

Matthew 9:9-17

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Preacher: Cameron McCartney

[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all, and what a fitting song to sing as we think! in this passage about the love of Jesus Christ to think about how deep the Father's love for us is in giving his own Son for us.

From the outset today, I want to say that my aim is to make two things very clear from this passage. Firstly, as we look at the character of Matthew in verses 9 to 13, I want us to see that Jesus' merciful love extends as far as the worst of sinners.

Jesus' merciful love extends as far as even the worst of sinners. And secondly, in verses 14 to 17, and perhaps this should be our big takeaway from today, serving Jesus should be a joyful, overflowing obedience as we grow in understanding his love.

Serving Jesus should be a joyful and overflowing obedience as we grow in understanding his love. But before we go any further, let me pray. Lord Jesus, as we gather this beautiful morning to worship your beautiful name, we ask that you would show yourself clearly to us by your Spirit. Lord, I pray for all of us, including myself, that you would soften our hearts and allow us to take in the glory of your love today, that we would know how to obediently serve you in the purest of ways in our lives and how only you can enable us to do this.

[1:34] Father, I thank you for how clearly you speak through your Son, Jesus, in this passage. And we thank you as well for this clear illustration of the wineskins. Lord, help us to understand it, know it, and apply it to our lives.

We ask this in your name. Amen. You know, it's very easy to judge people based on their background, isn't it? Their social class, their job, what hairdresser they use or what supermarket they frequent, or what about how they spend their time off.

If I asked you to be really honest with yourself, what sorts of people do you judge? Have you ever made a presupposed unfair judgment on someone based on their race or their fashion sense, their hobbies, what type of job that they have, or the way that they choose to spend their money?

I'll be honest about one for me. Since I was in high school, I've always held a bit of judgment for those types of people who don't really seem to do any work, but always seem to succeed, who always seem to slip their way through when they don't really deserve it in my mind.

I've always wrongly envied those sorts of people and to my shame, not always fully trusted them either. I wonder if you harbor a similar type of judgment for some types of people in your own heart.

[3:03] You know, in this passage, there is a lot of judgment being made of people and particularly of Matthew. Matthew sat at a tax collector's booth and this most likely meant that Matthew worked at a toll house.

He was a type of Jewish customs official for Herod Antipas. He imposed taxes on those bringing goods to and from the surrounding region of Galilee.

Therefore, he was mixing with plenty of Gentiles, which made of an unclean type of person in the eyes of the Pharisees. And the job he had was, of course, a dodgy one.

His career path was classically associated with dishonesty and greed, trying to squeeze the most he could out of people because he could get away with it.

I'm quite sure that Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, and also the author of this very gospel, is the sort of person that many of us would happily sit and judge.

[4:06] But Jesus' call is a surprising one, isn't it? Follow me. When I asked earlier, what sorts of people do you judge the most? What sorts of people do you have your guard up against?

Well, perhaps you could think of an individual. How would you react if this person said to you that they had become a Christian? You bumped into them in the Thistle Center and they said, ah, Jesus found me and I responded to him in faith.

Would we be like the older brother of the prodigal son? Or would we be able to be deeply joyful with that person? Now, I'm aware that the person you had in mind may have already been a Christian, but perhaps that's part of the point.

How often do we judge even our brothers and sisters in Christ? See, the calling of Matthew was no insignificant call. Here's a man who's not respectable.

Lots of people hate him. He's a bit of a cowboy. Why would Jesus Christ want someone like Matthew to follow him? What standards are these for religion?

[5:06] Does Jesus really want money grabbers to be his disciples? Well, the merciful love of Jesus extends even as far as the very worst of sinners.

There must have been something in Matthew's heart that was attracted to Jesus. And so he accepted his invitation hastily. And later that night, Jesus was round for dinner with his new disciple. The other disciples were there alongside many of Matthew's tax collecting colleagues. And you see how verse 10 specifically mentions that these folks are sinners.

In their culture, they are not regarded as good people. The Jewish leaders dislike the tax collectors since they disregard their own man-made halakha laws in relation to tithing.

And doesn't the dinner with Jesus remind us a little bit of chapter 8, 11 to 12, where many come from east and west eat at the feast in the kingdom of heaven with Jesus.

[6:07] But indeed, the very subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside. The kingdom of heaven may be an unexpected place. It's not full of traditional law-keeping churchgoers.

It is primarily full of lively, grace-filled Christians. And here at Matthew's house in verse 11, the Pharisees ask Jesus' disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Why does he associate himself with the wicked? Surely he should come and be part of the holy sect if he is the son of man. Is he not wasting his time with them? And Jesus doesn't make his disciples answer this one.

But in great style, he answers the Pharisees with three punchy and proverbial phrases. First one, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Not long ago, our brother Vinny was up here testifying of his newly found faith. And did he not say how this particular verse was almost like a bit of a penny drop, a light bulb sort of moment for him?

[7:14] It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. It is not the strong and powerful who need a doctor, but those who are in a bad way. Jesus is saying, Do you need to see me?

Or do you think you can get on fine without me? Brothers and sisters, today, this week, are we aware of our ongoing great need for Jesus in our everyday life?

Do we want him to be part of our thoughts and our decision making, our prayers and petitions? Or do we only want him when it is convenient? Jesus is saying in this illustration, You're in a better place if you call on him, understanding that you are sick without him, than to believe you are healthy and therefore never call on him.

And then verse 13, But go and learn what this means. And that's a classic little Jewish rabbinic phrase that the leaders of the Pharisees would likely have heard a lot, but Jesus turns it back toward them.

But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Jesus is quoting from Hosea 6.6, and thankfully we've done Hosea recently.

[8:31] The context is where the Israelites feel to listen and learn from God's continual, consistent judgment of them. The Israelites treat God only as a loving father rather than as a divine guide or teacher.

Hosea speaks of how the people's love is so weak. God's love is great, but theirs is like the morning mist, the early dew that passes away. He sends them consistent judgment and words of warning through the prophets, but they never take him seriously.

So God says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. God is trying to say something like, stop making empty and heartless animal sacrifices to me when your character is completely unmerciful. Don't think that I will answer your call when you treat these sacrifices ritualistically with no heart engagement.

Matthew 5.7 should not surprise us. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. I guess the last of these three phrases is the cherry on the top.

[9:46] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. The idea being, I have not come to call the people who think they are good. I have not come to call the people who think they have

something to impress me with.

I have not come to call the people who functionally think that their morals are better than mine. I have come to call those who are sinners. I'm here for those who know they don't deserve me because of their great sin, who consider themselves very blessed to be saved by me.

I find this gem of a sentence in a commentary by R.T. France. The difference between Jesus and the Pharisees lies in their conception of priorities and the will of God.

For the Pharisees, the first priority is obedience to regulations for Jesus and mission to people. Do we see that? The Pharisees think that righteousness is about executing the law down to the letter, no matter how detached their heart attitude is when doing so.

But Jesus' righteousness fulfills the law in that it is centered around love for others. Remember that Jesus is God and so for the Pharisees to be critical of him is basically to criticize the ways of God himself who they say they believe in.

[11:06] Ultimately, they think that their ways are better. Now, brothers and sisters, have we ever done this? Have we taken some of the practical parts of the law and detached them from their underlying principle?

Allow me to say this. Have you ever thought you're a bit better than other people because you're T-total or because you've not struggled with some of the bigger sins in the ways that other people have?

In your heart of hearts, do you take that as a little bit of a one-up? Do you actually think you're a bit better than other people? Again, allow me to say this. These are the hardest things for me to say in this sermon.

Have some of us made the opposite mistake of understanding righteousness to be based around the Bible but to be improved by adding on some modern liberal ideas of sexuality, expressive individualism or the idol of comfort because these things have now become the status quo amongst most young people in the West right now.

It is a huge mistake for us to go beyond the Word of God by updating it or twisting it to make it say things that it's not actually saying. That is indeed what the Pharisees were doing with the Old Testament law.

[12:20] And additionally, when we stop listening to God and His Word, we risk hearing the normal background noise of our culture too loudly instead. And then we begin to believe things that seem to be the status quo but are unrealistic and therefore unhelpful.

And like, I know this is challenging but we can sometimes miss the joy of being a Christian when we take our eyes off the Lord and spend so much of our time or energy and thoughts overindulging in material things of this world that don't really matter.

I know that this is a challenge. You see, the two great misuses of the law are legalism, which is the mistake of the Pharisees, believing that adherence to the law apart from the grace of Christ is what God is pleased with.

And the opposite is the more common mistake of antinomianism, which is actually a closer cousin to legalism than we often think. It's to mistakenly say that we can disregard the law altogether because Jesus loves us and saves us by his grace alone.

That view misrepresents both Jesus and the law. So the legalist thinks the law will save them even though they don't love Jesus. The antinomian thinks Jesus will save them even though they've ignored all of his laws.

[13:41] But the key problem is neither of them really see themselves as particularly big sinners. It's the key thing between these two.

Neither of them really see themselves as particularly big sinners. But Jesus' love extends as far as the worst of sinners, not the righteous.

The important takeaway here is not the triage whether you're more likely to be legalistic or antinomian. The important thing is that you see yourself as a sinner. Sick people are the ones who need to call the doctor.

In this passage the person we want to be like is Matthew the sinner who was judged by others but saved by Jesus. And not the self-righteous Pharisees who thought they could gain people's respect by trying to hide their sins from everybody.

The Pharisees excluded themselves from Jesus' love because they didn't really think they actually needed him. They didn't think that God's love extended to these sinners but ironically they ended up

excluding themselves because they're the worst of sinners but they just can't see it.

[14 : 52] And this is a tragedy because it can just hit so close to home can't it? As soon as we start to think of ourselves as more righteous than we actually are in comparison to the other people we forget about the one from whom all righteousness comes.

the worst of sinners get their righteousness from no other place than Jesus Christ the righteous one. Then as we move on to verse 14 and beyond hopefully we'll see that serving this Jesus who saves sinners should be a joyful overflowing obedience as we grow in understanding his love. If the Pharisees have the wrong attitude then what's the right one? Well hopefully we can see that clearly in the illustrations of the coming verses. Now the mention of John's disciples in verse 14 refers to those who follow John the Baptist and he had earlier been put in prison for suggesting to Herod Antipas the ruler of Galilee that he maybe shouldn't be married to his brother Philip's ex-wife a reasonable enough rebuke I thought but with John the Baptist now in prison for that the disciples of John had fair reason to be mourning and fasting their leader is in prison their question to Jesus is why do we and the Pharisees fast often but your disciples don't fast?

Jesus is answering in verse 15 how can the guest of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and then they will fast a few weeks ago we were at Sarah's brother's wedding and it would have been completely inappropriate at that wedding for the bride and groom to suggest that everyone should take a day of fasting straight after the ceremony because that would be the miss the point of the wedding wouldn't it?

We are here to celebrate something we are celebrating something good not mourning something bad so we absolutely want to celebrate and feast have a glass of wine sing songs of praise and pray prayers of gladness the disciples of John don't realise that a mini wedding feast is taking place at Matthew's house the bridegroom is of course Jesus Christ himself he has come to redeem his bride the church Isaiah 62 verse 5 says as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride so will your God rejoice over you isn't that a wonderful illustration Jesus is presented in the Bible as a perfect bridegroom in our series in Hosea wasn't it made very clear to us that we are like the faithless bride whoring after anything else we could rather than committing ourselves to love the great bridegroom this feast at Matthew's house is a mini wedding feast it's showing us a little of what it might be like during the great feast of heaven where needy sinners are welcomed in but the self-righteous ones prefer to stay out we can often miss this part of the illustration the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and then they will fast

[18 : 04] Jesus is with them now that gives them every reason to celebrate and be glad but there came a day when he was taken away and that was to be the day for fasting the disciples probably should have been fasting whenever Jesus was buried and as long as Jesus is not with us we should at times fast as we long for his return and for the great wedding feast to begin now I've always found these next two illustrations rather confusing so my apologies if my explanation of them is equally unclear and confusing because I think this is quite a nuanced illustration isn't it in verse 16 no one no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment for the patch will pull away from the garment making the tear worse you wouldn't repair an old garment with a new patch of cloth as it will pull away from the tear giving you a bigger problem than the one you had before also in a similar vein you don't pour new wine in the old wine skins!

This is a bit of a tongue twister Bible tongue twisters this passage would probably be number one now these illustrations the old garments and wineskins represent an old way of thinking old things and new things it's hard to put a finger on exactly what Jesus is referring to but I think the old things in the illustration represent a traditional Jewish legalistic attitude to the law which seeks to gain righteousness through the ritualistic approach of sin offerings and sacrifices now that's long let me say that again the old things in the illustration represent a traditional

Jewish legalistic attitude to the law which seeks to gain righteousness through the ritualistic approach of sin offerings and sacrifices and then the new cloth and the new wine represent the new way of righteousness given through the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' once for all sacrifice and what Matthew is saying is you cannot attach the new onto the old you just can't stick Jesus onto your legalism because your desire for obedience should come from Jesus' grace alone not because you need to prove anything to him D.A.

Carson says to try and domesticate Jesus into the matrix of established Jewish religion would succeed only in ruining both Judaism and Jesus' teaching to fit Jesus around Judaism misrepresents Jesus and it's also incompatible with Judaism because Jesus is not just a Jewish

figure Gentiles can come to him and understand what he's doing he's come to build on Judaism yes but in building on it he has created something entirely new the Pharisees and disciples of John are right to have concerns about the law but they fail to understand that Jesus Christ fulfills the law to understand how to be obedient we must be captured by the love that Jesus Christ has for sinners and when as sinners we understand that Jesus loves us as sinners as we are we will begin to walk in a joyful overflowing!

A legalistic approach to

[23:08] Jesus grace just doesn't work nor does it work to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism because a big part of Jesus work is grafting in non-Jews so he's starting a new movement a new religion here you've understood the law if you love God and love others and we can do that only if we've been stunned by the love that Jesus already has for us the new wine and wineskins are about understanding Jesus who has fulfilled the law as our way of salvation and living obediently in response to that great grace which he has given us that is the new thing that Jesus is wanting people to see no longer do we live trying to tick off a list of rules so that Jesus will be impressed with us now we live with obedience in a way that engages a heart of thankfulness because that is the way that Jesus has enabled us to live by his spirit Colossians 3 says that we can only put to death what is earthly in us as we set our minds on

Christ as Christians in the Middle Ages and one of the catalysts for that reformation was the German monk Martin Luther Luther wrote in 1517 this is over 500 years ago he wrote this in his disputations against scholastic theology he wrote these three things in that list it is impossible to fulfill the law in any way without the grace of God following that condemned are all those who work the works of the law blessed are all those who work the works of the grace of God what Luther is trying to say to his religious peers at the time is that it is not only through the grace of God that we are able to do any good works ourselves it is only through the grace of God that we are able to do any good us to life again that is the only way we are able to please him the attitude is not about working the works of the law it's about working the works of the grace of God it's about good works of grace not works of the law it's an overflowing joy in Jesus love that causes us to live righteous lives if we think we can please God without engaging our hearts with the love of Jesus then we are but a burst wineskin we are an old garment unable to be tailored we are stuck in our ways if we can't accept the new wine of Jesus grace accepting us as sinners you cannot pour new wine into a stubborn old wineskin that keeps wanting to be chosen by the vintner but can't actually see that it is!

to make any new fresh wine at all guys I think it's important that preaching is not just an information download sorry if this sermon has been that so far the word of God is to be responded to with practical application stemming from our hearts and so I hope that I can lead us all in that direction in a passage like this I think we typically overemphasize the hard heartedness of the Pharisees and that is true and understandable but I think the blind spot then is that we forget that as humans it is much easier to be like the Pharisees than to be like Matthew Matthew gave up everything to follow Jesus and so the application is not that we shouldn't be like the Pharisees I think the application should be we all need to follow the example of Matthew the sinner who gave up Bible not just avoid being like the negative example so earlier on

I asked us to think about what sorts of people we judge it's very natural for us to judge others before we judge ourselves I think we all ought to challenge ourselves to think about where we personally are at with this passage it's helpful to have some level of self awareness and self judgment but what's critical is that we do something about what we know about ourselves so my question is where would you say your faith is at the moment and this slide behind me is not to try and discourage anyone and say that you're not a Christian it's just to try and promote some self reflection that's all I'm not trying to judge people here are you a sinner walking in the power of Jesus are you allowing Jesus his love his character his word his forgiveness and his powerful reign to shape your life encourage you and spur you on in your faith are you praying to him really believing that when you call on him he does indeed hear you are you reading his word delighting that you are hearing the voice of

[28:14] God who spoke the universe and the creation because if we aren't doing those things we do risk slipping into these other categories don't we we might become overly concerned with our own personal righteousness in front of others ahead of how much we are delighting in the Lord and giving thanks to him or perhaps we've become complacent we do know that we're Christians but at

times we become so involved and indulged in all the pleasant things of life that we've forgotten what they're for we've actually forgotten the joy of the Lord which is our strength and which is to be enjoyed at all times friends this morning where are each of our hearts at are we trying to pour new wine in the old wineskins are we just trying to drink the new wine without putting it in the any wineskin that's to want all the temporary blessings from Jesus but not wanting to commit our whole lives to being shaped love into new wineskins a new way of understanding the fulfilled old testament law as a helpful guide to be aware of rather than a checklist to be ticked off that we need to have sorted before we become real

Christians that is not a helpful way to think did you notice that weddings garments and wines are all biblical illustrations of salvation Jesus is saying here that the way to be saved by God is not to try and please him with self righteousness it is not to just blindly hope that he will save us even though our thoughts and our morals and our life are repeatedly inconsistent with his law the way to be saved is to invite Jesus in he came up to Matthew and asked him to follow him is he calling on you inwardly in your heart to just now to follow him or commit to following him again in his word Jesus is presenting himself in many different ways in many different ways the love he has for you even as a sinner just as you are do you understand that do you love him perhaps perhaps there's one or two people here whose faith up to this point has mainly been a legalistic one it's time today pray that Jesus will show you his love and allow a new stream of obedient righteousness to flow from your heart from the power of the spirit perhaps there's one or two you have been slipping into this antinomian approach pray that Jesus will show how great his love is for you and don't ignore it take it in grasp it invite the spirit to let it change you from the inside out you see the problem with legalism and antinomianism is the same they don't see themselves as particularly big sinners but the cure is also the same we need to see how much Jesus loves us as sinners and that he did not treat us as our sins deserve mercifully he didn't come with punishment and judgment but instead he came with grace and mercy and died on a cruel cross to show just how much he wanted us to be in his kingdom are we preparing ourselves for that kingdom that great wedding feast if you feel sick in sin if you aligned he has died he was resurrected he lives eternally and so this has eternal consequences call the doctor it is not the healthy he need the doctor but the sick the solution to this sin problem is not primarily physical or mental it is spiritual the solution to this sin problem is not physical or mental it is spiritual if we want to learn how to love like

Jesus and get ourselves in line with God's will his mission the sinners well we can only progress in that if we commit ourselves to meditating and resting in the love that Jesus has for us and choosing us even though we were a faithless bride a sinning tax collector and showing his undying love for us in dying for us so that we can live life in a new way of repentant obedience of grace not aimless rule keeping Jesus' merciful love extends as far as the worst of sinners and so as we grow in our understanding of this beautiful love which he has for us then we learn to serve him with an overflowing grace filled and joyful obedience let me pray Lord Jesus we thank you that you did not come to call the righteous but sinners we pray that you would help us all to be able to grasp the wonders of your love to understand our sin and to lean into this love as we trust you more Lord joy is found in obeying you and so we ask that you would just help us to walk in the joy of the Lord and live our lives to the full we thank you that we are guests at your wedding table and not only are we guests but we are indeed your bride and so Lord Jesus help us to enjoy living under your protection your leadership your care your guidance and your love in our lives this week we pray that as we know you more we would desire that our lives would be lived more amen