that I've never done before. I went to go see a chiropractor. I know a lot of people go for regular adjustments. Sarah is one of them. She speaks highly of it. And I've always been like, "That's great honey, I'm glad that works for you. I'm not sure that's for me though. I don't think I really need that anyway." Except this last Sunday I was playing basketball. I took a pretty hard fall. I got whiplash. Middle of the week I'm feeling pretty miserable. Can't get comfortable enough to sleep. Sarah says, "Ben, I've got this coupon for a new referral, would you like me to set up an appointment?" I said no. Later in the day though when I was still feeling miserable and she cheerfully asked me again, I said ok. What was I getting myself into? I'm still not quite so sure but I'm hopeful it's going to make a difference.

You all are smiling because you know exactly how this works, don't you? People can be so stubborn. We tell ourselves we're fine. We try and act like it's all good. We won't go and get help...and this is true on so many levels, right? Except when it isn't all good and we know it. When we're hurt, when we're sick, when we're desperate, when we've tried everything and we're finally ready to admit maybe we need help. Then we'll go. Maybe.

Just like with church sometimes, right? Or when it comes to God. Sometimes when people think it's all good, they don't think they need church. They don't need God. Or maybe they tried going to church for a while and weren't really sure if it was helping anything. Maybe they didn't fully understand the worship service so they stopped going. Maybe they prayed once and or twice and didn't see immediate results or the payoff they were hoping for seemed a bit lacking. Maybe their need just didn't seem big enough.

Interestingly, in the verses that come right before our sermon text today from Matthew chapter 9 of the Bible, we hear about a guy who had some huge needs and some good friends who wanted to help him out. The guy was paralyzed. He couldn't walk. But one day when his friends heard that Jesus was in town they picked up his stretcher and were determined to carry this man to go see Jesus. Except they found that the house Jesus was in was so full of people by the time they got there that nobody else could get in. Nobody else could even get close to Jesus. Other people were in their way blocking their path.

When I think about this I muse, "Just like today....sometimes we can make it so hard for people to come near to Jesus. What obstacles am I, are we, putting in the way of people that are preventing them from getting to know their Savior?" But this man's determined friends won't give up easily. They make a hole in the ceiling and they lower their friend down into the middle of the room right in front of Jesus. Jesus then performs two incredible miracles. He says, "**Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven**" (Matthew 9:2). He forgives the man's sins! And then to prove that he had the authority to do so he invited the paralyzed man to pick up his mat and start walking. It was awesome! The man got up and went away praising God! But do you know how some of the people who were there reacted? Maybe you can guess. While many people were left awe-struck and praising God, some of the religious leaders were murmuring amongst themselves. You see while they were so close to Jesus in proximity, right next to him there in the house, their hearts were far from him. Like Pastor Bill warned us against last week... their hearts were full of hypocrisy and a harsh judgmental spirit that stemmed from their own sense

of self-righteousness. And then comes our text today.

**<sup>9</sup> 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.**

**<sup>10</sup> While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"**

**<sup>12</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."**

It's an incredible story, isn't it? Think about it. Matthew is actually caught in his sin. He's sitting in the tax collector's booth, at work in his office, when Jesus walks by. He has nowhere to hide. Tax collectors worked for the Roman government and the way they themselves profited was by cheating their fellow Jews out of more money than they owed. They were notorious for this, considered by their fellow Jews to be the worst kind of scum at the bottom of the pond. But at the call of Jesus, "Follow me," Matthew seeks the promise of a better future, forgiveness!... and a fresh start. Perhaps Jesus saw in Matthew's heart what had been stirring for a while, "I need help. God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And Jesus does! He has mercy. After all it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

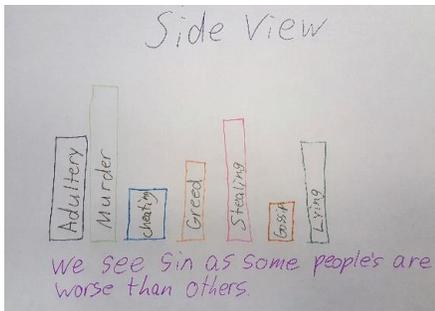
The next thing you know what's Matthew doing? He's inviting Jesus over to his house. He wants Jesus to be a greater part of his life. He's throwing a dinner party. And who does he invite? The people that he knows need help just like him. His friends. Fellow tax collectors. Fellow sinners. People who need mercy. A man once consumed with selfish greed, Matthew quickly becomes a gracious host so that Jesus, the Great Physician, might have the opportunity to diagnose and treat others too.

What a neat scene there at Matthew's house. I think how amazing it would be if all of you were part of small groups that met in each other's homes and you were comfortable inviting friends to get to know Jesus in the context of a shared meal together. See I'm guessing a lot of us within the church think of Jesus as the "Friend of sinners" and we think, "Yeah this is great. Of course he is."

But not everybody who saw what was going on over at Matthew's house felt this way. Not by a long shot. Some people thought, "Jesus isn't doing this right." **When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"**

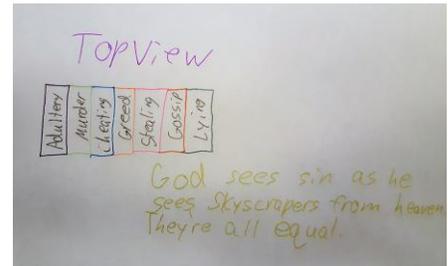
So let's think about this for a second. Doesn't it make you a little frustrated that the Pharisees were upset at Jesus here? I mean who are they to want to keep certain people away from Jesus and getting the help they need? But heart check time here...let me ask you this. Would you be able to sing songs of praise to God in worship if you knew that the person behind you voted for a different presidential candidate than you and you learned why? What sins...if you knew that the people sitting around you had committed them...would cause you not to want to come here to church? What kinds of sins...if you knew that people walking in today had committed, would cause you to seek a different church with less sinners, stop coming altogether, or give up on God?

Or let me ask it like this, What kinds of people have you shied away from inviting here to church because somewhere deep down you judged them as not worthy of your time, not worth the effort, not worth the potential risk, or thought, "I hope they find Jesus, just not in my church."



You see we tend to see sins like this, don't we? {pic1-side view} We see some people's sins as worse than others. We rank them. But the thing is our rankings end up all looking different. We all find ways to have other people's sins out rank ours and then it's really easy to find fault with church, other people, pastors, etc. and decide not to go—even to think you don't really need Jesus, at least not to the degree that *those* people do. But that's exactly what the Pharisees did. It's why they were so judgmental. They didn't think they needed a Savior, a spiritual doctor,

because after all they weren't the sick ones. But remember here's how we tend to see sins {pic1-side view}. But here's how God sees them {pic2-top view}. Like seeing skyscrapers from heaven, they all look the same. We're all guilty. We're all sinners. So when Jesus says it's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick, who's he really saying is sick? You and me! Everybody. You need to understand this.



That's why Jesus went on to say...<sup>13</sup> **But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**" You see the Pharisees, just like a lot of people, including us sometimes, thought they were righteous. Or at least...good enough, better, when they compared their righteousness ranking to others. So they were offended that Jesus would dare spend time with sinners like Matthew and his friends.

How about you? Be aware that this can happen in subtle ways too. Christian cliques can form. And not even intentionally. Sometimes inadvertently. It can be exciting to just to be around and have good Christian friends. It's wonderful to spend time with them and you look forward to seeing them and doing things together. And for some of you when you get together here at church it might seem like this is the friendliest place on earth...because you're in the "in" group. Meanwhile over time you become oblivious to the needs of others who start to feel like they don't belong or people who are new and coming for the first time and maybe don't have a single Christian friend. They perhaps even start to feel judged as if you don't think they're worthy of your time or your attention or your compassion. We don't want this to happen.

I told you at the beginning that I went to the chiropractor this week which I'd never done before. I went because I was feeling shooting pain in my neck. And because it was my first time there they also took x-rays. And then she took the time to go over the x-rays with me and you know what? I learned a few things I never knew before. Apparently, all the times I got whiplash playing football because I got a helmet in my back and then hit my head on the ground wasn't all that good for me long term. I could see on the x-rays that I have some issues with a couple vertebrae in my neck that I'm going to want to get taken care of while they're still relatively minor issues. This is going to mean some regular adjustments for me for a while. I can see now why this will be good for me. But I never would've known this without getting the x-rays and someone who knows what they're talking about taking the time to help me understand what I'm seeing. But now that I understand, I can start to get the help I need and I'm actually glad for that.

Isn't that sort of what Jesus is saying today—with both truth and love... **"It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."** He wants us to understand that he is the great physician, the great healer. And he gives us what we need which is first of all the truth about ourselves. I mean you want a doctor who's going to be honest enough to tell you the truth in order to help you, right? If the x-ray or the MRI shows there's a problem, you wouldn't want the doctor to say just go home and keep doing what you're doing, would you? And so God gives us his law which scans our hearts and gives us the diagnosis of our sins.

But Jesus doesn't leave us there with this diagnosis. He doesn't just reveal our sins. He provides the remedy! It's where truth and love meet in a simple yet profound way—at the cross {pic3—keep on screen for awhile}. Sometimes people will donate blood, or plasma or even bone marrow for complete strangers. Sometimes a brother or sister might be able and willing to donate a kidney to a sibling. Once in a while even for a total stranger! But have you ever heard of a doctor who would willingly switch places with a terminally ill patient? Or could you imagine yourself willingly trading places with a death row inmate awaiting execution?



Yet Jesus took it one unimaginable step further. He traded places with this entire sin-sick world—the only Righteous One in the place of sinners. He accepted the diagnosis of the entire world as his own. He therefore took our greed, our gossip, our adultery, our lying, our hatred, our jealousy and our anger and our stubbornness and our pride...and all our sins completely upon himself. Whatever your most grievous sin is, when you were caught like Matthew in the tax collector's booth, he took that too. He had to bear in his holy body our horrible sin disease, our death, our damnation so that we could have a full share of his resurrection, his life, his spiritual vitality and health and ultimately his home in heaven. The Scripture says, **God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God** (2 Cor. 5:21).

And to obtain this cure, there are no deductibles you have to meet. No co-pays. No second opinions required. It's all there, freely available, and it can't get any better. All you need is simple Spirit worked faith in Jesus Christ your Savior.

So then Jesus says, **But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'** Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament prophet Hosea. In other words, worshiping God has never been about just going to church and going through the motions. It's never been just about mouthing the right words or saying the right prayers. It's never been just about how good a person's life looks on the outside or on their public social media profile when compared to others. It's never been just about following tradition and doing things the "right way" ...but about having your heart in the right place. It's about starting where David did when he said, **"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise"** (Psalm 51:17).

A contrite heart. When we offer this to God instead of our awesomeness, our own righteousness, then we will find a God who is merciful to us. Who forgives us. And who for Jesus' sake heals us and makes us whole. And when we're whole—we're free then to go and be merciful to others. This is God pleasing worship.

So go and learn what mercy means. The thing is you won't just learn by listening to my sermon. You'll learn by going out there and trying to put this sermon into practice by showing mercy. Really every aspect of life now Jesus has transformed into mercy ministry for people who need him so very much.

I ran across this comment in a church leaders blog this week. **"Increasingly, I think unchurched people think about walking into a church the way you might think about randomly walking into a wedding to which you weren't invited or into a corporate retreat for a company for which you don't work. It would just be weird. In the future, about the only way non-Christians will keep showing up at Christian churches is via personal invitation."**

Well you know what this sounds like to me? An opportunity! An opportunity for God's people to start showing mercy again. Like Matthew did. Jesus had mercy on Matthew first and Matthew invited his friends to get to know Jesus better next. So friends, if you've experienced the mercy of your Savior, let's go out there and learn what mercy means. Let's be humble. Let's be understanding. Let's be kind. Let's be generous. Let's be merciful. Let's help people meet Jesus. That's why we're here. Amen.