

Sinners and Old Wineskins 8-8-04

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Matthew 9:9-17 (NIV)

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. 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." 14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. 16 "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. 17 Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Jesus had just left the house of Peter where those men ripped open the roof to get a paralyzed man to Jesus. The Lord had declared that He was able to forgive sins and proved it by healing the man. The crowd was filled with awe, but some of the religious leaders were indignant and called Jesus a blasphemer. (Matthew 9:2-8) This was the first sign of trouble coming from the religious establishment.

As Jesus left the house and went down the street, He came to the tax collection booth where Matthew was working. The Romans collected many different kinds of taxes. There was a land tax of ten percent of the grain and twenty percent of all fruit, an income tax of 1%, and a poll tax. There were other minor taxes, like for traveling on a road or crossing a bridge, importing or exporting, a purchase tax on goods bought or sold. There was also a beast of burden tax and a per axle tax on carts.

Volunteers from the district were recruited to collect these taxes. It was the employment of the greedy, because they could become quite wealthy collecting taxes from their countrymen for the occupying power. Some wealthy people would bribe them to decrease their tax amount. Between these bribes, collecting more than was due, and cheating Rome of the full amount collected, they became very wealthy individuals. (Luke 19:7-8) But this wealth came at a great social cost. They were not allowed in synagogues or allowed to testify in court. They were classified with murderers and robbers and considered unclean. They were the bottom rung of Jewish society socially but near the top financially.

Matthew was probably collecting one type of the many taxes when Jesus passed by his booth. The road through Capernaum was a major road from Rome to Egypt. A Roman mile marker was unearthed in Capernaum that told the mileage to the gates

Commented [notes1]: 2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?"

5 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?

6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

7 And the man got up and went home.

8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

Matt 9:2-8 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Luke 19:7-8 (NIV)

of Rome. It may have been at this very spot that Matthew collected Rome's highway and transportation tax. That may be one reason why there was a Roman garrison in this little town, to insure that no one hung Matthew. He would have had some education and been able to keep records in Greek. His name was Levi in Hebrew, but Jesus called him by his name in Aramaic, Matthew, which means the gift of God.

You couldn't have lived in Capernaum without hearing of the new Rabbi who healed everyone that was brought to Him. Surely Matthew heard the story of the healing of the leper and the Centurion's servant. Both of these people were considered unclean just like him. Sitting there in his little hut to keep out of the sun, Matthew stopped the travelers and demanded their tax payments. Jesus said only two words to him, "Follow me". We don't know if Matthew had seen Jesus at an evening meal, or heard Him preach from a distance, but whatever the case, his heart had been prepared.

Keep in mind that this is the author telling his own testimony. He tells us very little, and perhaps that is because he thinks it is a common testimony. Life was the daily grind with little meaning or true fulfillment. There was no satisfaction in his wealth. Wondering about his purpose in life and what eternity held for him, he heard the preaching of a Man who spoke like no other and backed His preaching with miraculous acts. He was probably wondering if he could possibly be accepted as a follower. And then he heard Jesus command, "Follow me!" It wasn't a request. It was a command.

Many of you have been in Matthew's position. I hope you are continuing to follow as faithfully as Matthew did. . He got up, walked away from his lucrative job, and never looked back. *Tradition states that he preached for 15 years in Palestine and that after this he went to foreign nations, the Ethiopians, Macedonians, Syrians, Persians, Parthians and Medea being mentioned.* —International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

The majority of Jesus' disciples were fisherman. They left their nets, but Matthew took his pen with him and wrote down the stories of Jesus' life. Many believe there was a list of the sayings of Jesus in Hebrew written by Matthew that was lost. Many of those sayings ended up in the Gospels.

Jesus looked right past the Jewish social prejudices and saw that Matthew was ready to step into a life of faith. Maybe there is someone here this morning sitting in the same space that Matthew was in, thinking they can't be a disciple, following Jesus into a life of faith. Jesus looks past what everyone else sees and looks into your heart. He isn't looking for perfected hearts. He is looking for hungry hearts, hearts dissatisfied with the world, hearts that know there is more, and He commands, "Follow me!"

Jesus went to Matthew's home for dinner. That reminds me of Revelation 3:20. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me.* Matthew heard the call, opened the door, and Jesus came in to have fellowship with him. This is the most amazing thing to me. The holiest One to ever live saw past what revolted everyone

else, and with just two words sent Matthew in a whole new direction in life. The same thing happens today. The same thing could happen to you.

Remember that those fishermen disciples had been with the austere John the Baptist before following Jesus. They were the ultra-orthodox, rejecting the Pharisees as compromisers. Verse 10 *While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.* That word that is translated "sinners" means non-religious people. To these orthodox Jews, Jesus had gone over the edge. This was the half of society that any "respectable" person steered clear of, and their Master is having dinner with them! It was unthinkable.

Verse 11 *When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This is the second attack. Their first was only to think in their minds that Jesus was blaspheming. Now they confront His disciples, as if to bring them to their senses and have them abandon Him. But Jesus, the ever-faithful Shepherd of the sheep, picks up on their subtle attack.

Verses 12 and 13 *On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* Where should the doctor be? He ought to be among those that need him. The world is spiritually sick. We have been infected with the deadly virus, sin. We were born with it, but we willingly yielded ourselves to the infection as well. Is there any doctor that can save us from certain death?

What was the last story about? You see, Matthew is systematic. These stories aren't just randomly strung together. In the last story Jesus proved that He could forgive sins. In this verse He is telling the Pharisees that to do that He must be among sinners. The doctor has to be with the patients.

So far, Jesus has patiently tried to get the religious leaders to see the truth, because He loves them too. Now He is going to separate those who love God from those who love power. He does that with the word of God. He quotes from their own prophets, Hosea 6:6. *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."* Hosea told the people the very heart of God. God isn't after some big performance that is painful or costly. He just wants us to be merciful to others as He is with us. He wants to see our injustices toward others stop. Instead of making these so called "sinners" feel like they were outcasts, God wanted mercy to be shown them. How could they change if they couldn't enter a synagogue to hear the Word of God? Jesus was telling them to learn the meaning of God's word through Hosea. He was asking them to consider the heart of God and line it up with what they were saying. Oh how we need to do the same! I often insist on my way because it is familiar instead of God's heart because it is right. Lord help us to know His heart.

Now, those who truly believe God's word and are seeking the truth have a chance to have their thinking corrected. The Word, which they respect, has been presented to explain to them their misperception so that they could change their opinion of what Jesus is doing. It helped the disciples understand why their Master acted in ways

they previously thought were unacceptable. Jesus added that He had not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance. But wait a minute. The Word declares that there are none righteous, no not one. (Psalm 14:3) Jesus has come to call all men to repentance, a new way of thinking, of seeing the world and our condition, to see through God's eyes.

Commented [notes3]: 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. Psalms 14:3 (NIV)

When we realize we are sinners too, then we are glad that Jesus is friend of sinners. When we see we are as sick as those we saw sickness in, we are glad this doctor makes house calls. Aren't you glad the Great Physician makes house calls! We have to drop our pious attitude and realize that we are in the same boat with the drunk and the adulterer. Our sin might manifest itself differently, but we are in just as great a need of the Great Physician of the soul. That is when we stop pointing fingers at others and focus on our own soul's condition before a holy God.

Verse 14 *Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* Remember, John the Baptist was the austere, fire breathing, desert dwelling wild man. He was ultra-orthodox. To John, everyone was a compromiser and needed to repent. So John's disciples, who may have been acquainted with some of the disciples of Jesus, asked why they didn't fast. The strict Jews all fast. Jesus used language that would remind them of John's own words. John referred to Jesus as the Bridegroom and to himself as the friend of the Bridegroom.

Verse 15 *Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.* While Jesus is in the earth, they have a special time of being able to directly be taught by Him, to ask Him questions, to observe His responses, and their joy would be like that of a wedding feast. But Jesus knew He was headed to the cross to bear the sins of the world. The time would come soon enough when they would need to fast to receive clarity in their prayer life. Though we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, we need to fast to focus on that which is eternal, to break our focus from the physical, and tune our hearts to the spiritual. Fasting clears out your spiritual ears and helps you see the will and work of God all around you. There is a time for everything. It was not the time to fast while Jesus was with them. It was the time of joy.

Verse 16 and 17 *"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. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."* This passage ties this whole section together. The Pharisees and John's disciples were operating out of an old paradigm. It was a paradigm of religion and rules, the way they always did it. Jesus came bringing an example of being led by the Spirit of God, and everything He did seemed out of place to them.

Jesus said it was like sewing a new piece of material on an old garment. That new piece was less flexible and would shrink. It would end up creating a bigger hole than the one it was to repair.

The old wineskin had stretched and hardened. If you put new wine in it, as the wine ferments, it would push against the inflexible skin and break it. The wine would spill, and both the container and the wine would be ruined. Jesus came with the example and life of the Spirit of God. His ways and manners would not conform to the old religious wineskin. If they were going to follow Jesus, they would have to die to the old and become new. It was the only way they could follow. If they hung onto the old, they would constantly be offended. Eventually they would become so offended and discouraged at God's ways that they would leave. They had to let go of the old ways and become new creatures in Christ to be able to contain the Spirit of Christ.

Listen to Barclays' application of Jesus' teaching to our day. "Throughout all its history, the Church has clung to the old. What Jesus is saying is that there comes a time when patching is folly, and when the only thing to do is to scrap something entirely and to begin again. There are forms of church government, there are forms of church service, there are forms of words expressing our beliefs, which we so often try to adjust and tinker with in order to bring them up to date; we try to patch them. No one would willingly, or recklessly, or callously abandon what has stood the test of time and of the years and in which former generations have found their comfort and put their trust; ... and there comes a time when patches are useless, and when a man and a church have to accept the adventure of the new, or withdraw into the backwater, where they worship, not God, but the past." —Barclay's Daily Study Bible

Certainly the same it true for us individually. We can get in our routines and patterns, good ones, perhaps even ones that were at first inspired by God. The problem is that we stagnate in them. As the world around us changes and we grow to a certain point, we need to change our ways. But if we have hardened and no longer have the elasticity that comes from being sensitive to the Spirit of God, we will find ourselves rejecting all that is new. The Holy Spirit's urgings will fall on hardened hearts that are too set in their ways, as we worship the past.

I have found a telltale symptom of this disease, a critical spirit. When we are set in the old, like these Pharisees, we complain about all that is different. It challenges us, and we don't like the challenge. We have settled in and we don't want anyone to rock the boat, even God. The opposite is true as well. A joyful, positive, encouraging spirit is elastic enough to consider some new way to reach out, to grow, to change for the sake of God and His Kingdom. In which condition do you find yourself this morning? It is never too late to forsake the old and become new.

Matthew had heard the call of God in his heart that said there had to be more. Life had to be more than amassing wealth. All he needed was Jesus instruction, "Follow me." The Pharisees were so fixed in their ways that they couldn't rejoice over Matthew's rebirth. All they could see was Jesus with undesirables. Is your heart with Matthew or with the Pharisees? It is never too late to leave it all behind, and follow Jesus!