

January 25, 2026

MERCY EXTENDED: MATT 9:10-19,23-26

Introductory Activity Option 1

Ask the group to share a definition of the word “mercy.” (Allow time for discussion.)

Explain: “Share this definition found on page 1081 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015): ‘one’s consideration of the condition and needs of his fellowman.’” (ETB LG, 97)

Explain: Sometimes a story helps us get to the heart of a word more easily than a strict definition. (Share the story of Second Lieutenant Charles Brown and Second Lieutenant Franz Stigler from the *Explore the Bible Commentary*, pg. 84-85.) The battlefield is rarely associated with mercy. Actually, how frequently do we see mercy exhibited by people in our everyday lives? Not often. (SKIP TO SUMMARIZE AND TRANSITION BELOW)

Introductory Activity Option 2

Begin by passing out stick-on name tags to the group. Tell them not to write anything on them yet.

Say: Sometimes when you go to an event or party that is designed to introduce people or foster relationships, you will get a name tag. For example, when freshmen enter college, organizations or departments might have introductory get-togethers. You might also encounter such an event at a large workplace. The name tag enables others to know your name. Now imagine that instead of receiving directions to write your name on the name tag, you were asked to write one word that describes you.

Instruct the group to do that now. Ask them to write one word that would describe them. It could be a character trait, a hobby, or even a sports team they follow. Ask them to keep it light and fun. (After they complete the task, ask them to stick the nametag on and share what they wrote.)

Say: Now, many of you probably did write something too terrible on there. You probably did not write “greedy,” “lazy,” “liar,” or any other truly negative trait. Well, in today’s lesson, we are going to see some people who would have freely acknowledged their “bad” side. They would have worn the badge of “sinner” proudly. There are some others in our lesson who wore the badge of “righteous” but should not have. There will also be a man who threw all pretenses aside and came to Jesus wearing a name tag that says, “faith-filled and desperate.”

Summarize and Transition: Today, we are going to examine an account from the life of Jesus in which He demonstrates mercy both spiritually and physically. Our story picks up at a party. Matthew, the author of this Gospel, had organized the party for his friends. He wanted them to meet Jesus. Matthew himself had only become a follower of Christ shortly before this. Last week, we ended our time together by looking at the miraculous healing of a paralytic (9:1-8). After that event, Jesus was walking and came upon Matthew. We can deduce that Jesus was not walking aimlessly because, upon seeing Matthew, He said, “Follow me.” Immediately, Matthew began to follow Jesus. We can also be sure that Matthew not only followed Jesus but became His disciple. After experiencing the call of Jesus and the mercy of Jesus, Matthew invites his friends to a party to meet Jesus. That is where our lesson picks up today.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

1. JESUS'S MISSION (MATT. 9:10-13)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 9:10-13.

Explain: Over the past month, we have examined Jesus' teaching ministry and His healing ministry. We will see more of that as we continue in our study, but today our attention is drawn to the mission of Jesus. His teachings help us understand the Kingdom and how to live as Kingdom people. His healing shows us the coming of His Kingdom. His mission, though, was for people to actually enter into His Kingdom. In this passage, we see that His Kingdom is open to all kinds of people. To help us see that, let's examine the people at this party.

Matthew: First, of course, we have Matthew, the host. Luke says that he "hosted a grand banquet for him at his house." (Luke 5:29) Something in Matthew's life had changed, and that something was a relationship with Jesus. "Matthew wanted his colleagues and friends to know Jesus as he knew him." (ETBC, 86) He wanted to find a way to introduce them to Jesus, and he probably figured "they would come to supper more readily than to a sermon." (Spurgeon, 103)

The Tax Collectors and Sinners: Matthew worked with and interacted with the outcasts of Jewish society. Matthew and his tax-collecting colleagues were despised by the Jews of Capernaum. Tax collectors worked for the governing authorities that oppressed the Jews. Moreover, tax collectors would collect more taxes than necessary and skim a little off the top. Citing Huges and Lane, O'Donnell says that tax collectors "were easily the most hated men in Hebrew society." Moreover, "they were viewed as religious and political traitors, trained extortionists, and thugs among the highest criminal element... [They were] officially excommunicated from the synagogue and unofficially from respectable society." (Preaching, 243) These people were shunned by society because they made a choice to take a job that would enrich them at the cost of others. Moreover, those labeled "sinners" would have been those who sinned openly and did not care who knew it. These were the friends and colleagues that Matthew wanted to meet Jesus, and Jesus came to meet them!

Discuss: What are some ways, besides inviting someone to church, that you can help someone who openly wears the badge of "sinner" meet Jesus?

Explain: I don't think this was a bait-and-switch effort on the part of Matthew. I don't think his friends were coming for a party and Matthew surprised them with Jesus. Jesus was a well-known figure in the area, and these people were probably as interested in Him as everyone else. We don't have to bait and switch people. We don't have to invite them to our homes for a crawfish boil and surprise them with a 30-minute video about Jesus. Instead, we can invite them to our homes or to have a cup of coffee and tell them you have something important to share about your life. Then you can tell them how Jesus changed you. The most important things about

Notes:

TEACHER'S NOTE: Matthew presents the events in Matthew 9 as one event with all of the events. happening on the same day. That is entirely possibly. Some scholars break up the events and say they happened over an extended period time and Matthew mashed them up into one day. In our lesson, we will examine them as if they happened all together. Our goal in this lesson is not to understand the chronology of Christ's life or the writing conventions of Matthew. Instead, our goal is to understand what Matthew is trying to teach us in this chapter.

"The combination of 'tax collectors' with 'sinners,' 'prostitutes' or 'Gentiles' ('pagan[s]') recurs throughout the Gospels (Matt 11:19; 18:17; 21:31-32; Luke 15:1). Such references became idiomatic, demonstrating how unwelcome the tax collectors were to the Pharisees." (NAC, 156)

Matthew's party are (1) he wanted his friends to know about Jesus. We should have the same desire. (2) He went through the effort of finding a way to introduce them to Jesus. We should do the same. "We can follow Matthew's example by using hospitality to reach our friends for Christ." (ETB LG, 98) But what was the response of others who heard about the party?

The Pharisees: (Reread verse 11. See Notes Box.) Now, we are not sure how this interaction played out. The Pharisees were not invited to the party, and they would not have crashed the party and entered Matthew's house. That would have made them unclean in their own eyes. So, whether they were in the courtyard or on the street looking in the window or Jesus' disciples and later Jesus came out, we do not know. But again, the point is the lesson the author is trying to teach us. That lesson is found in their question and Jesus' answer. They first questioned Jesus' disciples, not Jesus, about His actions. As we saw before, the people at the party were some of the worst sinners in town. The holier-than-thou crowd could not understand why Jesus would debase Himself by eating with them. We should understand that eating a meal with someone was a truly personal act. "In Semitic society table fellowship was one of the most intimate expressions of friendship. For this reason the religious leaders could not understand how Jesus could be a religious person and dine with 'bad characters' (v. 15, NEB)."¹ That brings us to Jesus and His answer.

Jesus: (Reread verse 12-13. See Notes Box.) Whether Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees directly or to His disciples is unclear. Either way, the Pharisees would have gotten the message. He begins with a proverb related to sickness and doctors. Generally speaking, a person does not go to a doctor unless they have a problem. (Jesus was not thinking about the yearly checkup suggested by your insurance provider.) Moreover, if we consider the situation (Jesus visiting a home full of sinners), we might equate it with a home visit by a doctor. Someone does not call a doctor to their home unless someone is sick. In effect, Jesus is saying, "The people in this home are sick. They have all the symptoms. They need a doctor. You, Pharisees, do not outwardly display the symptoms of a sickness. Until you realize you need a doctor, I will focus on those who clearly need one. And oh, before you go, consider what the prophet Hosea said about God's desire. 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' So instead of focusing on your rituals and rules about associating with the 'dirty sinners,' remember that God wants you to show them mercy. Show them mercy by being a healer and bringing them to the Lord."

Discuss: What are some ways you can be a "friend to sinners?" What are some ways your church can be a "rescue shop for sinners?"

Notes:

Matthew 9:11

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Matthew 9:12-13

¹² Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

¹ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 62. J. Cardinell, 2026

Summarize Transition: The great missionary C. T. Studd once said, “Some want to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.” (Preaching, 245) That was the evangelistic model Jesus used. We should do likewise. We do not associate ourselves with the activity of sinners, but we should be associated with those who sin. There is no better way to bring them to Jesus.

2. JESUS’S WORK (MATT. 9:14-17)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew **9:14-17**.

Explain: Here we see some more people show up to the party. This time, it is some disciples of John the Baptist. Unlike the Pharisees, they don’t come to criticize Jesus, but they do come with a critique and question. We can know that their hearts were in the right place because Jesus didn’t correct them. Instead, He educated them. The religious leaders were asking, “Why is Jesus eating with them?” and John’s disciples were asking, “Why is he eating at all?” (Preaching, 249-250) It was common in Jesus’ day for pious Jews to fast regularly. For John’s disciples, denying themselves would have fit well with their teacher’s lifestyle. “John the Baptist was an ascetic. His ministry was to embody repentance in how he lived, what he looked like, and what he did or did not eat.” (Preaching, 250) In everyone’s minds, fasting was a good thing. And it is. We will talk about that in a minute. But Jesus tells them that fasting has its time, and for His disciples, now is not the time. He equates Himself with the bridegroom (An allusion to the OT that hinted at His divinity that probably went over everyone’s head. See Notes Box). He then equates His disciples to wedding guests. It would not be right to fast at a wedding. “Sorry, I can’t eat your cake or drink your punch in celebration of your wedding because I am being super holy today.” That would be inappropriate. Jesus is saying all of Israel has waited centuries for me to arrive. They should celebrate while I am here. Later, they can fast.

Discuss: What is the purpose of fasting?

Explain: The group might have listed several reasons for fasting. O’Donnell gives us a few in his commentary on this passage. A few from his list are:

- “when we are trying to develop and practice self-control”
- “to grow our moral muscles”
- “when we are repenting of sin (the times when we have failed to control ourselves)”
- “when we are calling upon the Lord to know his will, make a wise judgement, or ask him to open a door for the gospel.” (Preaching, 254)

Notes:

“Like honest friends, who felt hurt, they came to headquarters, and asked the Lord himself.” (Spurgeon, 104)

“This was a sincere question from a group who would be willing to listen to what Jesus had to say. This why our Lord doesn’t rebuke them, as he does the other two religious groups.” (Preaching, 250)

“By the time of Jesus pious Jews often fasted twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.” (ETBC, 89)

“The bridegroom was a key Jewish metaphor for God (see Hos 2:16–23). This intimation of Jesus’ divinity further connects this passage to the previous three miracles. Jesus’ disciples may also recall John the Baptist’s own use of the metaphor for Jesus (John 3:29).” (NAC, 158)

“We live in the time between the ascension and the second coming. Therefore, the way Jesus ends verse 15 is directly applicable to us today.” (Preaching, 253)

After answering their question, Jesus goes a little deeper to discuss religion and ritual. He does so by giving two analogies, one related to wine and wineskins and the other related to a torn cloak and patches. Real quickly, we need to understand where He is coming from. Wineskins were made from animal hide. After some time, the wineskins harden and become brittle. You do not use old skins for new wine because new wine will ferment, causing the skins to expand and burst. Similarly, you should preshrink a patch before putting it on an old cloak. If you don't, the patch will shrink and tear the cloak further. So, we have to stop and determine what Jesus is trying to teach here. A few scholars help us understand this. Dr. Charlie Ray, former OT professor at New Orleans Seminary, provides two helpful statements:

- "What Jesus came to do was a new work, unlike anything in the traditional Jewish teaching." (ETBC, 89)
- "The teachings and actions of Jesus would not fit in the old Jewish system. His disciples could not be confined in the old system; they needed new skins to hold the new wine of the gospel. (ETBC, 91)

Douglas O'Donnell, pastor of New Covenant Church of Naperville IL, writes, "He is tearing down any man-made, religious traditions that had come to overshadow, supersede, or contradict the Old Testament and the gospel of the kingdom." (Preaching, 248) In other words, Jesus is reiterating what He said in Matthew 5:17. He came to fulfill the law and bring about God's Kingdom on earth. Some of the religious practices and rituals of the day would not only prove unfruitful, but they would actually hamper the Kingdom's growth. The Pharisees and John's disciples were holding on to the old ways. Jesus was trying to introduce them to the new ways of the Kingdom.

Discussion: While it might be a little tangential to Jesus' exact point, let's consider a modern application. In the church, we can hold too tightly to "man-made, religious traditions." Without being negative towards others, what are some traditions in the church that can get in the way of the gospel?

Summarize and Transition: The truth of the gospel never changes, but the ways we help others discover the gospel can. The way we communicate gospel truths can change. The way we go about "doing church" can change. These changes are necessary because people think and communicate change. Just consider some of the analogies Jesus uses. The people in His culture understood them immediately, but we have to take time to first understand what He is talking about before we can understand what He is teaching. The people of the first century thought differently from those in the 10th, 15th, and 21st centuries. Moreover, people from an Eastern background think differently from those with a Western background. Likewise, rural people think differently from urban people. Young people think differently from older people. We have to determine the context in

Notes:

New Wine: "The good news of the kingdom that has come in Christ."
New Wineskins: "Whatever teaching and conduct points to or holds up the gospel of Messiah Jesus."
Old Wineskins: "represents Judaism, not teachings in the Torah that are fulfilled in Christ...as well as, and more to the point, any un-Biblical traditions such as those of the Pharisees." (Preaching, 248)

"Jesus came not to repair Israel's worn vesture, but to bring new robes. Even if mere mending had been aimed at, it could not have been effected through his disciples copying old ways." (Spurgeon, 105)

which we are ministering and share the content of the gospel in a way they can understand. It is an act of mercy to understand people and communicate the gospel to them in a way they can grasp its meaning. That is the work Jesus is about at the party full of sinners. However, sometimes the time for talk comes to an end, and we have to start doing a different kind of work. That is what we are going to see next.

3. JESUS'S COMPASSION (MATT. 9:18-19)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 9:18-19.

Explain: While Jesus is having this important theological conversation and trying to help these religious people understand His mission and His Kingdom, someone interrupts Him. Mark (5:22) and Luke (8:41) tell us that this man was named Jairus. He was a leader in the local synagogue. This means he was both a well-respected and pious man. He is not the kind of man that others would expect to come to Jesus, but it appears he truly believed that Jesus was from God, if not the Messiah Himself. It also appears that he is having a very difficult time. We don't know why Jairus did not come to Jesus before his daughter lay on her deathbed. But we do know that when he came to his lowest point, he went to the only person who could help him. Also consider that at this point in the book of Matthew, Jesus had not raised anyone from the dead. Jairus knew God had used men like Elijah and Elisha to do such things, but something like that had not been seen in Israel for centuries. Despite his status in the community, his station in the synagogue, any questions he might have about Jesus, or the long shot of his daughter from the dead, he came to Jesus. We see his faith through his actions: he fell at Jesus' feet. We see his faith in his words: "Come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Discuss: What strikes you most about this situation?

Summarize and Transition: We can glean several application points from this situation. 1) Even the most unlikely person can be open to the gospel during difficult times. Jairus came to Jesus on his own. In our culture, people might not know enough about Jesus to seek Him on their own, so we should endeavor to bring them to Him. 2) While having theological conversations is important, sometimes we need to stop talking with religious folks and go help those in need. Bible study and church attendance are good, but eventually we need to leave the church house and go into the community. That is where Jesus is headed next.

4. JESUS'S POWER (MATT. 9:23-26)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 9:23-26.

Explain: On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus experiences an interruption. A woman who has been sick for 12 years comes near Jesus. She plans to simply touch His robe. In faith, she believes that this simple act will cure her, and it does. After a brief conversation with the woman, Jesus continues to the home of Jairus. Upon arriving at the home, Jesus

Notes:

"While most synagogues had a chief ruler, a group of lay elders also helped fill administrative positions. The general term "one of" suggests that Jairus was among this larger group of elders." (ETB LG, 102)

"From discussing church questions our great Rabbi very readily turns aside to go and see a sick, nay, a dead girl. He is more at him doing good than anything else." (Spurgeon, 109)

"Picture the scene. I like to imagine the reaction of the religious crowd who are gathered outside Matthew's front door, throwing their questions at Jesus and murmurings against him. And then here comes Jairus. They know Jairus. He's one of the rulers of the local synagogue. They think, 'Ah, he must have a question for Jesus too. Just line up behind us.' But no, there is no question, only a bended knee and a confession, a statement full of faith in Jesus." (Preaching, 257)

encounters a group consisting of hired mourners. It was common and culturally required for families to hire professional mourners. Matthew tells us they were “lamenting loudly.” They were literally throwing things into disorder or making a commotion (cf. ETBC, 94). It is these professionals that Jesus commands to leave. And it is these professionals who scoff at Jesus’ words when He says, “the girl is not dead but asleep.” It appears that they are not inclined to leave, so they are “put outside.” The word translated “put outside” could also be translated as “throw out or even exorcise! Jesus evicts the mourners probably to regain some calm and decorum inside.” (NAC, 161) Once things have calmed down, Jesus enters the home with a small group (Mark 5:40; Luke 8:51) and raises the girl. There are a few application points we can glean from this short passage.

- 1) We should not give up on those whom Jesus intends to save. The professional mourners might have been hardened by the realities of life, and this might have caused them to reject Jesus’ claim. Sometimes we get hardened by life’s circumstances or beaten down by life’s maladies and refuse to believe in the ability of God to save. Let us not give up on people.
- 2) Jesus can redefine a bad situation. When He said that the girl was asleep, He was not denying her death. Instead, He was redefining the situation. He knew that He was going to raise her to life. Therefore, He said her situation (death) was no worse than a deep sleep. The reality of her problems did not change, but Jesus looked past the present. He knew the good that was coming and redefined the present.
- 3) Our trust in Jesus is never misplaced. Jairus came to Jesus with faith. This might have been a little intimidating because of his status in the synagogue. Jairus’ and Jesus’ journey was interrupted. That might have been a little frustrating. The mourners would not leave and interfered with Jesus’ work. That must have been disheartening. Nevertheless, intimidation, interruption, or interference would not prevent Jesus from acting.

CONCLUDE

If you began the lesson with the story from World War II

We began our lesson with a story about mercy given during wartime. Mercy is given when we truly see others and consider their needs and condition. Jesus understood the need of Matthew’s friends. He showed them mercy in an attempt to bring them the grace-filled gospel. The “righteous” refused to show mercy. John’s disciples were confused about the way Jesus was changing things. In an act of mercy, He tried to teach them. Lastly, we saw Jesus have mercy on Jairus and his daughter.

Mercy should be central to the way we go about life and ministry.

Challenge:

There are people in your life who need a little bit of mercy. Maybe they are in a bad spot financially, maybe they are just a little quirky and need a friend, maybe they are suffering because of sin, maybe they need help understanding Scripture. Make a point of showing mercy this week.

If you began the lesson with the nametag activity

We began our lesson talking about nametags. Matthew’s friends’ nametags said “sinner,” and rightly so. The Pharisees’ nametags falsely proclaimed them “righteous.” John’s disciples’ nametags might have read “honestly confused.” Lastly, Jairus’ nametag read “faithful and desperate.”

Challenge:

Instead of labeling others this week, let’s consider the nametag we wear. It could say a lot of things, but if we are followers of Jesus, it rightly says “forgiven.” In small letters below that, it reads, “by the mercy of God.” Let’s show mercy because Christ showed mercy on us. The sinner, the holier-than-thou, the spiritually confused, and the desperate all need our mercy.