

Sermons on Matthew

For Whom Jesus Came

Matthew 9:9-13

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
3/20/2005*

For Whom Jesus Came

Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “_Follow Me._” So he arose and followed Him. ⁻¹⁰⁻ Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. ⁻¹¹⁻ And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, “_Why does your Teacher eat with _tax collectors and __sinners?_” ⁻¹²⁻ When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, “_Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ⁻¹³⁻ But go and learn what *this* means: _‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’_ For I did not come to call the righteous, _but sinners, __to repentance_” (Matthew 9:9-13).

Hanging out with sinners

Matthew records his own conversion as a preface to an event where Jesus was surrounded by sinners. Matthew was a tax collector. Jewish tax collectors were often considered to be sell-outs to the pagans and were known to use their office for grafting (Luke 19:1-8).

That they were held in derision by the religious community is plainly seen in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector where the Pharisee smugly and piously thanks God that he is not like “**this tax collector**” (Luke 18:11). It would seem that we are to enter into this passage with an appreciation for this disdain.

Community antipathy is often more biting and pernicious than individual ill will; perhaps because community anger has a host of advocates paving the road. History has afforded us numerous examples of communities of people who joined hands in hatred, contempt and indifference. Whether Hitler and Jews or 18th and 19th century America and blacks, we are shocked at what communities of people are capable of.

Not only should this shed light on the atrocious nature of post-modernism where truth is determined by the community, it should also make us aware of what humanity is capable of, left to their own devices...*Lord of the Flies*.

Let us, therefore, as study what happened in this house, be aware of the hostility and derision the religious community has for the people sitting at the table with Jesus. The antiseptic Pharisee saw

these people as a plague from which they must protect their children. They were open and infectious sores...yet here they sit with Jesus.

Bad Company Corrupts

But before we use this passage (as many have) as a springboard justifying the Christian's full immersion into the sin's darkened culture—before we exegete this passage in such a way as to strategically thrust our six-year-olds into the belly of the great infidel in order that they might evangelize—let us ponder the God's wisdom.

Do not be deceived: “_Evil company corrupts good habits_” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed (Proverbs 13:20).

There are utilitarian benefits of the Christian's connection with the world. Certainly if Christians are to let their “**light so shine before men, _that they may see your good works and __glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)**, it is necessary for the believer to avoid living in a vacuum. Yet at the same time, Christians should be unwilling to engage in the world as to allow even one stain on their souls. Followers of Christ are not like the under-cover cop who, in his attempts infiltrate, engages in the ungodly activities of the underworld. Christians are to remained unstained (James 1:27).

We never get the impression that Jesus was merely partying with the world. And here, though surrounded by sinners, He is also surrounded by His disciples.

In short, it is an unbiblical notion that Christians should isolate themselves from the world. Yet at the same time they should be wise and unwilling to allow the world influential access to their thoughts, actions and ethics.

Ad Hominem

The Pharisees (religious leaders of that day) would allow no such behavior.

**“...they said to His disciples, “_ Why does your Teacher eat with
_tax collectors and __sinners” (Matthew 9:11)?**

This is what logicians call an attack *ad hominem* (argument against the person). The fallacy in this attack is that the person is wrong in what they are saying because of a fault in their character. *Ad Hominem* is often employed against the Reformed faith by pointing out flaws in the behavior of Martin Luther or John Calvin. It is also employed against the Christian faith in general via the crusades or the Spanish inquisition or Jimmy Swaggart or Jim Bakker. It is a weak form of argumentation. After all, even the demons can be accurate (James 2:19).

Jesus, however, may be the only example in history where the *ad hominem* would be supremely legitimate; after all, finding a flaw in your pastor or Martin Luther or John Calvin in no way casts genuine doubt or legitimate aspersions against the Christian faith. But finding a fault in Jesus is another matter entirely. Jesus was not teaching, as all others do, of a truth somehow detached from His own being and nature. He wasn't merely telling the truth; He is the truth.

It is interesting that in all the assaults history has perpetrated against the Christian faith, there is a dearth of arguments against Jesus himself. There were initially numerous efforts to find fault in Christ by the teachers of the law and they unanimously failed; of course they failed—by what standard could one judge the righteous creator of heaven and earth? But so utter was their failure that they would eventually seek to twist and pervert His words by supplying false witnesses against Him (Matthew 25:60, 61).

For Whom Did Jesus Come?

Upon hearing their accusation, Jesus, as He was wont to do revealed the treachery of their hearts. They had lost the notion of what should have been their religious dispositions—sinners in need of a Messiah (Genesis 12; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; 55). Dispensing with a confession of sinfulness led them to, not merely a contentment in their own righteousness, but a merciless disposition toward those who they viewed as less righteous than themselves. Let us be reminded that a haughty or proud look is first on the list of things the Lord hates (Proverbs 6:17).

Heaven help the church and the Christian who loses sight off the heart of their faith, i.e. the need for a Savior. When that is moved side-stage the crowning of self moves upstage. Though Christians are to pursue righteousness with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:34-40), a smug contentment in our having “achieved righteousness” shuffles the church and those who attend it away from the pale of God’s grace. The truth of this is apparent in Jesus’ words **“Those who are well have no need of a physician” (Matthew 9:12)**. He goes so far to say that He **“did not come” (Matthew 9:13)** for those people.

Churches and Christians therefore must ask themselves if they have a view of Christianity consistent with this proclamation of Christ. Are churches, as it were, hospitals where the Master Physician is healing man’s decrepit soul—where it is readily apparent that over and above all other aspects of our relationship with Jesus is the continual recognition that He, and He alone, delivers us from sin and death?

To the extent that I have my finger on the pulse of today’s church I fear that we have lost sight of this. Churches have descended to venues of self-help where the pastor is the motivational speaker. They’ve become retail outlets where contentment is purchased or theatres where inspirational concerts and shows help their congregants through a difficult week.

I hope I am wrong about this, but to the extent that I am correct, these churches and those who attend must ask themselves whether or not Jesus came for them.

One might answer, “There was a time when I was a sinner and I did repent but now I must move on to solid food. We must no longer consider ourselves as sinners in need of a Savior but as saints moving onto maturity.” To this I must say that your maturity is but a twisted regression. For no one who truly sups with Christ would, in any genuine definition of maturity, delude themselves into thinking that His saving graces are blanching in the pursuit of nobler things. It is quite the opposite. The single most glorious portion of the Christian faith is to sup with Him and on Him as we remember that Celestial Surgeon of the broken and defiled human spirit died that we might live.

And unlike the doctor who washes his hands after touching his diseased patients and writes a prescription he hopes will do the trick, this Physician baptized Himself in man’s filth and darkness for He

knew this, and this alone, would be a pleasing remedy before His Father in heaven.

This is all tied together in Jesus' words, **"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'" (Matthew 9:13)**. The Pharisees lack of mercy—man's lack of mercy in general—is inextricably linked to his lack of willingness to confess that he is himself in need of mercy. And may there be a spiritual haunting of our souls when we, in our merciless dispositions before others, come to recognize that the genesis of this our high view of self and low view of the cross.

May we continually repent of this and enjoy those mercies which are granted to us every morning (Lamentations 3:22, 23). May we in turn extend those same mercies to our fellow sinners that they might also sup with Healer of the nations (Revelation 22:2).

Questions for Study

1. Why do you think Matthew mentions his own conversion (page 2)?
2. How did the Jewish people feel about the tax collectors? Why (pages 2, 3)?
3. Is this story to be used as a license to immerse ourselves in a non-Christian culture (pages 3, 4)?
4. What kind of an attack did the Pharisees make on Jesus? Discuss this (page 4).
5. For whom did Jesus come? Explain (pages 5, 6).