

Matt. 9:9-13 - I Desire Mercy and not Sacrifice

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 22 March 2009 02:00 -

1.

Introduction

1.

In this passage Jesus told the Pharisees to "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" I want you to search out what Jesus' words mean as we study this passage. Jesus' words express this principle: "Holy things are for unholy people, because holy things sanctify unholy people. Holy things give God's mercy to unholy people

" Christ has power not only to heal and forgive sins, but to sanctify—to make the unholy holy.

2.

Outline. You can see God's intent to mercifully sanctify unholy people in the two parts of this passage. V. 9 presents the sanctification of Matthew. Vv. 10-13 present the sanctification of sinners

1.

The Sanctification of Matthew v. 9

2.

The Sanctification of Sinners vv. 10-13

3.

Body

1.

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The Sanctification of Matthew v. 9

1.

Text

1.

9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

2.

Matthew. Notice Matthew's name. Matthew was also called Levi. Levi was the more honorable name, but Matthew humbly mentions his less honorable name to keep our focus on the grace Christ showed to him.

3.

Tax collector. Notice also that Matthew was a tax collector. He was "Sitting at the tax booth."

1.

This was a dishonorable profession, because it was dishonest. Not only were the taxes demanded by the Romans, whom Jews felt did not have a right to govern Israel, but tax collectors would collect more than was owed, and resorted to force, threats, and trickery to take citizens' money. Bribes, extortion, corruption, and temptation to these sins were tax collectors' middle name.

2.

Like Paul, Matthew admits his life was sinful before Christ called him to be an apostle. Matthew tells us he was a tax collector to tell us he was a sinner. Matthew was a sinner.

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3.

"Follow Me." In the midst of this sinful life Jesus called him saying, "Follow me." This call is what made the difference in Matthew's life.

1.

This is an effectual call. This is an effectual call.

-

The words of the call were accompanied by Christ's power to save Matthew. Matthew was sitting, doing his work, with no inclination to follow Christ. He was set in his ways of sin, and like the paralytic in the previous passage, Matthew would not have risen and followed Jesus unless Jesus had effectually called him to do so. There is an instructive parallel in the words of the text: the paralytic "rose and went home";

Matthew "

rose

and followed

" Jesus. The demons cannot go unless Jesus commands them to; and unless Jesus says the word, the paralytic will not be raised, sinners will not be forgiven, and sinners will not rise and follow Him.

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The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." (**Rom. 1:16**) Matthew didn't deny Christ's authority or delay his obedience, but rose immediately and followed Him.

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This is an enlivening call. Because this is an effectual call, this is an enlivening call. I've heard a sermon on this passage titled "The Raising of Levi." This event is the "raising" of Matthew. This was Matthew's spiritual resurrection. Matthew was dead in his sins. But Christ made him alive. And so the text tells us, Matthew "

rose

."

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This is a sanctifying call. Not only is this call effectual and enlivening, but also this is a sanctifying call

. God's external call comes to a sinner, and when God makes it effectual, God's call saves the sinner

. Christ called Matthew to repentance, and Matthew repented. God's call is holy, and we are not. But God's call makes us holy.

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The Sanctification of Sinners vv. 10-13. In v. 9 we learn of the sanctification of Matthew. That is reason enough to praise God for His work of salvation, but the story does not end there. In vv. 10-13 we learn of the sanctification of sinners

1.

Text

1.

10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

2.

11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

3.

12 But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

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4.

13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

5.

The Lord's Supper with Sinners

1.

The connection. Why is the call of Matthew connected with this dinner? Because Matthew hosted the dinner at his house, as a farewell to his associates now that he was following Jesus. That is the historical connection. Luke (**5:29**) records Matthew threw "a great feast", but out of humble penitence for his own sin Matthew does not mention his generosity in hosting the meal. But there is a further connection. Jesus called Matthew to repent. And so far from abandoning his coworkers to follow Jesus, Matthew brought his coworkers to Jesus, so they might be healed, receive mercy, and repent. Andrew and Philip invited their brothers, the woman at the well invited her town, and Matthew invited his coworkers.

2.

Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners. Who is welcome at the Lord's table? And who is welcome at your table? Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

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These terms indicate not so much an economic as a moral judgment. As a tax collector Matthew was wealthy enough to throw a great feast.

" These

tax collectors and sinners

" may have included both wealthy and poor, but what bound them together was their partnership in crime, and the public's disgust. Jesus went to a dinner party with what amounts to today's Mexican drug cartel members, druggies and dealers, corrupt police officers and executives receiving astronomical bonuses taken from your taxes!

The Pharisees' Frequently Asked Question

"Jesus, why are you eating with these people? Why are you throwing your pearls of wisdom to these swine?!" **Psalm 119:115** says "Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God."

And

Psalm 1:1

says "

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

" Why would Jesus say anything different?

1.

And now inquiring minds want to know. The Pharisees were asking questions again in order to find fault with Jesus. They were careful students and teachers of the law, who sought to practice it to a 'T.' Every jot and tittle of the text mattered to them, and every last detail of the ordinances instituted by God mattered. In these things there was nothing wrong with the Pharisees! For

mally

they were the

truly faithful

among the Jews. Yes,

outwardly

they were "

whitewashed

," but

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inwardly
they were "
tombs
." (

Matt. 23:27

) Clean and righteous and obedient on the outside. But rotting and guilty and wicked on the inside. Dirty rotten scoundrels; they were the pot calling the kettle black. They had unregenerate hearts, guilty records, and an unholy life. What kind of answer do they deserve?

2.

Christ's answer. The answer Jesus gives them is for us as well.

1.

Heart: Recognize sinners' need for healing. First, recognize sinners' need for healing.

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

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"[1.] Sin is the sickness of the soul; sinners are spiritually sick. Original corruptions are the diseases of the soul, actual transgressions are its wounds, or the eruptions of the disease. It is deforming, weakening, disquieting, wasting, killing, but, blessed be God, not incurable. [2.]

Jesus Christ is the great Physician of souls. His curing of bodily diseases signified this, that he arose with *healing under his wings.* He is a

skilful, faithful, compassionate Physician, and it is his office and business to heal the sick.

[1](#)

Sin-sick souls
need
this Physician, for "
without [Him] we can do nothing.

" (

John 15:5

) They need a new heart, a heart of flesh rather than a heart of stone (

Ezek. 36:26

) so they will "
be no longer stubborn

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" (

Deut. 10:16

) in rebelling against God. They need to be born again to "

see

" and "

enter

" the kingdom of God. (

John 3:3, 9

) They need to be a new man, a new creature, to crucify their old nature, to resist the lusts of the flesh and fulfill the desires of the Holy Spirit. Unless their heart is made holy, they are utterly lost to the power of sin.

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Recognize sinners' need for spiritual healing.

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That is a reason to invite them to your table, to your church, and even to the Lord's table. They need spiritual healing, and it is by abiding in Jesus Christ that they will have life, and have it abundantly, bear fruit, abundant fruit, fruit that will last. They need spiritual healing just as much as you did before Christ gave you eternal life. And for you who are saved, even now that you have received a new heart, it is by drawing your spiritual life from Christ who lives forever that you will live. Jesus says "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. " (John 6:31) "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

" (

John 6:51

) "

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

" (

John 6:53-58

)

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Jesus spoke not of the sign, but the thing signified. He spoke not of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, but of what they signify—His body broken for you, and His blood shed for you. He spoke not even of a literal eating of His body and drinking His blood—not of the sacrifice itself, but of what that sacrifice accomplished! It accomplished

God's mercy

. It brought God's mercy to you who do not deserve it, but who desperately need it.

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Record: Learn God's desire to extend mercy. If you recognize sinners' need for healing, second, you must learn God's desire to extend mercy. Christ told the Pharisees, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

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The passage. The passage Jesus quoted was **Hosea 6:6**, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

" In Hosea God called His unfaithful people to return and be faithful to Him, because He was faithful to them. But God's people were faithless and would not heed His word, so God said, "As for my sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.

" (**Hosea 8:13**) Sacrifices signified that God would atone for your sins through the death of a substituted. But if you offered a sacrifice without believing God's promise to atone for your sins, you would receive no mercy from God! It is not the sacrifice, but God's mercy in the sacrifice, which saves. And Christ your Master says to you, "Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"

" (**Matt. 18:33**

) Christ says to you, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."

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The contrast. Learn God's desire to extend mercy. He desires charity, not formality, substance, not show, and warns you against having a form of godliness while denying the power thereof. True religion consists not in external observances, shows of holiness, or doubtful disputations, but in faith in Christ, love for God and your neighbor, and good works—"visiting the fatherless and widows.

" (

James 1:27

) The Pharisees' sacrifices were merely physical because they were not mixed with faith, but mercy is spiritual. The contrast between mercy and sacrifice is not absolute.

Hosea 6:6

says God desires "

the knowledge of God

more than

burnt offerings.

" The ordinances God commands must be observed, but they must be observed by faith. In

1 Pet. 3:21

God says "

Baptism...now saves you.

" But he specifies it is not the outward washing which saves, but the reception of Christ by faith. Baptism consists of two parts—the physical sign of washing, and the spiritual thing signified of salvation by faith in Christ. So also with the Lord's Supper. The outward elements symbolize Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for your sins. But this meal is not merely a symbol. It also includes within itself the reality of God's promise of salvation, it includes the real presence of Christ through His word and Spirit, and this meal conveys to you the blessings of salvation itself. This meal is not just a sign, but is a visible promise from God, and God's word is effectual; the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Do not just eat this food today, but by faith receive God's mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Which is more important, taking communion or believing in Jesus Christ? God commands both, but only by believing in Jesus Christ will you go home today forgiven of your sins. Samuel told Saul, "

Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

" (

1 Sam. 15:22

) "

When Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."

" (

Hebrews 10:5-7

) Christ obeyed God in your place so you could be forgiven of your sins. "

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

" (

2 Cor. 5:21

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The challenge. Learn God's desire to extend mercy. Is there room in your heart for those whom Christ welcomes to His table? Will you extend mercy instead of maintain a mere show of religion? " As the Lord has

forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

" (

Col. 3:13

)

Holy things are for unholy people, because holy things sanctify unholy people

. This meal calls unholy people to receive God's forgiveness for their sins.

-

Life: Extend sinners Christ's merciful call to repentance. In salvation God promises you a new heart, a new record, and a new life. Jesus heals your heart of original sin, cleanses your record through His merciful sacrifice, and sanctifies your life by His call to repentance. It is because the new heart, record, and life are blessings of salvation

that we must bring them to unholy people. If you have first

recognized sinners' need for healing

and second

learned God's desire to extend mercy

,
you must third

extend sinners Christ's merciful call to repentance

. He says "

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

"

The parallel passages add "

to repentance

."

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Who are "the righteous?" And who are the "sinners?"

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Not Justification but Sanctification. Because "the righteous" here are contrasted with "sinners," here Christ speaks not of the righteousness which is one's legal standing before God in the area of justification, but of the righteousness which is the moral perfection God requires of us in our actions in the area of sanctification.

Are the righteous believers? Are "the righteous" believers? My Arminian friend in Coffeyville claims "the righteous" must be ordinary believers, because who else in this life rightly could be called "righteous?" For this reason he claims that ordinary believers therefore should have no need of repentance.

But Jesus was eating with sinners, and not with the Pharisees, so Jesus clearly names the Pharisees "the righteous!" And the Pharisees were unbelievers. We must not equate the Pharisees with ordinary believers, and think the Pharisees had no need for repentance! Clearly Jesus' words here rebuke the Pharisees while identifying them by the words "the righteous." Christ's consistent message about the Pharisees comes to a roaring conclusion in Christ's seven woes against the Pharisees in

Matthew 23

Christ's consistent message is that the Pharisees are "hypocrites"

(
23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29
)

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' "

They preach, but they do not practice.

" (

v. 3

) "

You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also

outwardly appear righteous

to others, but

within

you are full of

hypocrisy

and lawlessness.

" (

vv. 27-28

) That last verse is the last nail in the coffin of the false doctrine that "

the righteous

" in this verse are believers who have no need of repentance! Rather, Jesus defines

what He means—"

the righteous

" are "

hypocrites

." When Jesus calls the Pharisees "

righteous

," He refers to their

external appearance

of righteousness, not to their

true internal state

of righteousness.

[2](#)

Application

The call to repentance. Now take heart; Christ did come to save hypocrites! And by God's sovereignty He overcomes our hypocrisy. But in regard to their responsibility the hypocritical Pharisees would not repent and believe, so they were not saved. Christ did not come to save hypocrites who will not repent and

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believe. He commands you, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. It is your job now to extend that merciful call to others, as Matthew did to his coworkers at his dinner party.

Extend sinners Christ's merciful call to repentance

. That is the general application of Christ's last statement.

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With regard to the Lord's Supper. But take note of two specific applications to the Lord's Supper.

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First, Paul says "Let a man examine himself to see whether he discerns the body."

Paul warns you to

take the Lord's supper not as a hypocrite, but as a believer

. Do you believe on Christ as your Savior? Then eat this bread and drink this cup trusting in Christ your Savior whom they signify and seal to you. Do not partake of this meal if you do not believe in Christ, or if you are not repenting of your sin, because this meal calls you to repent and believe in Christ! If you partake of this meal in an unworthy manner, as a hypocrite, your eating and drinking will bring God's judgment upon you. If you are not reconciled with another believer today, Christ warns you as well, "

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

" (

Matt. 5:23

)

-

Second, this meal at the Lord's table is for sinners. These holy things are not for unrepentant hypocrites, but they are for sinners in need of the Savior. Christ does not tell sinners to run from this table, but instead He invites you to "

Take

," and to "

eat

." If you know you are a sinner, Christ calls you to come to this meal, and He will restore your soul, He will forgive your sin, He will lead you again in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. These

holy things are for unholy people, because these holy things sanctify unholy people. These holy things give God's mercy to unholy people

. For He says, "

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I desire mercy and not sacrifice.
"

1 Matthew Henry, 118.

2 Many in this life believe they are righteous. Many claim to be righteous. Many appear to be righteous. But only the souls of just men made perfect—only the perfected saints in glory—are truly and perfectly righteous. In this life, "

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

" (

Rom. 3:23

) The verb "

fall

" is in the present tense, meaning that because all have sinned at one time in the past, from that point onward continuing into the present they "

fall short of the glory of God.

" But to the praise of His glorious grace,

the holy God sanctifies unholy people

. Christ came to call sinners to repentance.