

Merciful Towards Sinners

Matthew 9:9–13 · Wes Terry · Broadview Baptist Church · Sunday, September 20,
2026 Series: What Man Is This? (Week 8)

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Thank you. We're going to be in Matthew chapter nine this morning, and it's good to see each and every one of you. I see a lot of brown shirts out there. That's a sign, I think, that we had a pretty good women's retreat. I heard we had 76 people. That's pretty awesome. So you got us guys skunked. We have not gotten close to 76. So guys, RSVP for the next one. It's going to be in April, so you've got plenty of forewarning. Third weekend of April or fourth weekend of April. Is it fourth? Fourth weekend of April. Put it on your calendar. Let us never be defeated again, all right?

A hundred people when I was there. It's amazing how many roads lead back to Roby, and often even from here at Broadview, I run into people who have Roby connections. And growing up in a small town has its perks, I must say. You can't hide, and so everybody knows who you are. And that can be good, because if you have a problem, there's a lot of people there to support you and to help you.

The problem is, if *you* are a problem, everybody knows about it. And there were times in my life where I would have appreciated a little more privacy, because there were things that I was hoping to keep under wraps. But the Scriptures warn that your sins will find you out, that God is not mocked, and whatever a person sows, that is what he's going to reap.

And so there were — I had times in my life where I was reaping what I had sown. The problem was that my oats were being talked about at the coffee shop every day about three o'clock, four o'clock PM. And that's rough. I don't know if you've ever had that happen to you, where your reputation — people may boil you down to your worst moment, or maybe your worst regret, and there's nothing you can do to change it, because people have already formed an opinion about you before you even say a word.

Does anybody sympathize with what I'm talking about, where you're known for your worst mistake? And what I hope would happen in those kinds of situations is that people would be willing to listen to the nuance and to the complicated backstory, and give a little grace, and hear me out.

And sometimes I use the word *mistake*, because sometimes it wasn't even an egregious sin. It was just, you know, you were being a little more foolish than you should have been. Maybe you did it this way instead of that way, and as a result there was a cascading set of

effects. But you want people to give the benefit of the doubt. You want them to appreciate the nuance.

What we want people to give to us, though, we're very rarely quick to give to others. Have you ever noticed that? How we want people to give us a lot of mercy and give us a lot of grace, but when it comes to the shoe being on the other foot, we can be pretty quick to believe the worst about people — even people we know really well. In fact, it's usually the people who know you the best who are the quickest to believe the very worst about you. We don't always give the benefit of the doubt. And so the thing that we want, we're not prone to give.

And all of that brings us to our passage today, because Jesus has been encountering these different individuals, and with each encounter it's been revealing a specific truth about the identity of Jesus — who he is and what he was about. And we've seen how Jesus, in doing these encounters, has confronted people and healed people and challenged people, rebuked even things like demons and the wind and the waves, and all of it demonstrates this authority of Jesus and this power of Jesus.

And yet when we got to last week's message, we saw that all of that authority and all of that power and all of that grace — [audio gap] — not only was he plagued by the guilt and shame of that sin, he was a paralytic, and so it was just insult to injury. He had physical suffering, spiritual suffering. And even though that person interrupted a lot of what Jesus was doing in the moment — teaching and sharing — he looked that man in the eye and he forgave him of his sins.

And so the question lingered after last week: if Jesus can forgive people of their sins, then what *kind* of sinners can he forgive? Just how bad of a sin can Jesus forgive you of? Just how great of a cleansing is this power of Jesus to forgive sinners?

And that leads us to our passage today, where Jesus is going to call a man to follow him who is what I would call the chief sinner of Capernaum. We know him as Matthew. He's the author of this Gospel, and we think of Matthew as this kind of put-together, well-oiled machine of a disciple who wrote one of the Gospels and is one of the top ten MVPs of the Christian life. And yet when Jesus called him, he was none of those things. He was known for his worst mistake. He was marked, and people had a decision about him before he even opened his mouth.

And even though all of that shame and all of that guilt and all that reputation preceded him, when Jesus walks by his booth, he reveals mercy. He shows this person, who did not deserve mercy, great, great mercy.

And so what we see about Jesus is that even though he is unrivaled in his power, he is gentle and he's kind. Even though he can compel demons — hordes of demons — to leave a person and go into a herd of pigs, even though he can literally still the wind and the waves, when he looks at the brokenness of your life and my life, he doesn't come down with a hammer. He doesn't come down with a spirit of condemnation or shame. He approaches — [audio gap] —

And if you feel like what I was describing, you need to know there's a God in heaven who knows what you're going through, and he has sent his Son into the world to communicate to you mercy — not condemnation, not judgment, but mercy. And when you see this about Jesus, it will not only change how you think about him; if you are following him, it will change how you think about everyone else. And that's what I want to challenge us with this morning.

Reading the text

So let's pick it up in Matthew chapter nine, starting in verse nine. The call of Matthew runs from verse nine all the way down to verse thirteen. Jesus has just healed this paralytic, and now he's going to go on from there and call Matthew to himself.

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to Matthew, ‘Follow me.’ And Matthew got up and he followed him. And while he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ Now when he heard this, Jesus said, ‘It's not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means’” — and then he's going to quote Hosea chapter six — “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” This is the Lord speaking. “For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” — Matthew 9:9–13 (CSB)

Now, I imagine Matthew writing these words. And he writes it differently in his Gospel than Mark records this same story, as does Luke record the same story. Matthew does it very differently, as he's done with many of the stories up to this point. I just imagine Matthew writing these words probably with tears running down his cheek. Even though it's very short and kind of not all that detailed, this was his story, and he remembers what it was like to be sitting in that tax booth.

Nobody likes paying taxes today. Nobody likes the IRS. But in first-century culture, tax collectors were even greater *persona non grata*. They made a living basically by taking your living, and so they would take a little bit off the top of the produce that you would have. And so Matthew was in a class of people who didn't just make their living off of other livings — those tax collectors would often abuse the system and exploit it. They would take more than what they were supposed to take. They would take more often. They would take a greater percentage. And as a result they were hated, despised — not only because they were collaborating with the Roman Empire and working for the occupying army, but because they were using their authority and power to fleece the Jewish people, their own people.

And so Matthew is in that category, and he's sitting in this tax booth. And Jesus, whom I'm sure he had heard about because of the reputation he had in Capernaum, Jesus walks by. And everything in Matthew assumes he's going to be just like all of the rest — just like all of the other rabbis, all of the other Pharisees and Sadducees. Every other Jewish person, whether they were religious or not, they would look at that tax booth and they would spit,

and they would scorn. They would say, “These people are worthless. These are irredeemable scum.”

And Jesus walks by, he turns back to Matthew, and he says, “Follow me.” And when he says, “Follow me,” he doesn’t just mean, “Hi, do you want to hang out today?” He’s saying to Matthew, “I want you to be with me. I want you to be on my team. I want you to be in my inner circle. I want you to basically live with me. I want you to follow me. I want you to learn from me. I want you to be part of my tribe.”

And so the thing that he least expected to happen was the thing that Jesus extended. And it’s a reminder of how mercy works in the Christian life between us and the Lord, and how mercy should work between us and the people around us.

I want to give you three things that mercy does.

One: Mercy meets you where you are

The first is that it meets you where you are — just like the mercy of Jesus met Matthew where he was, before he cleaned up his life, before he even made any changes.

We don’t have any indication that Matthew had any inclinations of following Jesus in any way. For all we know, he’s still committed to Rome. He’s still making money off of the other people. We don’t know that he was a bad person necessarily. We don’t know that he was dishonest in any way. But he was committed to his life prior to Jesus, and nothing leads us to suggest he wanted to change.

And yet when Jesus walks by him, he calls him out — which is how mercy always works. The Lord does not wait for you and for me to decide to clean up our life before he begins working in your life, drawing you to himself.

I know this has been true in my life. I would imagine this has been true for many of you, where you would say, “I wasn’t trying to follow the Lord. I wasn’t looking for the Lord. I was the opposite. I didn’t want the Lord. I hated the Lord. I was running from the Lord.” And yet even though I was in that kind of place and committed to that kind of rebellion, it’s as if the Lord chased me down. It’s like a hound of heaven — I can’t remember who says that, maybe Charles Spurgeon. He pursued me, he chased me, he called me out.

And that’s how mercy always works. **Mercy always takes the initiative. Mercy calls. He calls out to you before you ever come to him.**

This is the way that the grace of God works throughout the Christian Scripture. He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham was a committed pagan, doing his pagan thing, living his pagan life, and out of nowhere God in his sovereign grace calls him to himself. You see that with Jesus and Peter and James and John.

It’s the opposite of what you saw in chapter eight with the two would-be disciples. These two would-be disciples who had conditions on their faith — they come to Jesus and they say, “I’ll follow you wherever you go.” They were eager. They wanted to follow Jesus, but they didn’t understand. They had conditions on their faith. “I’ll follow you so long as you

give me a really great life, so long as you make me comfortable, so long as you give me power.” And Jesus says to both of those people, “No, you’re not ready to follow.”

He rejects the people who push themselves on him, and yet he calls the people who aren’t even looking — because that’s how mercy works, because mercy’s always given to sinners, and sinners by and large are not generally looking for salvation. They’re going the other direction. But Jesus is merciful, and so he calls out to you. Maybe that’s what this morning represents in your life: Jesus calling you to himself.

The distance mercy crosses

And he calls to Matthew even though doing so would have been very taboo. Peter, James, John — all fishermen — would have been aware of this person, Matthew.

Matthew was a tax collector. There are actually multiple types of tax collectors; I found this out this week in studying. There was the chief tax collector. Then there was — the Hebrew word is *gabbai*. The *gabbai* is the tax collector that taxes your annual income, taxes your property, taxes things like that. Most people by and large are happy to pay those kinds of taxes. It’s just part of doing business, part of living in America. So you pay your property taxes. Maybe you grumble, you complain, you try to protest, but it never works. But you pay it.

There’s another tax in the first century. This was a transaction tax — kind of like you pay a sales tax today, they would pay a tax like that. It was a producer tax that Peter and James and John would have paid, because they were fishermen, and in their trade they would get their fish and they would sell it. But before they could sell their fish, they would have to pay the tax. And so Matthew’s job was essentially to take from the top of their earnings.

That kind of tax collector was called a *mokhes*. And there were actually two different levels — the mega-*mokhes* and then the minor *mokhes*. That’s not the technical name, but that’s how I think about it. The mega-*mokhes* — that’s someone like Zacchaeus, wee little man. He was a chief tax collector, which meant he was behind the curtain, and he could kind of get out from underneath the shame of being a tax collector, because no one ever saw his face. He was behind the curtain pulling the strings, playing the puppeteer.

It was the people who were in the front office, the people who were in the booth — those were the minor *mokhes*. That’s what Matthew was. And so he was quite literally the worst of the worst. He was the face of the occupation and those who collaborate with it. He was a Jewish man working for the Roman army, fleecing Jewish industry to enrich himself.

And again, we don’t know that he was dishonest. We don’t ever see that Matthew was bad, like Zacchaeus had to go back and repay everybody because he was fleecing them dry. Maybe Matthew was, maybe he wasn’t — but the reputation would have been his regardless.

And so for Jesus to call that kind of person requires him to cross a great social distance. And again, that’s how mercy works in your life and in my life. When Jesus calls us to himself, typically there’s a gap. There’s a gap between who we are and who we need to be — who

we are when we're met by the mercy of Jesus, and who Jesus will transform us into in his mercy. He does not wait for you, in other words, to clean your life up.

And so maybe you grew up in church thinking, "When I get my life together, then I'll become a follower of Jesus, and I'll be like all those other church people who have their lives together. Right now I can't hang out with those people. They're just too judgmental, they're too condescending, they're too buttoned up and boring."

And the reality is, people who genuinely understand the gospel are not people who have a meaningful relationship with God because of their morality. Their relationship with God is not strong because they've been really good and religious. **The mercy of Jesus is always the grounds of intimacy with your heavenly Father.** And when you divorce yourself from the mercy of Jesus, then you leave the Christian gospel and you enter into what the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the religious — [audio gap] —

— who God wants you to be and who you are. But because God is merciful, he will cross that distance. He will close that gap in order to bring you to himself. And so you no longer need to live as if you've got to get your life together before you can become a Jesus follower. You don't have to dot all your i's and cross all your t's. You can come to Jesus as you are, because that's where he will always begin to call you.

And so mercy meets you where you are. It'll cross every distance, it will close every gap, and it will call you before you ever decide to come.

Changing allegiance

And when that happens in your life, you will have a decision to make — just like Matthew had a decision to make, and that was to follow him. He had to make a decision.

And when it says that Matthew got up and followed him, it sounds kind of underwhelming, but it was a big deal. Because what Matthew was doing in effect was leaving all of his security — leaving his economic security, his physical safety. He was protected by Rome, by the prefect of Rome. He had, like, the mafia who would cover his back. He was hated by the people that he was about to join in that circle. Peter, James, and John — Matthew would have taxed them into poverty. They were not going to be excited to bring Matthew into the fold.

So he's leaving comfort, he's leaving security, he's entering into something very questionable. He made a tremendous sacrifice. He did what the other people in chapter eight didn't do. He counted the cost, and he chose to follow. No conditions on his faith. No, "Jesus, I'll follow you so long as —" [audio gap] — some place, or marry an ugly person, or whatever your conditions are.

He drops all of those things, because when you respond to mercy, what you're in essence responding to is a recognition: *I don't deserve it.* And because he's given me something so amazing even though I don't deserve it, there's no demands, there's no conditions that I can place on following Jesus. I have to give my utter allegiance, surrender everything, drop it, and follow.

And that's what Matthew does. His allegiances change, his desires change, his future hope changes. All of that changes because Jesus met him in mercy.

And what Jesus does for Matthew is what we're called to do for people. Because Jesus — his Spirit is in you and me. Those who profess the name of Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and we are the hands and the feet of Jesus. We are continuing the ministry of Jesus.

And so when we say as a church that we want to love people where they are, that's what we mean. That we do not want to be the kinds of Christians that require people to fix themselves up before they would be welcome in a sanctuary like this, or before they would be welcome even at our own dinner table. That it doesn't matter who you are or what you've done — we're going to give the benefit of the doubt. We're going to give a long leash. We're going to have a merciful spirit, because that's what Jesus demonstrated toward us.

And maybe you are a little less, in your eyes, sinful than they are, where they are. But you are still plenty sinful, and Jesus had to cross plenty of a distance to reach you. And so you become willing to cross the distance in order to show — [audio gap] —

People need mercy every day. (*Amen.*) There are seasons in which we are not living as we ought to live. (*Amen.*) We are selfish, we are rude, we can become difficult to live with — and the response to that sin and to that sinner is mercy. (*Yes.*)

And that's Jesus's response, even though he's the most powerful person in the room, even though he had the moral high ground in every moment, even though he could have crushed them. He could have said, "You're in the wrong. How dare you?" He could have ripped them to shreds — and he restrains and does the opposite.

And that's the invitation for people like you and me who — you've been walking with Jesus for a while, you get your life put together, you think you're doing pretty good, and if you're not careful, what can creep up in you is what's in the scribes and the Pharisees. It's a superiority, it's a self-righteous spirit. "How dare Jesus hang out with those people, those sinners and those tax collectors?" Those are the people for whom he came. **And as soon as you begin to distance yourself from those people, you've distanced yourself from him** — because he came to seek and save the lost, and the way that he seeks and saves the lost is with mercy. (*Right.*) Not judgment, not a spirit of condemnation, not a spirit of shame, not a spirit of judgment and rudeness, but a spirit of compassion and grace.

That is what Matthew received, and that's why he surrendered everything. Because in surrendering to Jesus, even though he lost his protection and he lost his financial security, he gained a love and a commitment from God that his soul had been wanting since he was born. He received the thing that he desperately wanted — more than money, more than protection — and that was a relationship with his Father in heaven, by following Jesus whom he had sent.

The Chosen clip

There's a show called *The Chosen* that I have been watching, and I know some people love to hate on it. Their creative retelling of this encounter I find pretty fascinating. I want to

show you this clip, because I think it captures the moment, and then we'll continue moving on to what happens next. So let's watch this video.

[Clip plays — dramatized dialogue of Jesus calling Matthew: "Follow me." — "Me?" — "Yes, you." ... "I didn't get it when I chose you either." — "But this is different. I'm not a tax collector." — "Get used to different."]

So again, you can see just how despised Matthew was. There's a development of this character in *The Chosen* where the first time you're introduced to him, he's sitting in the back of a cart that's filled with donkey manure, and the guy that's giving him a ride is giving him cover, and the guy makes the joke that people don't understand — "I have the greatest piece of manure in all of Capernaum sitting in my—"

So people hated this guy. And you could even see Peter and James and John — Peter especially: "You don't know what this guy's done. You don't know what you're doing." And Jesus shows mercy. He says, "You didn't understand when I picked you either. You need to get used to different."

And this was different. This was radically different. And this is what makes Jesus unique. The reason that he came was not to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance.

Two: Mercy moves you to the table

So not only does he call Matthew, in spite of all of that cultural friction — when he calls Matthew, he immediately deploys him for ministry. He says in verse ten that a big feast was held, and then, while he was reclining at the table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. And then when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

I want you, if you underline in your Bible, to put maybe a little box around this phrase: "eat with Jesus and his disciples" — and then the question in verse eleven, "Why do they eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

This is a Greek word that is playing off of this Greek word, that when they sat at the table they weren't just sitting in chairs, they were reclining — [audio gap] — a place of intimacy, a place of warmth.

You didn't just bring anybody to your dinner table, especially Jewish people and their kind of association. They had protective layers of association. There were hierarchies of social intimacy. And so if you brought someone into your home, that was one level of friendship and intimacy. But if you brought them into your home and they reclined at your table, that was essentially like someone letting their hair down, taking their shoes off, being their most natural self — and you accepting them anyway. You're just accepting them as they are, where they are. There's no polite distance. There's no professional distance. There's this: *you are part of our family*.

And immediately Matthew goes from being considered the scum of the earth to reclining with Jesus and his disciples — which is Matthew's way of saying, "They brought me in. They welcomed me. They made me feel as though I was part of their family."

And that's what the table represents, and that's what makes the table so powerful. The table is like the tax booth. The tax booth represents the gap between Matthew and God — the cultural distance between who he was and who he wanted to be, this friction, this brokenness, this shame, this rejection. All of that is wrapped up in this tax booth.

Jesus calls him out of the tax booth, and he moves him to the table. And that's what mercy does in your life and my life. **It meets us where we're at, and then it takes us where we need to be.** (Yes.) The Lord moves you along where you need to go in life, not through fear and condemnation. **It's not the lightning bolt that motivates you to repentance; it's God's kindness, and it's his mercy.** And so he meets you where you're at, and then he moves you where you need to be.

And where you need to be, what God wants you to be, is in close communion with Jesus. He wants you to be at the table — and the table is a table of mercy.

Throughout the Scripture, Old and New Testament, the table is symbolic of oneness. It's fellowship. It's what Jesus talked about in Matthew eight, when he blessed the Roman centurion and said, "I'm really impressed by your faith." And then the Jewish people were super mad at Jesus, because *how can you be nice to this centurion?* And he responds to the scribes and the Pharisees, "Let me tell you something. Many people from north and south and east and west will come to sit at the table of whom? Abraham. They're going to come and sit at Abraham's table. And then those who thought they were going to sit at the table, they will be cast out."

And so now you see a perfect picture of exactly what Jesus said would happen. It wasn't the people who thought they should be there at Abraham's table. Because those people assumed that they'd get to earn their ticket — that if you're going to sit at the table of God, you'd better be awesome and excellent and morally blameless and put together, because that's what God deserves. God is holy, and if you're going to be in his presence, you need to be holy. And so through religious ritual and activity and striving and a lot of self-righteousness, they made themselves feel better about themselves by making themselves look better than everyone else.

But in so doing, they had missed the heart of God — because God's heart was always a heart of mercy. **God's relationship with his people has never been through religious ritual.** The religious ritual was in service of the covenant relationship. The covenant relationship was always a covenant relationship of grace. It was always a relationship based on mercy, not effort. And when they missed that, they divorced themselves from the invitation that they had received.

And in place of their invitation come the tax collectors and the sinners — because they knew they needed mercy, and because they knew they needed it, they were welcome to sit, and they were welcome to recline.

Enriched communion

Because your relationship with God, if it's going to mean anything, if it's going to be anything, has to be a relationship of mercy. A relationship where you're not saying, "God,

don't you owe me because of how good I've been? Don't you think you need to bless me with this or that because I went to church? God, why don't you fix my marriage? I'm doing everything right. I'm reading the Bible every day. I'm going through the checklist. You need to fix this" — instead of remembering — [audio gap] —

God's table is a place where your communion is enriched. God's table is a place where not just your communion with Christ is enriched, but your communion with his people is enriched.

And that's what was so upsetting to the people who didn't have eyes to see. I read this week that for the religious establishment, they were actually pretty happy to see tax collectors repent. There were some people who thought that it was an unforgivable sin, but most people thought you could repent of even being a tax collector and be brought into the fold. Where they disagreed with Jesus was on his proximity relationally. They were happy to teach the sinner from a distance. They were happy to see them repent and change — but not to come into the table. They were to remain on the outside until they got their act cleaned up.

And a lot of people approach their relationship with God in that way, and as a result of that they never experience true intimacy with Jesus. If you really want to experience intimacy with Jesus, you've got to understand mercy. You've got to understand that your relationship with God is a relationship that is grounded in mercy.

Have you ever been to a dinner table where you got an invitation, but you only got the invitation because the person *had* to invite you? Hopefully not. I've been to a few of those parties, and you're sitting at the table and you feel like an imposter. You feel like you don't belong, and so you don't really talk to anybody. You find a corner where no one's going to bump into you, and you try to get out of there as quick as you can.

I wonder how many of you treat your relationship with God in that way — like a stranger at the table, like someone who doesn't belong.

Contrast that with being at a table with your very best friend, who sits across from you, looks you in the eye and says, "Man, how have things been going?" And they talk not all about them; they're talking also about you, and they're genuinely interested in your flourishing and your welfare and all of those things. Those are some of the very best experiences that you can have in life. And that's the kind of relationship that God wants to have with you.

But you'll only be able to sit at that table if you're not feeling like an imposter, if you're not feeling like you don't belong. And you'll only ever feel that way if you understand mercy — because your sin is going to be a problem for the rest of your life. And until you can understand that my relationship with God and my standing with God is not determined by that sin, but that sin has been abolished, forgiven, no longer credited to my account because of Jesus — then I can draw near to the throne of God's grace in confidence, not because of who I am, but because of who Jesus is. And I can receive that intimacy.

And that's the intimacy that will change your life. That's the intimacy that gives you a superpower that you've never possessed before, because it doesn't matter what other people think about you. It doesn't matter what other people say. It doesn't matter even if they're *true* in what they say about you. You say, "It's actually worse than that — way worse than what you imagine it to be. But I'm secure in who I am, because my identity is based on the mercy of Jesus. I've been forgiven of that sin. My standing before God is no longer determined by my very worst moment or my best moment. It's determined by what Jesus Christ has done, by his best moment and by his atoning death for me on the cross."

When that clicks — (*Yeah*) — your communion with God is enriched, and you will have a relationship with God that you may have never thought was possible.

And when you have that kind of relationship with God, it enriches your relationship with the church — because church people are broken people just like everybody else. And instead of condemning them and judging them and expecting them to get their act together, you can treat them with the same mercy that Jesus has treated you.

Engaged commission

And then when you get that down, God's ready to use you — just like he was ready to use Matthew. And you know what he did? He took Matthew's shame and his past and what Matthew thought would disqualify him from the mission, and he says, "I'm actually going to use your mess to bring other people to the table."

And so all the tax collectors, all the sinners — we don't know how many. The people who thought they would never be welcome at the table were sitting. And how were they sitting? They were *reclining*. The position of intimacy, the position of relational proximity. We don't even know that they believed. We don't even know that they were true believers. It never says that they were all following Jesus — and yet they had the same level of proximity. And that's the invitation.

I think that's the challenge for us as Christian people. I was really challenged by this this week, because I'm a pastor, so most of my time is spent up here — not up here, like I don't work from the stage, but I'm around church people all the time. And you can become a Christian so long that all of your social circle is church people. And not just church people, but people who have their lives together. And then you can bump into people in the world who are living in great brokenness, and they're feeling ostracized and alienated, and their lives are falling apart, and your impulse can be, "Ah, I want to get some distance between me and that person. That's going to take a lot of my time. It's going to take a lot of my effort. I don't want my kids being influenced by that person."

And to some degree there's a little bit maybe even of wisdom that you could claim in that justification. **But whatever relational wisdom may be present, it in no way justifies hatred, discrimination, contempt for people in that place** — because those are the people Jesus came to receive. Those are the people who need mercy, and the way that they receive mercy is by you bringing them to the table.

They were reclining with whom? Jesus? Not just Jesus — his disciples. And I imagine when the Pharisees went up to Peter and James and John and said, “Why is your teacher eating with those people?” they probably thought to themselves, “I don’t know. I’m a little bit uncomfortable. You know, Matthew almost got me sent to prison. But I don’t know where else to go, because he has the words of life.”

Assumptions challenged

And so your communion will be enriched, your commitment to the mission of Jesus will be engaged — but if you choose to do that, you need to know that your assumptions are going to be challenged.

Jesus will challenge what you think is culturally acceptable. Jesus will challenge what you think is wise or unwise. Jesus was taking a hit on his reputation in doing this, and you may take a hit on your reputation in extending mercy. It may be inconvenient. It may feel wrong.

Think about this in the context of a family, or in the context of dealing with your children. Sometimes everything you want to just bring down the hammer — and the need of the day isn’t the hammer, it’s the extension of mercy. But Jesus challenges your priors, because it’s so easy for us to divorce ourselves from the Spirit. It’s so much easier for us to operate according to law instead of grace — when the reality is, it was God’s kindness that led you to repentance, and it’s the mercy of Jesus that will lead them to repentance.

Three: Mercy matters most

And so mercy meets you where you are, and moves you to the table. Then finally, mercy’s going to create some resistance.

It created resistance against Jesus. The Pharisees raised the question, “Why is your teacher eating with those tax collectors and sinners?” And when Jesus heard this, he said, “It’s not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”

Jesus in effect is dropping the mic in this moment — not only in saying, “This is what you always do to broken people, you dum-dums.” It’d be like you going into the doctor’s office and saying, “Why are all these sick people here? Gosh, don’t you have something better to do?” No — sick people go to the doctor, dum-dum. That’s what they do.

And so Jesus is saying, “I’m here for sick people. I’m a rabbi teaching the ways of God. Where else are they going to go? Who do you expect me to hang out with? People who already know all the answers? People who have their lives put together?” Of course not. “So it’s not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”

And then he drops the mic in verse thirteen, and he says, “I want you to go read the Bible.” He’s talking again to scribes — that’s who Luke says they are, the scribes of the Pharisees. Here it says Pharisees. These were Bible people. And so he says, “You Bible people, go read the Bible. Go learn what this means.” And he quotes Hosea six, verse six, God saying, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” And then Jesus responds, “I didn’t come to call the righteous, but I came to call sinners.”

Now, if you go back and read the context of Hosea chapter six, it's the Lord rebuking Israel because they had missed the plot. They were very fastidious to their temple rituals, to their sacrifices, to the routines and things like that — but their love for God had grown cold, and so they were using the ritual as a replacement of what God really wanted.

What God really wanted was a heart of affection. He wanted their love. He wanted their devotion. He wanted knowledge *of* God, not knowledge *about* God. That's kind of dry and academic and theological. That's good — but that's always in service of the deeper knowledge, the relational knowledge, the intimate knowledge, that there's a communion between you and me. And they had missed that.

He says it's like the morning mist — here today, gone tomorrow. Well, actually, here in the morning and gone by ten a.m., or maybe seven a.m. if you're in West Texas.

“Your love is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes. This is why I have used the prophets to cut them down; I have killed them with the words from my mouth. My judgment strikes like lightning. For I desire faithful love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” — Hosea 6:4–6 (CSB)

“For I desire faithful love” — this is the Hebrew word *hesed*: covenant, relational, loyal love. “That's what I desire, not sacrifice — the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Now notice what God is *not* saying. He's not saying *instead of* sacrifice, as in the sacrifices are not important. There is a tendency for some people to read this and say things like, “God just wants a relationship and not religion,” and they can demonize religion and demonize ritual as if it's bad in and of itself. And it's not. We have a Christian religion because we need forms, we need structures, we need routines, we need traditions. Those are all helpful. But the point is that those things are always in service of the main thing — and the main thing is knowledge of God. It's communion. It's love.

Just like Jesus said in Matthew 5: if you're going to get the kingdom, your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. They're religious, but they're only at a surface level. Their obedience to the law has never penetrated to the level of the heart. They're keeping the letter of the law, but they've missed the spirit. They're doing the right things externally, but they're lustful for people in their heart. They're harboring resentment and hatred.

And you may look religious, but if you looked under the hood — which is where God sees — nothing could be further from the truth. You are marked by hatred and spiritual indifference and apathy and coldness, and there is no mercy. And so you do not know God, because you do not have his heart. Because if you really knew God, you would have his heart, which is a heart of mercy.

What he wants for you is *hesed* love — covenant love that he's demonstrated toward you in the covenant, in this case the Abrahamic covenant; in our case, the covenant that we see in the Lord Jesus Christ. What he wants to see in you is the love that he has for you being poured out to other people, because you've been so greatly loved by him.

And so — [audio gap] — ritual doesn't matter. It doesn't mean you should stop coming to church. Please don't. It doesn't mean you should stop doing all of the things. It means that if those things have become a substitute for the main thing, you've missed it. Because what God wants more than all of that religious activity is for him to have your heart, and for your heart to be captivated by his love, captivated by his mercy, which has been so richly poured out on you.

But when you start to live as if you've got your big britches on, and you're too big for mercy, and you're too big for grace, and you've got it going on, and you're kind of super-Christian now — you've lost the plot. You're not a super-Christian. You're a baby Christian again.

Because big Christians, mature Christians, they never leave that place of mercy. They never leave an understanding that I'm saved by grace through faith, and what I've received from God I'm now going to pour out to others, and I'm going to live my life as if mercy matters the most.

Why does it matter most? Two reasons.

Number one, because of what it exposes. The mercy of God, when you see it portrayed, it will expose in you a heart of spiritual contempt that you can see in the scribes and the Pharisees — *“those people, in that way.”* And in your heart and in my heart it will expose the same thing. When you see someone demonstrate mercy to another person and it creates this self-righteous indignation in your heart — *they don't deserve that, they haven't earned that* — that is hypocrisy that is displeasing to the Lord. And it's actually the mercy of Jesus that exposes it in your heart, and for that reason it's a good thing. And so you need to let it have its intended effect and expose the leaven of the Pharisees that has no place in the heart of a true Christian.

And then the second reason that it's important is because it explains why Jesus came.

Jesus quotes this same verse a little bit later in Matthew 12:7: “If you would learn what this means — ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ — then you wouldn't have done what clearly displeases the Lord.” If you would learn what it means that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, then you would understand what God is doing right here and right now. You would see what I'm up to: that I am the Christ, and that as the Christ, I've come to advance the will of God.

And the will of God is not to overthrow the Roman Empire. The will of God is to save his people from their sins. And the way that people can be saved from their sins is if someone who is worthy pays the price for their sins.

The reason that Jesus could forgive Matthew, the reason that he could forgive the paralytic, is because he knew that those sins would be atoned for through his perfect life. And if you live your life as though you get to be the payment for your sin — that you do enough good — [audio gap] — you will spend eternity in hell, because God is way more holy than you are righteous, and it will never be sufficient. Someone else has to take your place. Someone much better than you. And that person is the Lord Jesus Christ — because he's not just a man. That's been the whole point of Matthew 8 and 9. He's so much more than a man. He is God in the flesh. He is the Son of Man who comes to die for sinners.

And that's why he came. That's the whole reason that God sent Jesus: he knew that we could not save ourselves.

The table we are about to sit at

And so when Jesus sits at the table — which we're about to sit at — and he redefines the Passover, and he takes the bread and the cup, and he says of the cup, which was symbolic of the blood of the Passover lamb, he says, "This cup is not the blood of the Passover lamb. It's my blood.

"For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." — Matthew 26:28 (CSB)

"This is the cup of the new covenant" — not the Mosaic covenant, not the Abrahamic covenant, but the new covenant. The new covenant is a covenant in which the law of God is written on your hearts. The new covenant is a covenant in which you are forgiven of your sins. "But this covenant is established not in what you do, but in what I do. My blood, which is shed" — for what? "For the forgiveness of sins. And so take and drink, and do it in remembrance of me."

And what is the bread? The bread is the body of Christ broken for us — because the only way that Jesus could save sinners and forgive sinners is by standing in their place. He had to bear the penalty, the punishment that we deserve. He took the stripes. He took the wrath. He absorbed it into his body on the cross. And then he took all of that judgment and all of that wrath, and he buried it in a grave — [audio gap] —

— in mind that it is finished. The payment is sufficient. You can be forgiven.

But the only way that forgiveness is going to be credited to your account is if you can finally accept the terms of the arrangement — which are terms of *mercy*. It is by grace that you have been saved, not of works, lest anybody have room to boast.

The only superhero in the Christian religion is Jesus, forever and always — because he's the one who showed us mercy when it's not what we deserved.

And when you have that gospel enter into your heart and you truly get it, not only will your relationship with God be transformed and enriched — you will be transformed into a person that looks like Jesus, and you will be an extender of the mercy that you have received, and you will advance the Great Commission to the ends of the earth.

Transcript ends here. The recording moves from this point into the observance of the Lord's Supper.