



gracefellowship

Series: unWorthy: Calling the Outcasts
Date: September 10, 2023

Title: Riffraff to Righteous
Passage: Matthew 9:9-13

Sabbath Blessing and Prayer (After First Song)

May this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

May God's word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:1-10 (Before the Message)

In the Roman world men would buy tax franchises like someone might buy a Chick-fil-A franchise. You would purchase a franchise from the emperor and then extort money from the Israelite citizens to pay the required taxes to Rome and then line your own pocket with whatever excess you wanted to charge.

There were two primary forms of tax collector. The first was a general tax collector, which was someone who collected property tax, income tax and the poll tax. These taxes were set by official assessments, so they weren't typically unreasonable. However, the second taxes were on things like imports and exports, roads, vehicles, animals used for work purposes, even things like fish that were caught and sold in the market.

The tax collectors had basic requirements for what to pay to Rome but then could set the extort people for anything above and beyond that with the muscle of Roman soldiers collecting the money. A few minutes ago we read the story of Zaccheus, who was a chief tax collector. He worked behind the scenes and paid men to collect the taxes for him. Then there was a guy like Matthew who we are going to read about today. Matthew, or Levi (same guy, one is his Hebrew name, the other his Roman name), was someone who was a more visible face and

collected people's taxes in a booth. Matthew lived and operated his tax booth in Capernaum, the major market for selling fish caught off the Sea of Galilee. You might imagine that Peter, Andrew, James and John have had to pay more than their share to Matthew over the years.

Because of the role he played in helping Romans tax his own people, Matthew was hated and despised by his countrymen. In fact, he would have been cut off from his own people and even from God. Matthew would have brought shame on his entire family and would not have been welcome in his parent's home, he would have been banned from the synagogue and he could not worship or make sacrifices in the Temple. Religiously, Matthew was worse off than many Gentiles in the eyes of the Jews! (Content taken from: *Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur)

With that as the backdrop of our story today, look with me at Matthew 9:9-13.

:: Matthew 9:9-13

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

<https://youtu.be/87JIUxqTMLk?si=nsk8xay5qXwimVU>

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

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

When Jesus meets Matthew and calls him to follow Him, Jesus does the same thing He did with Zacchaeus- He invited Himself over for a dinner party! Imagine a man who was not even allowed to attend synagogue being invited to follow a Rabbi and become his disciple! Then the Rabbi came into his home and ate a meal with him! This was unheard of behavior for a holy man of God to associate with someone like Matthew. But that's exactly who Jesus wanted to be around.

The Pharisees didn't like this at all! Standing outside Matthew's house and looking into the courtyard, they see Jesus eating with Matthew. And who would Matthew have invited to a banquet at his home? Other tax collectors and people the Pharisees just called "sinners." It's possible there were prostitutes there. It's possible there were petty thieves invited. When you're an outcast you tend to hang out with people who have also been labeled as outcasts. Matthew's only choices of friends were the riffraff of society! So that's who he invites to have dinner with Jesus!

I want you to notice what Jesus doesn't do in this situation.

- Jesus doesn't ask Matthew to prove his worth as someone who can be a disciple.
 - o Some people think to follow Jesus we have to clean ourselves up first. In fact, we are supposed to come to Jesus and ask Him to do the work of changing us.

- Jesus doesn't ask Matthew to drop his friends.
 - o He doesn't say, "I can't come to your house if people are going to be there who don't follow God."

I love that Jesus is willing to meet people where they are. I'm afraid, too often as Christians, we have put a bubble around ourselves and are unwilling to be around lost people.

Illustration: When we lived in Arkansas there was a strip club just about a mile from our church. We found two different Christian approaches to that club:

1. A group of Christians started a website and took pictures of the cars in the parking lot then posted them on the website so people could see if their spouse was going to the strip club. Their goal was to scare people away from going.
2. A group of women would go before the club opened and as it was closing and take food to the women who worked that night and would just stand in the parking lot and talk with them and offer to pray for them or serve any needs they may have.

One of those things is sleazy. The other is beautiful. Those ladies didn't say, "Here are the conditions for us to show up and serve you and love on you- they just met them where they were and showed them God's grace.

Here's what we consistently see in the gospels when Jesus interacts with those the Pharisees call outcasts:

The call of Jesus is to come as we are, but not to stay that way.

As we follow Jesus we are meant to become more like Him. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to change us to be like Jesus as we read His Word, spend time with God in prayer and fellowship with other believers.

I love what we see Matthew do when he begins following Jesus- when he met Jesus, he couldn't wait to invite others to meet Him, too!

Question: Who is the last person you invited to church with you? When was the last time you invited someone who doesn't go to church to join your life group?

A recent LifeWay survey said that Most unchurched Americans say they have multiple Christian friends, but those friends haven't shared with them how or why they should follow Christ.

In a [2016 study of 2,000 unchurched Americans](#), Lifeway Research found an openness to religious conversations, especially with Christian friends and family. Yet, few unchurched individuals say they've ever had someone explain how a person becomes a Christian.

The unchurched say they're open to having religious conversations. Close to half of unchurched Americans (47%) say they would discuss freely if someone wanted to talk about their religious beliefs.

They also say they would be more willing to listen to Christians talk about their faith if they saw Christians living out their faith in public.

Matthew met Jesus and invited his friends to come meet Jesus as well.

But the Pharisees weren't happy about this. When the Pharisees see all this going on they ask Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Matthew tells us that the Pharisees ask this question to the disciples, but it's Jesus who answers. I imagine the scene kind of like this: The Pharisees call the disciples over to the edge of the banquet where they are watching the party from outside the courtyard of Matthew's house. Then they ask the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The disciples look at each other don't have a good answer, so they walk over to Jesus and say, "So, the Pharisees were wondering..." Then Jesus says, "Guys, I've got this one; I'll go talk to the Pharisees."

That's when Jesus drops this wonderful truth bomb on the Pharisees:

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

Jesus makes a pretty obvious statement- sick people need doctors and I've come to bring healing to the sin sick people.

You can't be with Jesus and maintain a life of sin- the two things are incompatible.

Jesus didn't come to make sick people more comfortable in their sickness; He came to bring them healing!

The Pharisees saw themselves as doctors for people, but they were the kind of doctor who wouldn't touch a patient. They just prescribed a bunch of laws to follow in order to be right with God.

In the middle of what Jesus said to them, He quoted Hosea 6:6- or at least part of it. This is a tool Rabbis would use to get their point across as they taught lessons. Jesus knew the Pharisees had the text memorized, so he quoted part of it,

knowing that they would huddle up and confer with one another over the text to see what Jesus was trying to convey by picking out this part of the passage.

Hosea 6 is a passage that talks about the injustice that is done by the priests because they have walked away from God's story and abused the people they are supposed to be shepherding. God has to remind them that more important than the sacrifices required by the law of Moses is the mercy they should show people as they point them to the goodness of God. The Pharisees had lost the story of God and had become self-righteous, legalistic rule followers with little compassion or mercy for people. Jesus came to show us a different and better way.

Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him and then shows mercy to all Matthew's friends by having a meal with them.

When Jesus wants to reach people for the Kingdom He doesn't call them to the synagogue, He calls them to supper!

Earlier I asked when was the last time you invited someone to church. But maybe before we invite someone to church we should invite them to our dinner table.

Sometimes when we talk about evangelism and sharing our faith it can seem really daunting. But you don't have to help everyone find Jesus. God has put a certain number of people in your path consistently that you are meant to shine a light into their lives. It may be 5/8/12/15 people that your life has influence in and you can consistently impact with the gospel.

Here's the real question: Do you believe that God wants to change your world through your influence?

A couple years ago we took the church through a strategy to reach people with the gospel in hopes that it would help us share our faith more consistently and easily. It's the acronym B.L.E.S.S.

B- Begin with prayer.

L- Listen

E- Eat

S- Serve

S- Share your faith

Within your circle of people you have the opportunity to change the world! And it may start, like Matthew, with inviting people to the dinner table. In fact, here's the challenge for this month: who is one non-Christian person/couple you can invite to a meal?

It's not your job to save people. Let the Holy Spirit do that. But it is your responsibility to share God's love with people. John Mark Comer wrote this:

“We are not sales people. Our job is not to close the deal or manipulate people with the right technique. It’s simply to bear witness to what we have seen and experienced in Jesus.” – John Mark Comer

When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him it changed his life forever. He moved from being an outcast and looked down upon to being a man who wrote one of the four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus! God can take riffraff and make them righteous. Jesus was able to see something in Matthew that no one else saw. I pray that we are able to look at people around us and not see problems or messy situations or outcasts, but to identify people as loved by Jesus who God moved heaven and earth to make His Kingdom open to them.

As we close this morning we are going to sing a song about following God into places where there is brokenness and spiritual need so we can carry the light of His love and grace and salvation.

Closing Prayer:

**Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.**

Life Group Discussion Guide

Read Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 19:1-10

1. What things are similar about these two events?
2. What things are different about these interactions?
3. How does Jesus treat people differently than the Pharisees?
4. How would you say you typically think about or treat non-believers?
5. Who do you most identify with in the story of Jesus and Matthew?
 - a. Jesus
 - b. Matthew
 - c. Tax Collectors and “sinners”
 - d. Pharisees
 - e. Jesus’ disciples
6. This week we were challenged to invite a non-Christian friend or relative for a meal before the end of the month. Who comes to mind for you to be able to invite? (Take time to pray for those names and invitations to be received)

Remind the group of the BLESS Strategy for sharing our faith:

- Begin in prayer, asking God to open doors for relationships and spiritual conversations with lost people.
- Listen as people talk for needs in their life and things that would reveal where they are spiritually.
- Eat with people, inviting them in for a meal that opens up relationships.

- Serve a need someone shares with you about or that you see in their life.
- Share your faith in Jesus and the hope you have found in a relationship with Him.

What is the next step each person in your group needs to take this week to be part of this strategy to reach people with the gospel?