

Mercy Goes Where the Need Is

Fuel Your Faith 12

January 11, 2022

Today's Fuel Your Faith is based on a reading from [Matthew 9.9-13](#). Here we read:

- **9** As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him.
- **10** While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples.
- **11** When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
- **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."

The story of the conversion of Matthew the Tax Collector is recorded in all of the synoptic gospels. Jesus is early in His ministry and has been preaching and teaching throughout the northern province of Galilee ... in and around Capernaum. This was a borderland, with the Jordan River 3 miles E of Capernaum separating two provinces, controlled by two different Herods. Besides being on a trade route in northern Israel, Capernaum also served as a fishing port for the Sea of Galilee. All of this led to great opportunities for the government to tax all the goods carried through and traded in this town. This is probably why Matthew says there are "many tax-collectors" in [Matthew 9.10](#). Mark tells us Matthew's tax booth was beside the sea, so it is very likely that Peter, John, and Andrew could have had previous dealings with Matthew as they paid taxes on the fish they caught from the sea.

The hatred the Jews had for tax collectors is well known. They worked for the unpopular government that had been sanctioned by the hated Rome. On top of that was the notorious reputation tax collectors carried as extortioners, often requiring far more tax than the government required. And yet, here is Jesus ... being mobbed by a crowd who is showing great interest in Him ... approaching the one man in town who no one, and I mean no one in town would have shown any interest in. Period. Tax Collectors and sinners were irredeemable. But here is Jesus, who specifically walks up to Matthew and to no one else in the crowd, "Follow me." And without hesitation, Matthew immediately responds by getting up and following Jesus. Luke adds that Matthew "left everything behind," [Luke 5.28](#).

This story is so powerful in many ways. One of them being that Jesus wrote off no one. There was absolutely no predetermination or judgment made beforehand as to whether a person was worthy of the gospel ... or whether he thought they would automatically reject the gospel. Even the worst of the worst received the invitation for new life in His new kingdom. And that is the scandal of verses 10-11. It's the reason behind the Pharisees' objection. Notice again it's not just one tax collector that has been received by Jesus ... it's "many." These are the common

people who did not keep up with the rules and regulations of the Scribes. Many of them led immoral lives. They were completely undesirable by the religious establishment. Jesus is teaching that He has the power to forgive sin ... even the gross sins of these rejected people.

Jesus is not there eating with them so he can indulge in their sins. He is there as a source of hope and deliverance. He saw them as people who needed help. As he will say in verse 12: "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." And so, He was with them. He cared about them. This is mercy in action. With the self-righteous Pharisees, these would have been the first they would have destroyed. Not Jesus. He came to them with a profound sense of pity and sorrow for their hurts, anxieties, and sorrows. He said to them, "I'll take your burdens. I'll give you hope. I'll set you free." The ancient philosopher, Diogenes, is quoted as saying that "as a doctor must go among the sick, so a wiseman must mix with fools." Any effective healer must expect to get his hands dirty. And Jesus certainly did that because people mattered.

That is certainly not the case with the religious elite, who emphasized precision obedience to manmade rituals, while ignoring the moral demands of their religion. Their strict adherence to law-keeping overrode their concern for those in need. This is why Jesus says in v. 13: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Jesus is not saying sacrifices are unnecessary, but those sacrifices mean nothing absent of the heart that moves to love one's neighbors as oneself. Righteousness is not a bad thing in and of itself. It is the goal of discipleship. But righteousness that puts sacrifice before mercy is not the righteousness of the kingdom.

Those who rely on the correctness of their behavior may find it hard to recognize their own need for a Savior, whose role is to save His people from their sin, [Matthew 1.21](#).

Will you see the lost with the eyes of Jesus? I love this quote from R.T. France: "Discipleship is not for the comfortable and respectable, but for those whom conventional society would rather keep at arm's length. The Pharisees can see only their failures, but Jesus sees their need, and the fact that they [tax collectors and sinners] acknowledge it themselves gives him the opportunity to fulfill his calling."

So, as you think about today, what are some ways you can go about applying the teaching of [Matthew 9.9-13](#)? Is there someone out there you know who needs the mercy of Christ? Someone who may, at first glance, not be with it, easy to overlook, or just be outright rejected by people around them? How can you demonstrate to them the mercy of Christ?

True love always shows mercy.

Thank you for listening to Fuel Your Faith. Join us again tomorrow as we talk more about how the need to demonstrate the mercy of Christ.