**Jesus Came To Call Sinners**

September 23, 2018

Matthew 9:1-13

Key Verse 9:13 “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus has come for bad people, not good people; those who know they have a terminal disease, those who are desperate, those who are hurting, those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, those who are weak, those who are weary, those who are broken, sinners who know they are sinners. That is the message of Christianity, the essence of the gospel. John Knox, one of the greatest preachers in Scotland, certainly a man that most would think to be a man of great righteousness said, “In youth, in middle age, and now after many battles I find nothing in me but corruption.” You hear someone say, “Well, I would never go to the church because it is full of hypocrites.” I say without hesitation, “Come on, there is always a room for one more.” Everybody in the world has been hypocritical. Most people have the idea that religion is for good people, but the truth is it is for bad people who know just how bad they are. That is why they come to God. Let’s learn today that Jesus came to this world to call sinners.

Look at verse 2. “Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’” Notice that Jesus saw “their” faith. According to Mark’s gospel, four men brought the paralytic by tearing the roof because of the crowd. They had faith in Jesus to overcome any obstacles. According to statistics, 95% of people healed by Jesus were brought by others. People do not come to Jesus by themselves. They are brought. And they aren’t always brought easily! It takes determination and innovation! We give up too easily when we encounter obstacles. I always thank God for my friend who brought me to Jesus. He persisted in bringing me to Jesus during my college days without any result. After graduation, when I met him, he invited me to his apartment. I thought I was going to his house, but he was living in the church. Because of his ingenuity, I was brought to Jesus. How far are we willing to go to bring our friends to Jesus?

How did Jesus bless them? Look at verse 2b. “...he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus accepted the paralyzed man as a son. Outwardly, the man looked gaunt, weak and burdensome. But when he came to Jesus, though carried by others, Jesus welcomed him as a dear son and comforted him, saying, “Take heart.” Here we learn that Jesus accepts those who come to him in faith as his dear children, saying, “Take heart, son;” “Take heart, daughter.” This is the voice of comfort and encouragement; it is the voice of the Messiah.

Jesus’ words were not just good wishes to make him feel better. Jesus' words solved his fundamental problem from the root. Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” To Jesus, this man’s most urgent, fundamental problem was not paralysis, but sin. We desperately need forgiveness of sins. Sins are like stains which can never be removed. There are many time-machine movies. Many people fantasize about going back in time to change the past. This is their effort to erase past mistakes. But it is impossible. Once a white cloth is stained with red ink, it can never be removed. There may have been several reasons why he became a paralytic. He may have lived an immoral life and contracted sexually transmitted disease. He may have gotten drunk and got a car accident. No matter what the reason, he may have been suffering from the guilt, and that God was displeased with him. He wished to go back in time and fix his mistakes. But he cannot.

Sin is defiling; it has defiled God’s image and stained the soul. Sin has planted in us the devil’s image. We become the devil’s children. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is gross ingratitude to God. Sin is incurable. “Can a leopard change his spots?” says Jeremiah, “Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” Sin affects all men, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin is deep in the heart of man; even those who are born again still fight against sin. Sin dominates the mind. It pollutes the body. Sin brings man under the dominion of the devil. Sin subjects man to misery so that he is subjected to emptiness, so that he knows no peace, so that he is doomed to hell. This is true of all men.

Then how can we solve the sin problem? Many people do good things, hoping they will compensate for their evil deeds. This is the essential teaching of all kinds of religions. Other people torture themselves with guilt and condemnation hoping to bear the full punishment for their sins. Still other people try to forget about their sin problem through meditation, drinking or using drugs. But the Bible teaches us very clearly that no one can solve their sin problem by their own effort. Only God can solve our sin problem. How did he do this? In his great mercy, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ into this world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus paid the full price of our sins through his death on the cross. On the cross, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34a). In this way he forgave all our sins. Jesus declared to the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven.” Jesus erased all of his sins completely. Isaiah 1:18 says, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Jeremiah 31:34 says, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” When the missionaries went to Alaska to take the gospel to the Eskimos and wanted to translate the New Testament into their language they found that there was no word in the Eskimo language for forgiveness, and so they were stuck because that is the major message of Christianity. But they found that the Eskimos had a very interesting phrase. This is the word, a one-word phrase; issumagijoujunnainermik. Not being able to think about it anymore. And they used that all through the Bible for the word for forgiveness. God is not able to think about it anymore. He has removed it. He forgave our sins. The Lord gave to the paralytic the greatest gift meant to deal with the greatest need.

What was the response to Jesus’ gracious words? Some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” (3) They thought that only God can forgive sins. In one sense, they are right. Only God can solve our sin problem. Sin is primarily an offense against God, so forgiveness must come from God. Jesus wanted to persuade them that he came from God for the purpose of bringing forgiveness of sins. Jesus asked them, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?” (5) Jesus wanted them to know that he is the Son of Man sent by God with authority on earth to forgive sins (6a). So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home” (6b). The visible healing of the paralytic was designed to confirm that his sins had been forgiven, an invisible miracle. It is the same as when he cast the demons out of the demon-possessed; He sent them into the pigs. Why? Because if he just said, “Demons leave,” nobody would have known whether they left or where they went. But when they saw two thousand pigs dive off a cliff and drown in the sea, they knew exactly what had happened, that the demons had entered those pigs, which proved the point that Jesus had cleansed those two men. And so here is the same thing. He is healing the man as proof of his power to forgive, but it was the forgiveness that was the root, and the disease that was the symptom. By doing the visible, Jesus manifests the power to do the invisible.

When he heard the voice of the Son of God, he got up. Jesus’ word has power to make the paralyzed leap like a deer. Perhaps the man jumped, danced, dunked a basketball, and then went home. The man was healed instantly as a proof of Jesus’ authority to forgive his sins. Here we can see that those who receive forgiveness of sins from Jesus are completely changed and live a totally new life. They are no longer powerless people but powerful people; they are no longer ungrateful whiners but thankful and dynamic children of God. When we receive forgiveness of sins from Jesus, our value system, lifestyle, purpose, and hope are all transformed. We become God’s children who grow in his glorious image.

Look at verse 9. As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. Jesus said to him, “Follow me,” and Matthew got up and followed him. In Jesus’ day, tax collectors were the most despised people in Israel. They were hated by their own people because they entered the service of their enemies and amassed fortunes at the expense of their own suffering people. One of man’s basic desires is to receive recognition and honor from others. More than that, everyone needs self-esteem. But Matthew ignored these things. He pursued money as if it was everything. In the process, he lost his self-esteem and people's respect. He forfeited his identity as one of God's chosen people. He had money, but he could not buy happiness with money. He could not buy peace, righteousness, or joy with money. He found that he lost many valuable things in order to get money. Now it seemed there was no way to erase his past mistakes. His life was ruined, messed up. His sin of guilt and despair made him powerless. He must have said to himself, “I am too lost!” or “It’s too late!” It is true. In this world he would never have a second chance. Once a sinner, always a sinner.

Then he heard Jesus’ command, “Follow me.” What does “Follow me” mean to him? Simply speaking, it was forgiveness of sins and inviting him to be Jesus’ disciple, who would learn of him, grow to be like him, and eventually be a blessing to others. It was an invitation to a new life. Jesus’ words gave Matthew new hope and direction. He believed that he could start over. So he got up from his tax booth, left everything behind, and followed Jesus. As he did so, his despair, guilt and shame vanished. New joy and peace began to flow from his heart. He lost a comfortable job, but he found a destiny. He lost a good income but he found honor. He lost a comfortable security, but he found a meaning of his life. Then he opened his home and invited many tax collectors and sinners to a dinner party with Jesus. It was so joyful, with people laughing and eating deliciously. Most of all, it was because Jesus was with them. Jesus listened to all of their agonies and wiped every tear from their eyes, one by one. They found new hope in Jesus. In this way Matthew began his house church ministry.

Everyone seemed to be happy. However, when the Pharisees saw this, they were most unhappy. They felt that people who had no right to be joyful were too joyful. They were offended and asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” They thought the best way to deal with sinners was to cast them out of their community. So they segregated all kinds of sinners and refused to have fellowship with them. To their way of thinking, Jesus would be contaminated by sinners and ruin his holiness. But if Jesus did not eat with sinners in this world, he would always have to eat alone. Jesus wanted to correct their view of sinners. So he said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” When doctors see a sick person, they do not think that he is useless. Doctors see the person and the disease separately. Doctors believe that if the disease is dealt with, the person will be healed and become useful. To doctors, it is not the person, but the disease that is the problem. Likewise Jesus sees sinners like a spiritual doctor. Jesus distinguishes between sin and sin-sick people. Jesus sees that if only the sin can be cured, the person can be healthy and become useful. So Jesus treats sinners with great hope, deep understanding and tender care, like a doctor who wants to heal them. Here we learn that our view of sinners is important. We tend to disparage those who sin purposely and repeatedly and to write them off. This is contrary to the view of Jesus. We have to learn from Jesus who had the view of a good doctor toward sin-sick people.

Look at verse 13. “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” The Pharisees needed to learn something. They had a lot of Bible knowledge, they worked hard and sacrificed a lot. But they did not know God’s heart. God wants us to know his heart above all. God’s heart is filled with mercy. God does not use his power to crush sinners who make mistakes. Rather, in his great mercy, God understands, bears with, forgives, and restores people, and gives us new hope to make a new beginning. James 2:13b says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” No matter what else we may know about God, we must know that God is merciful. Without knowing God’s mercy, we don’t really know God. The purpose of Jesus’ coming was to show God’s mercy to sinners. Mercy should characterize God’s children. Mercy removes the barrier between the righteous and sinners. We cannot have mercy on others if we remain in our own world. Having mercy means going into their world, and look at the world from their point of view. To those who are suffering, what they need is not truthful words, but mercy. When Job’s friends saw Job suffering, they concluded that Job was suffering due to his sins. They told him to repent. Job said to his friends, “Have mercy on me, my friends, have mercy, for the hand of God has struck me.” We should examine ourselves. After years of serving God sacrificially, have we have become legalistic and judgmental rather than merciful? Lord, have mercy on us!

We learned that Jesus came to call sinners. God forgives our sins. God does not think about our sins any more. Even though we are wretched like the paralytic and the tax collector, when we come to God, he considers us pure and we can start new life in Jesus. There is always a room for one more sinner in Jesus.