

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.' [a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Doctor Has Come

Many people don't care for doctors. I try to avoid them at all costs. Even if I'm sick. I'd rather wait it out than go to the doctor. Why is that? I imagine it's something to do with money and dealing with insurance companies. It may be due to the fact that people are uneasy about the doctor because they only go to them when they are sick. But, some stay away afraid of finding out a lump is something serious, so they'd rather ignore it and hope it goes away on its own.

But when you're sick and I mean really sick - you want to see a doctor. When you're only slightly sick or feeling pretty good, you have no need for a doctor. Jesus understood that which is why he spent his time with the sick, the sinners, and even the self-righteous. Jesus doesn't wait for people to come to him. Jesus brings healing wherever he goes.

The great misunderstanding inside and outside of the church is that Christianity is for good people, people who have their lives together. There are even jokes that the church would collapse if I ever darkened its doors. But to avoid church because you aren't perfect is like someone who is sick saying, "I'll see the doctor as soon as I get better." Don't wait. Before you are even good enough the doctor comes and he brings healing.

That's what Matthew wants us to understand. We find Matthew's call wedged between two sets of triads. In Matthew 8 we find a storm calmed, demons driven out, and the paralyzed walk. After Matthew's call a dead child is raised, a bleeding woman is healed, and the blind see. But at the center of a long list of miracles and healings is Jesus call to Matthew, "*Come. Follow me.*"

We don't know much about Matthew but has chosen to tell us his profession: tax collector. Collecting taxes was a lucrative and successful career. The way tax collectors won the right to collect taxes over an area was often done by highest bid. Those who can

guarantee the most taxes collected get the job anything collected over that number was theirs to keep. Tax collectors were hated and lumped in with “sinners”. On the other side of the scale opposite of the tax collectors at were the Pharisees. They are the supposed perfect people. Jesus uses them an impressive example when he says, *“unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”* The Pharisees went over and above the law and were even cautious with whom they were seen in public but they still weren’t righteous and even this wasn’t enough.

They treated sin as if it were an infectious disease, something you can catch by physical contact. They couldn’t understand how Jesus, who claimed to be God, could come into contact with such filth. Instead of approaching Jesus and asking him about eating and drinking. They instead choose to spread their infection and ask the disciples. *“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* (Matthew 9:11). Jesus begins to diagnose their problem, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* You think you have no need for me that you can stand on your own.

If you were writing a gospel like Matthew, how would you describe yourself? Doctors generally want details about your life, if you smoke, drink, allergies, and medical history. Would you go into the details? Matthew wrote, *“Matthew sitting at the tax booth... gathered with many tax collectors and sinners.”* (Matthew 9:9,10) Would we be so honest? Paul proclaims himself to be the chief of sinners and I’ve had people scoff at such statements. After all I don’t look so bad.

As they look around, other’s may not look so bad or seem so sick. Some sin is written on bodies evident for all to see. Others sins are written in hearts and minds and carry the scars of guilt that no one can see. We may even look like we’re on the opposite end of the scale among the good people. Do we like the Amish we’ve cut ourselves off from the sick world, create an Amish paradise, because it might rub off on us? Such thinking denies the sickness that is in us all. It’s not just a common cold. If left untreated it’s fatal. We’re all sick. We come to church to expose our sin, open wounds and treat them with God’s forgiveness.

I guarantee I will offend you at one point or another. You will be upset. You may go in search for a second opinion and that’s fine but only if you’re not out looking for what you want to hear. Going in search of someone to scratch your itching ears is like physician assisted suicide. Jesus must show us how sick we are. That little lump, that little sin is life threatening. The problem with sin is that often we can’t see it, feel it, or know it’s there.

Sometimes we can only view the effects over an extended period of time, death. God clearly tells us, "*The wages of sin is death.*" We are all sinners, every stinking one of us.

We may be able to impress others and put on a pretty good show. But if we think we are impressing God he has not come for the righteous but the sick.

Jesus knows we need to see how sick we are. He sends his law to crush and kill our pride. Jesus comes for the sick just as he came for Matthew. No self-respecting teacher would go out in search for students. If a student were bright enough, knew torah well enough, then maybe just maybe he'd be allowed to follow a rabbi for a while. But Jesus gets it all wrong. He stoops to recruiting his own disciples. They then hang out with sinners and unsavory characters.

Jesus did not wait for sinners to come to him (pull themselves up by their own bootstraps). He took the initiative went to Matthew and called to him, "*Follow me.*" When the Pharisees thought they needed to correct Jesus in this matter Jesus exposed their sickness like a surgeon he cuts to the hearts, "*Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'*" (Matthew 9:13). The Pharisees who pride themselves in knowledge of God's Word need to become students again. God doesn't want legalistic sacrifice and separation. He wants mercy.

What Jesus wanted to them to understand was that sin is not like a skin disease but righteousness and purity are. You cannot be too sinful for God to save, only too righteous to need his healing. Jesus calls out, "*Follow me.*" I bring healing, mercy, and I am the sacrifice. Coming into contact with Jesus, the doctor, provides healing and relief. The effects are evident in the life of Matthew. He gets up and follows Jesus. He invites his friends and family to a farewell party. He saw his call to be a disciple as a time to rejoice. He invites his friends, the outcasts of society and Jesus ate with them. Jesus has come for sinners. There was no trial period but immediate acceptance. This miracle of healing was instant and effective.

Jesus knows how sick we are. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He came not to call those who are well but those who are sick, those who are dead in sin. But, no cure is possible for those who are convinced they are not sick. Sometimes the hardest thing to believe is that we are as bad as the Bible states, that our conversion really is that great of a miracle. Yet Jesus comes to us.

Jesus diagnoses our condition and then prescribes a treatment, and treats souls with law and gospel, with Word and sacrament—all with the ultimate goal of salvation. As we approach the Lord's table we realize that we come as equals. We are all equally sinful and

needy but through repentant faith we are also equally welcome. The reason we practice close communion however is because we want to protect those who think they are worthy. A doctor prescribing medication without knowing the sickness would lose his license - how much more a pastor - doctor of souls, handing out medication without knowing his people?

Jesus our doctor takes care of us. Like a doctor who knows we need a heart transplant and there is only one match. He volunteers his own heart. Jesus meets the law's demands and he hands his heart over to you. He died on the cross to save you and his death covers all sins. Even those who look really sick. You aren't too sick to save but only to healthy to need a doctor. Sin isn't a contagious disease that you can catch by coming into contact with others but Jesus' righteousness is. The effects are evident in your life. Maybe like Matthew you will invite co-workers sometimes you could describe them as "sinners" maybe even tax collectors. But there is no trial period or doubt. Jesus has come for sinners.

So go and rub off on others. Infect them with God's Word. You may not like doctors and neither do I but we have a doctor who works miracles. Don't stay away. This doctor doesn't cost a thing. He takes care of serious life threatening situations as well as little life threatening lumps. There are other sick people just like you. Jesus is unlike any other doctor. He works faith. He heals and restores hearts and souls.