

Jesus' Encounter with a Despised Sinner

Matthew 9:9 [NIV] *“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.”*

Matthew worked in the region of Capernaum, and this is where Jesus was living at that time.

[**John 4:13; John 9:1**]

Matthew would have seen Jesus or at least heard of Him before this encounter.

Matthew was probably a customs officer at the border of Capernaum’s trade route.

Matthew was hated and despised by his own people for being a collaborator with Imperial Rome and their puppet rulers.

Jewish tax collectors were a notorious group and barred from the synagogues. They were an unscrupulous class of person who had bribed or bought to get their appointment. Then used it to become very wealthy by burdening their own people with excessive taxes.

Matthew 9:10-11 [NIV] *“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’?”*

It is easy to see why the Pharisees were furious with Jesus Christ’s apparent lax attitude in sharing a meal with Matthew and his kind, all sinners.

Psalms 26:4-5 [NIV] *“I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked.”*

It is amazing to see how Jesus often responds in an opposite way to traditional religious norms.

Matthew 9:12-13 [NIV] *“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.”*

The self-righteous Pharisees and many professing Christians today do not understand is that Jesus’ redemptive activity must be thrust into centre stage.

When we see the situation from Christ’s perspective, the Pharisees and many professing Christians today are left without reason for accusations.

It is like telling a doctor **not** to get close to the patient because he might get contaminated with the same condition as the patient or get blood on his hands.

Matthew 9:14-15 [NIV] *“Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 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.”*

It seems that **not** all of John the Baptist’s disciples were convinced that Jesus was the One whom John had introduced as “*the Lamb of God*” [the Messiah].

These disciples of John, who was now in prison, were sincere, and this is why Jesus took time to explain to them the New Covenant changes already present in Him and the effect it had on His redemptive work.

The disciples of John and the disciples of Moses [the Pharisees] fasted on Mondays and Thursdays on a regular basis. The disciples of Moses and of John were both religious fundamentalists who sought to separate themselves from everything they deemed “worldly”.

The Pharisees were legalists and John’s disciples were the gloom and doom last day prophets of their day.

Jesus’ disciples were radically different as they were filled with the joy of their Master’s presence and His teaching.

Who can possibly fast when sinners are being saved?

Who can separate themselves from the world when salvation is being offered to it by God through us, His servants?

Who can preach gloom and doom when the message of salvation is Good News?

Matthew 9:16-17 [NIV] *“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.”*

The old religious patterns of yesterday’s Old Covenant will **not** hold the new wine of today’s New Covenant gospel brought by Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew perfectly well that He came to people with new ideas and with a new conception of the truth.

Jesus was well aware how difficult it is to get a new idea into people’s minds, so He used two pictures which any Jew would understand.

If you put a piece of unshrunk cloth to patch an old garment, the first occasion the garment gets wet the patch of new cloth shrinks and the garment becomes ruined.

The Jews were passionately attached to things as they were. The law was to them the last and final Word of God. To add even one word to it, or to subtract one word from it was a deadly sin.

To the Scribes and Pharisees a new idea was not just a mistake but a sin.

That same spirit is by no means dead today.

Because of this, those confronted with the new teaching of Jesus and the apostles try to stitch it on to their old garment like a patch of new cloth, instead of accepting the new as a completely new garment of righteousness.

Law-keeping was the old garment.

Faith is the new garment.

You cannot mix the two.

Law-keeping was by your own strength, which fails.

Faith is by the strength of Jesus Christ working in us who has unlimited power to succeed.

Philippians 4:13 [NIV] *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

The “*him*” in this scripture is Jesus Christ.

In Christ’s days people stored wine in skins, not in bottles.

A new skin has a certain amount of elasticity so no harm is done when new, still fermenting wine, was stored in it, the skin stretches.

An old skin has grown hard and lost its elasticity so new fermenting wine and its gases would cause the skin to burst and the wine spilt.

Our minds need to be elastic enough to receive and to contain new ideas.

The history of progress is the history of overcoming of the prejudices of a closed mind.

All new inventions in the beginning were regarded with suspicion.

Within the Christian church this resentment of the new is chronic, the attempt to pour new things into old moulds is almost universal.

It may be that we would do well to remember that when any living thing stops growing and changing, it starts dying.

The Scribes and Pharisees had a view of religion which had stopped growing and changing.

They were more concerned with the preservation of their own holiness than with helping another person with their sins.

Just like a doctor who would **not** visit a patient who was sick lest they would catch some infection.

Essentially their religion was selfish.

They were more concerned with criticism than with encouragement.

They were far more concerned with pointing out the faults of others than to help a person to conquer their faults by looking to Jesus Christ as their Messiah [Saviour].

The Saviour they were looking for but did not recognise when He came because He did **not** conform to their idea of holiness.

They practised a goodness which issued in condemnation rather than in forgiveness and compassion.

They would rather leave a human in the gutter than give them a hand to get out and be healed.

Luke 10:25-37 [NIV] *“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next*

day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

It was the religious people of that day who left this dying man in the gutter, and a law-keeper who asked the question.

They practised a religion that consisted of outward orthodoxy rather than practical help.

Jesus loved and quoted one saying found in the writings of an Old Covenant prophet.

Hosea 6:6 [NIV] *“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

God desired mercy rather than spiritual sacrifices.

A person may diligently go through all the motions of orthodox piety, but if their hand is never stretched out to help a sinner and a person in need, they **cannot** profess to be a disciple of Christ, a true Christian.