

I HAVE NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT SINNERS

Matthew 9:1-13

Key Verses: 9:12-13

"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.'"

When we study Matthew's Gospel, we learn, first, Jesus' messianic ministry, second, the way to Jerusalem and his glorious crucifixion and resurrection. Right now, we are studying Jesus' messianic healing ministry. Jesus is our spiritual king. He heals our sinsickness. Isaiah described his healing ministry as follows: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Mt 8:17). Now, with our incurable diseases and sinsicknesses we can go to Jesus to be healed. Jesus is our friend and he heals our paralytic diseases and incurable sinsickness. In today's passage, Matthew 9:1-13, Jesus heals the paralytic and a man named Matthew. And Jesus also rebukes the Pharisees, who were like old wineskins, so that they may repent and receive the Spirit of God and God's mercy in their hearts as servants of God.

First, Jesus heals a paralytic (1-8). As we studied in the last chapter, Jesus attempted to have a retreat so that his disciples might have a time to rest and eat and study what they had seen when Jesus was healing the sick. Actually, the retreat was necessary. Mark 6:31 says, "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place to get some rest.'" But the disciples could not have a retreat due to the stormy sea on the way to the retreat place in Gerasa. They also could not rest, for as soon as they stepped on the soil of Gerasa two demon-possessed men horrified them, yelling and screaming because of their own sinsickness. The next day they had to come back to the Galilean district. Jesus wanted his disciples to have a certain time for resting. But when they crossed over and came to his own town, some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. Jesus saw their faith. He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

At that time, a paralytic was known as a kind of sinsick person. Paralytics are those whose whole bodies or parts of their bodies are paralyzed and they cannot take care of themselves. So they depend on others and burden others endlessly. They are not ashamed, but take it for granted that others should help him. According to John's Gospel, paralytics are men and women of unthankful minds. Once, Jesus saw a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Among so many sick people, Jesus picked this most miserably crippled man, the 38-year paralytic. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" His answer was to complain that people did not help him get into the water when the pool of Bethesda was stirred (Jn 5:6-7). A complaining mind is an unthankful mind. According to the book of Romans, unthankfulness is the worst sin among many sins. Unthankfulness is the root of sin (Ro 1:21).

There was a young man who looked handsome and neat. Once his

shepherd sent him to Chicago for [Bible study](#). When finished Bible study and was about to go back to his home, his shepherd's mother asked him to take a box of [groceries](#) to her son. But the boy forgot and just left, without even saying good-bye. His shepherd, who had received a telephone call that the groceries were coming by the boy, was happily expecting his return. But the boy did not bring the groceries and appeared to his shepherd with empty hands. His shepherd was unhappy about it and did not give him happy smiles. Then the boy wrote a note about how bitter his heart is because he was not warmly welcomed. He was not thankful at all, even though he lived in his shepherd's house for a long time. He was unhappy, not because he could not get happy smiles and dinner, but because of his unthankful mind. The young man could not be healed of his unthankfulness because he does not know the concept of thankfulness. He knows very well about selfishness, but he does not know thankfulness. So he is as miserable as a paralytic. Here we learn that when we are going to be healed from paralysis, then we must know what kind of sinsickness we have. Otherwise, we become self-righteous like the Pharisees.

The spiritual meaning of Jesus' healing the paralytic is so deep. We cannot fathom it without much prayer and spiritual enlightenment. The teachers of the law said to themselves, "Ah, this fellow is blaspheming!" Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" 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.'" (3-6). The Pharisees' first mistake was that they did not know the compassion of God. Of course, the paralytic emanated bad odor. He looked like the living dead. But Jesus had great compassion on him. Jesus' heart went out to him. Jesus already decided to heal him so that he could live, achieving what he wanted to achieve. Jesus healed him so that somehow he would become a great man of God.

The Pharisees' other mistake was that they had no noble humanity. So they could not see the paralytic as a human being like themselves. We should not be legalistic like the Pharisees. But we must be like Jesus.

Jesus did not just argue. He demonstrated that he has the authority to forgive the paralytic's sin. Look at verses 6b-8. "Then he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.'" And the man got up and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men." Through Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins.

Second, Jesus heals Matthew (9-10). The Bible calls this part the calling of Matthew. But when we read this passage carefully, this is precisely Jesus' healing Matthew. One day Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. Who was Matthew? Other gospels do not call him Matthew, but Levi the tax collector. It is very funny that Levi the tax collector calls himself "Matthew." He became Matthew after a long time. But here he didn't call himself, "Levi the tax collector," he called himself, "Matthew." "Matthew" means the teacher of mankind. In his self-esteem, Matthew, the author of this gospel, called himself "Matthew," acknowledging that he was no more Levi, but a

servant of God. Anyway, as soon as Jesus saw him, he told him, "Follow me."

Look at verse 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." The narrative is short. But this event is outstanding in Bible history. Matthew had been Levi the tax collector. At that time, tax collectors were known as public sinners. They were hated by their own people because they entered the service of their country's enemies and amassed fortunes at the expense of their own suffering people. To the people, who were fanatically nationalistic, tax collectors were the object of hatred. The Jews called them, "quislings," "renegades," and "traitors" and regarded them as sinners.

The tax collectors were called sinners because of their selfishness. These days a selfish person is known as a smart person. They do everything to satisfy their selfishness; if only they can make money, they are ready to betray their consciences and sense of honor. In this individualistic society, selfishness has been largely condoned. But in the Bible, selfishness is comparable to leprosy. A selfish person is dirty like a leper. A selfish person is harmful. Selfish people damage others' welfare intentionally and unintentionally. Mostly selfish people gain money through extortion, stealing, cheating and lying. But mostly they are unhappy. How nice it would be if doing such things could make them happy. But they are unhappy people, because there is no one in the world who can buy happiness with money. Biblically speaking, selfish people are the same as unthankful people.

Matthew was a selfish person. He was sitting at the tax collector's booth. Jesus knew that he was a public sinner. Jesus also knew that he was an able man. Jesus knew that he was a powerful sinner, while the paralytic was a powerless sinner. Jesus did not see Matthew's human condition. Jesus saw that he was lost in sin. As soon as Jesus saw him, he forgave all his sins. Jesus saw the image of God in this wretched man. Jesus saw in him the possibility of growing to be a great man of God. Jesus did not ask him, "Would you like to follow me?" Jesus ordered him, "Follow me." When Jesus ordered him, "Follow me," Jesus had decided to help him until this selfish tax collector, who was like a scorpion, would be changed into a sacrificial man of God. When Jesus ordered him, "Follow me," he decided to make him one of his disciples so he might be a shepherd for all selfish people in the world. We must raise many Levi the tax collector type of people as shepherds for the glory of God.

How did Matthew respond to his calling? As soon as Matthew heard the voice of God through Jesus, he abandoned everything and followed him (9). To Matthew the things of the world were no longer treasures to him. To Matthew Jesus was the source of joy in his life. At the moment Matthew met Jesus, due to Jesus' messianic compassion, his spiritual eyes were opened; his value system was changed. He was so happy that he had new life overflowing in him. In the past, Matthew's life had been full of troubles and the devil's torment (Ro 2:7-9). But since Jesus came into his heart, he could find the direction of life, and joy was overflowing.

In the past Matthew was a penny-pincher. But now to Matthew, money didn't matter. He did not know what he was doing. But he was preparing a great banquet. First, he invited Jesus and his disciples. Next he wanted to invite many noble people. But he knew none. So he invited many tax collectors who were his friends, and who were branded as public sinners by people. The joy of the feast was great. The taste of the food was great. Everything was so great that the feast was like a jubilant heavenly banquet. Jesus called a selfish sinner and healed him. Praise Jesus!

Third, I have come to call sinners (11-13). There were some unhappy fellows. They were the Pharisees, who said, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners'?" (11) The hypocritical Pharisees could not tolerate Jesus' fellowship with sinners. Moreover, they could not tolerate seeing that sinners were joyful and eating so deliciously with much gusto. Perhaps the Pharisees could not eat delicious food and complained all the time about the menu to their wives. So inwardly the Pharisees envied Jesus' disciples that they were eating so deliciously with unutterable happiness. The religious leaders were in essence called to be the shepherds of God's people. They had to take care of those people who are lost in sin. But they had no shepherd heart of God. They thought they were righteous and God's sheep were unrighteous sinners because they had no license from the Pharisees. They criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. Their human segregation was very strict. But Jesus didn't have any sense of segregation. He was eating deliciously with his disciples and all the tax collector class of people.

What did Jesus say in response to their criticism? Look at verses 12-13. "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.'" These two verses are very famous and well quoted by many people in history. But what is the main point of these verses? The main point of these verses is that Jesus came to this world to save sinners from their sins. This reminds us of John 3:16. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Here we learn something about Jesus. Jesus knew why he came to this world. He had a broken shepherd heart to embrace all the sick people of the world spiritually and save them until no one was left.

Today we learn that we Christians are learners of Jesus. We must learn that Jesus desires mercy, not sacrifice. Buddha also talked about mercy. But Buddha's mercy was sympathy with suffering people. Jesus' mercy is different. Jesus' mercy has hope that the people suffering from their sinsickness may be changed and used for the glory of God.