

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
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Matthew 9:9-13

Lessons from Jesus' Calling of Matthew

- 1. Diagnosing sick**
- 2. Prescribing the cure**

Hymns: 193 – 401 –

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All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Matthew 9 –

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."*

Are you feeling well today? Have you been well lately? Or sick? How has your health been in the past six months or year? I don't know how many people have told me, "I just can't get rid of this cough" or "I have a cold again!" I hope you're not sick today.

If you think about the medical industry today, it certainly can be quite specialized. There are doctors who only work on eyes, hearts, feet, or skin. We even

have doctors that just deal with allergies or plastic surgery.

Today Jesus uses the picture of being sick or being healthy in a very important way. He does this in our Gospel reading, which is the account of the Calling of Matthew. Today, let's examine Jesus' words carefully and learn about:

- 1. Diagnosing the sick**
- 2. Prescribing the cure**

1 – Our account began, "*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.*" Where did this incident happen? A look at the previous verses reveals that Jesus was in a village by the Sea of Galilee called Capernaum. He had just healed a paralyzed man, and "went on from there." Mark's account tells us that he was walking by the lake.

As Jesus walked, he passed by a tax collecting booth. Matthew was in the booth. Capernaum was a location both by the sea and also on the main road from Damascus to Egypt, so it was a prime location for exacting taxes on those who passed by with their goods. As Matthew sat in his booth, very likely in the middle of important business, Jesus simply told him, "Follow me." Matthew got up and followed Christ without hesitation. Many commentators believe that this was not the first time Matthew had laid eyes on Jesus. Capernaum was Jesus' headquarters, and he had had quite an active ministry lately. Matthew very likely knew very well about Jesus' ministry. Matthew's own account of this might be a bit modest. Mark and Luke say that he "left everything" to follow Jesus.

We read on: "*While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees*

saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Out of gratitude for Jesus’ call, Matthew throws a banquet for him at his house. And who comes to it? Tax collectors and sinners! It sounds like they are sick people.

Tax collectors certainly had a bad reputation at this time. We’re talking about a worse reputation than your local IRS man. A number of details contributed to their bad reputation, so that people of their day would call them “sick sinners”:

- Tax collectors were Jews who had made an agreement with the Romans to collect their taxes from their own Jewish people. They were in league with the enemy. Traitors!
- Tax collectors not only collected the price of the tax, but also their commission from people. They often collected plenty for themselves. Greedy!
- The method of collecting the money was not specified. Therefore, unfairness ran rampant among tax collectors. People feared them greatly.

Tax collectors were considered to be so despicable that they were barred from attending the synagogue; they were excommunicated! They were spiritually sick people!

We also hear that besides tax collectors there were “sinners” at the party. Who were these people? They certainly were not “law keepers” like the Pharisees. Even more, they were people with loose lives publicly. They were outcasts from the synagogue also, and outcasts from high society. These were corrupt people, thieves and prostitutes very likely being in attendance. Spiritually sick people!

From Jesus’s words, though, we see that we’re not done diagnosing the sick yet. We read, “*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.’ ”*” Jesus has some straight words for the Pharisees, who thought that they were pretty healthy, at least healthier than those corrupt, perverted sinners at the banquet.

Jesus pointed out the truth that they should put the term “sinners” on themselves. They should do this for a couple of reasons:

1. They were sinners as all mankind must admit before God. Psalm 14 says, “*The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*”
2. Jesus also pointed out a specific sickness in their wrong view of how a person is saved. They thought that their good works were meriting favor and salvation in God’s eyes. In fact, they had added numerous laws to the laws of Moses of the Old Testament that God had given them. If you remember Jesus’ story about the Pharisee and the tax collector who prayed in the Temple, the Pharisee bragged that he fasted twice a week. In the OT, they were commanded to fast once a year! They added the law that they needed to tithe all that they had down to even their garden plants – dill and mint! And in all this, they didn’t know how to apply God’s law properly to their own heart.

Therefore, they also had a hypocritical attitude toward other people. “Why, Jesus, do you want to hang around with lowlifes worse than me?!”

Isn't it great that Jesus came for people like that? Isn't it great that he came for hypocritical Pharisees? Isn't it great that he came for terrible sinners? Who would we compare this to today? Who are the bad sinners in our day?

- Thank God Jesus came for the man who operates the adult video store
- Thank God Jesus came for prostitutes
- For drug dealers who drive luxury vehicles
- For sex offenders
- For drunks
- For people who cheat on their spouse

But, dear Pharisees, we can't stop diagnosing there. The main lesson for you today is that he came for sick people like you. How does that sound? Does that make you bristle a bit?

Deep down we must admit that we are sick people through and through. “But I haven't done things like you just listed, Pastor!” you are tempted to say. However, you can see symptoms that you are a really sick person. Symptoms come in many different forms:

- The expletive that you said on the freeway when you were mad
- The flash of jealousy that came over you when you were in your friend's awesome house

- The security you feel when you think your life's been pretty pious lately and that you must be pretty saved because of it
- The temptation you have to give the silent treatment to your spouse because you're not happy with them
- The hesitancy we would have to “leave everything” of this world behind, as Matthew did to follow Jesus, because we love part of it a little too much

Or maybe you must admit, “Pastor, it hasn't even been that subtle in my life. I have flagrant and shameful reminders regularly about how sick I am spiritually.”

Therefore, we had better ask the second question today. When you have diagnosed a sickness, what is the next logical question? The sick person is longing to know, “So what's the cure?”

2 — How did we see the cure introduced to tax collectors and sinners in our reading? Matthew was so joyful to have been called as an apostle of Christ that he threw a banquet for Jesus at his house and he invited many of his “sinner” friends to meet Jesus. Jesus accepted this invitation, because he had come to “the sick,” namely sinners to repentance.

Matthew's friendship evangelism was just the thing those sin-sick souls needed. Jesus came. He ate and drank with them. That says something in and of itself, doesn't it? Eating a meal with someone is an act of friendly association with them, especially in Middle Eastern culture at Jesus' time. Matthew didn't invite them initially to a lecture or a seminar, but to a banquet so that they could meet Jesus. At this banquet, he would have the opportunity

to teach and talk as he saw fit. He could share the cure with those sick souls as he deemed wise.

It would have been interesting to have been a fly on the wall at that banquet, wouldn't it have been? I would be interested to hear exactly how Jesus led people into conversations about sin and salvation. I wonder if there were a number of "woman at the well" conversations, where he built a bridge in conversations to talk about living water, the one thing needful. The news about him coming into the world as the Savior who would give his life as an offering for their great and shameful sins on the cross was exactly what they needed to hear!

What about a cure for the Pharisees? Or were they beyond a cure? Jesus certainly has a sharper word for them. After all, they were the experts in Scripture. They were the ones who were to be leaders and examples for the people. So Jesus is rather direct with them. He tells them, "*Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'*"

What does that mean? By mercy, Jesus is referring to the pity, love, and grace that is God-pleasing. It had been modeled perfectly to the Pharisees by the fact that Jesus himself was with them. God had sent his Son by his grace to perform his mission of mercy for mankind. Jesus was there right in front of them, the Messiah sent from heaven! God's mercy was the example of the mercy they were supposed to be exhibiting in their lives!

By "sacrifice," Jesus is referring to completion of outward duty and ritual. Sacrifice is the service that God had prescribed men to do for him in the OT laws. We must recognize that both mercy and sacrifice are pleasing to God when done in the right spirit. They work together perfectly. But when outward sacrifice is done without the proper attitude in the heart, it is an empty shell. Jesus related an

example of this in his teaching. He mentioned once that although they were not to do work on the Sabbath Day, what would you do if your ox fell into a pit? Would you let him languish there and possibly die because it was the Sabbath, or would you rescue him? Mercy! Attitude! This would dictate the action and sacrifice. So pull him out of the pit.

We see a great example of the mercy of God here because Jesus taught the Pharisees this proverb here. The mercy of God was explained and extended.

Dear friends, this grace and mercy of God is your cure also. And it is miraculous. Many times a physically old or sick person runs into dire danger of losing their life when they have multiple ailments. Perhaps a bad heart condition is coupled with diabetes, along with pneumonia and emphysema. This is a deadly recipe for a person's future. As a sin-sick soul, you had ten terminal conditions against you when you consider the Ten Commandments of God. Any of them would take your life and soul eternally in hell.

However, then the Great Physician took your sins and paid for them on Calvary's cross and gives you mercy and healing. How amazing! And how joyful this makes us feel. A person who has been cured of cancer has tremendous joy. They have a new lease on life! Even more so, the believer who was once sin-sick and doomed has a joy that cannot be dimmed. They have salvation. And they want this good news to be extended to other sick people.

As we close our look at the Calling of Matthew, it's interesting that Mark's and Luke's account use a different name for Matthew than Matthew's account. They call him "Levi," which we assume was his old name. It means "attached." Matthew uses the name we speculate to be his new name: Matthew! Its meaning is "gift of Jehovah." This name probably was special to him. The

tax collector would now offer salvation for free. God would use Matthew to write the first Gospel. And he would serve as a missionary in the early Church. Tradition tells us he was martyred in Ethiopia.

May we remember the lessons this account has taught us about sickness and healing. As the hymnist penned:

**There is a balm in Gilead
That makes the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul**