

INTRODUCTION

This is the 25th message in our series from Matthew entitled, "Parables and Miracles." Today's message is about "The Doctor Who Still Makes House Calls." In our text today we're going to meet the writer of this gospel account. His name is Matthew. He was a tax collector but Jesus had a new career for him. Speaking of careers, there are a lot of people who are looking for new jobs. There have been some pretty funny job interviews. Here are five actual job interview reports that teach you what NOT to do!

1. "Bald applicant suddenly excused himself and returned to interview wearing a hairpiece."
2. "Applicant wore her iPod earplugs and claimed that she could listen to me and the music at the same time."
3. "Applicant stated that if he were hired, he would demonstrate his loyalty by having the company logo tattooed on his forearm."
4. "Applicant interrupted interview to phone his therapist for advice on answering a specific question."

And probably the worst possible job interview was reported as

5. "Applicant asked who the lovely babe was, pointing to the picture on my desk. When I said it was my wife, he asked if she were home now and wanted my phone number. I called security."

Let's read about the best career you'll ever have—following Jesus:

Matthew 9:9-13. "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. 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?'" 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."

Since this is a series on Parables and Miracles, you might be wondering how this fits in. It's not a miracle, so where's the parable? Look again at verse 12. This parable is only twelve words long: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." One of the titles we often use for Jesus is the "Great Physician." This is the only time in the Bible Jesus compares Himself to a doctor. Then Jesus explained the parable by saying, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." (and Luke adds "to repentance.") The point of the parable is simple. What a medical doctor does for your body, Dr. Jesus can do for your soul. As we examine this scripture, I'd like to share three life changing lessons with you:

I. JESUS CALLS EACH OF US TO FOLLOW HIM

Levi, who was later known as Matthew, was a despised tax collector. He worked for the IRS—not the Israeli Revenue Service, because none of the money went to Israel. He worked for the Infernal Roman Service. He was a servant of the Roman Empire. The Romans were the occupiers of Israel. A tax collector had to deliver a certain amount of revenue to the Romans, and his salary was anything he received above and beyond that amount. He could charge any exorbitant amount he pleased and there were Roman soldiers standing at his tax table to enforce his authority.

To understand how much the Jews hated these tax collectors, compare it to what happened during World War II. The Germans occupied France and Holland and then the Allies liberated these countries following the Normandy Invasion. After the Germans fled, the people punished those men and women who were considered German sympathizers. That's how Jews felt about tax-collectors like Levi. They spat on the ground when they saw them.

One day Jesus approached the tax booth and I can imagine the onlookers thought, "He's going to give that dirty tax collector a piece of his mind!" Instead Jesus walked up and said two words, "Follow me." And the tense of the verbs indicate Levi immediately left his booth, his job, and all the security it brought, and followed Jesus on the spot.

Jesus is still calling Levis to follow Him (and Wranglers as well). Jesus isn't interested in making believers or making converts. He is interested in making disciples and a disciple is a follower. There are three things that will happen when you follow Jesus.

A. You will make Him the central focus of your life

Before Levi started following Jesus, his life revolved around this job. He was going to make a boat load of money because he was fixed for life in this lucrative occupation. When Jesus called him, he had to choose whether his life would revolve around making money or around pleasing and obeying Jesus. Let me ask you today: What or who is the central focus of your life?

Let's consider our solar system as an illustration. At the center of our solar system is a huge sun. The sun is so large it comprises 99% of the mass of our solar system. The planet Jupiter is 300 times larger than earth, but the sun is 1,000 times larger than Jupiter. It is the gravitational pull of the sun that keeps all these planets in orbit.

Think of your life as the solar system. Think of Jesus as the Sun that is central to your life. Allow all the planets to represent something in your life. Think of Mercury as money, and possessions, houses and land. Let Venus represent romantic love. Earth can be your personal feelings and desires. Let Mars be food (like a Mars Bar). Neptune can be work, success, your job. Jupiter can be the big events, like weddings, or anniversaries. Saturn can represent leisure time, travel, or entertainment. Uranus can represent art, good books, and the theater. Finally, Pluto can be sports, recreation, hobbies.

All of those are good things in your life, but if one of those planets ever moves into the center of your solar system, your life is going to be seriously out of balance. That may be why your life seems out of control right now—you don't have Jesus at the center. Could you imagine what

would happen if the sun tried to orbit around a planet or two? It would be so out of sync that the entire solar system would tilt and spin out of control. For the same reason, we need something (or Someone) stable and powerful at the center of our lives to keep everything in balance. That Someone is the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you truly follow Jesus, He becomes the center that gives you balance and you will find that all the areas of your life will orbit smoothly around the Son. Discipleship means Jesus is in control of every area of your life—everything revolves around Him—not you.

B. You will invite Him into your home

The first thing Levi did was to throw a party and he invited Jesus. It is an occasion for celebration when someone follows Jesus. Some people think the Christian life is a somber, solemn, straight-laced experience that is to be endured. Jesus taught that the Christian life is a happy, joyous, abundant experience that is to be enjoyed! In other words, the Christian life is like a FEAST not a FUNERAL. Jesus said, "There is rejoicing in the presence of angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

Sadly, too many people are unwilling to invite Jesus into their home and family. They make their religion something confined to the church building for an hour on Sunday. It's like the guy rushing home from church, ripping off his tie and saying with relief, "Boy, I'm glad that's over with for another week!" If you are truly following Jesus, He will be recognized in your home. You will allow Him to rule over your marriage and family. You will talk to Him when you gather with your family. He will be unseen guest at every family meal. He will be consulted before you make family decisions.

C. You will want to introduce all your friends to Him

Levi invited his fellow tax collectors and other "sinners" to his party. Matthew hosted a supper for sinners. He wanted to bring his friends into his home so they could meet Jesus. In the verses prior to these in Matthew we saw four friends doing the same thing. They took their faith through the roof to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus.

Do you have a burden to introduce your friends to Jesus? You say, "I've tried to bring my friends to church, but they won't come, what can I do?" Why don't you try using your home as a safe place where they can join you for a meal and then you can tell them more about Jesus. I don't recommend you call it a "supper for sinners." You could call it a "Matthew Meal." You don't have to preach to them. You don't have to stand in front of your fireplace and say, "In just a moment I'm going to give the invitation, let's sing 'Just as I Am' and you come!"

You don't have to force the gospel down their throat—try offering some good food instead. It's a lot easier to swallow. Pray before the meal—invite the Lord to be present. In the course of the conversation talk about your love for the church and for the Lord. Be real, be tactful. Have fun—let them know that you can be a Christian and still have fun.

When we take a closer look at Matthew's meal we discover a second lesson:

II. JESUS IS MORE AT HOME WITH SINNERS THAN WITH RELIGIOUS SNOBS

Let's crash Matthew's party for a second. There's laughter, there's music, there's the smell of great food, and there's a lot of conversation going on. Jesus is the center of attention and He's telling stories and these publicans and prostitutes are laughing. Meanwhile, outside the door, there's a posse of religious snobs. They are the self-appointed righteousness police who have been following Jesus around and looking for opportunities to criticize Him. These are the same guys who were in the crowded house where the paralytic was lowered who said, "This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except God?" Now, they're looking in at this party and they complain to Jesus' disciples that there is no way this man can be the Messiah, because He's eating with tax collectors and sinners.

In spite of the loud conversations, Jesus heard their remark and 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.'" He quoted Hosea 6:6 and said, "Go learn what it *means*." It's one thing to know a verse and something entirely different to learn what it means and obey it. God wasn't impressed with the sacrificial system at the Temple as much as He is pleased when we demonstrate mercy and compassion to other people.

Jesus freely admitted that He hung out with the kinds of people who would never be welcome in the homes of the religious snobs. He said, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners".' But wisdom is proved right by all her children." (Luke 7:34-35)

I've made a statement before that has raised a few eyebrows and generated a few emails. But I'm convinced that if Jesus appeared for one day in East Texas He wouldn't show up at Green Acres or Marvin Methodist, or First Presbyterian. I believe we'd find Him down at those joints on the Kilgore Highway near the Country Tavern. Why? Because we already know Him and love Him and He is the kind of Shepherd who leaves the 99 safe sheep and goes after that one lamb who is lost and in danger.

At least one other person agrees with me. In her book *Gospel Medicine*, Barbara Taylor writes: "If Jesus were putting together a 'Sinners' Table' today at the local Denny's it might include a child molester, a garbage collector, a young man with AIDS, a migrant farm worker, a teenage crack addict, a motorcycle gang member and an unmarried woman on welfare with five children by three different fathers. Did I miss anyone? As you picture this, don't forget to put Jesus at the head of the table, asking the young mother to hand him a roll, please." (*Gospel Medicine*, p. 62)

Let's take her quote a little farther. Imagine you're sitting at a neighboring table with a group of clean, well-dressed Christians. You have all joined hands and prayed over your meal and quietly discussed the things of God. However, the noise from that other table makes conversation difficult. Your other friends leave and you notice there's an empty seat at the table of loud sinners. The guy with the beard at the head of the table turns His piercing eyes upon you, pushes out the chair, and says, "Would you like to join us?" What do you do?

“Oh, Pastor, if I knew Jesus was there, of course I’d sit down!” Just remember Jesus has told us, “In as much as you have done it unto the least these, you have done it unto me.” Folks, those are the very kind of people Jesus loved. He spent time with them—He ate and drank and talked with them. If we’re going to be the Church of the Lord Jesus, we must be willing to be more like Jesus than those religious snobs.

The church is a hospital for sinners, not a showcase for saints!

We must never forget this truth: The church is a hospital for sinners, not a showcase for saints! There is only one kind of person we allow in our church—sinners. Some of us are sinners saved by grace and others are sinners who can be forgiven by God’s amazing grace!

In his classic book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning reminds us: “Jesus comes not for the super-spiritual, but for the wobbly and the weak-kneed who know they don’t have it all together, and who are not too proud to accept the handout of amazing grace...Something is radically wrong when the local church rejects a person who is accepted by Jesus...Any church that will not accept that it consists of sinful men and women, and exists for them, implicitly rejects the gospel of grace.” (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p.27)

III. JESUS IS THE ONLY DOCTOR WHO CAN CURE SIN SICKNESS

Jesus indicated that He came to earth for the same reason a doctor spends his time in a hospital. Jesus came to help sinners. There is a disease worse than cancer and more debilitating than MS. It’s a spiritual sickness called sin and if we don’t receive a cure for this, we don’t just die, we die eternally. But the good news is that Dr. Jesus has the cure for our sin sickness.

Dr. Paul Brand, who was both a missionary and a physician, has diagnosed our sin sickness with this description: “We suffer from the universally infectious disease that we call sin-itis, iniquity-osis, or fallen fever. It is a degenerative disease that slowly robs us of our joy in life. Much like cholesterol does to our arteries, sin-itis has a tendency to harden the heart. It creates an impenetrable barrier around it, ultimately preventing it from experiencing life’s joys or sorrows. But probably the most discouraging news about this disease is that we are all born with it. It is in our blood stream from the moment we are conceived. And there is nothing we can do about it... But there is something that God can do about it. Jesus, the Great Physician, has come to seek out the sick to call those whose lives have been afflicted and to bring healing where there was only hurt.”

Do you need to be cured of your sin sickness? In order for you to receive Dr. Jesus’ cure there are three things you must do—the same things you do when you visit a medical doctor.

A. Admit you have a problem

You’ll never seek help from a doctor until you’re willing to admit you have a problem. As long as you linger in denial, you’ll never make an appointment to see a doctor.

Jesus was a master of sarcasm. He said the Pharisees were the kind of men who would strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. And He was being sarcastic when He said, "I haven't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Those religious snobs probably thought, "Oh, then I'm okay." They must have missed the twinkle in Jesus' eye because He was implying NOBODY is righteous! The Bible says, "There is none righteous, not even one." (Romans 3:10) And "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) We read in the paper about a serial murderer who was executed for his crimes and we pat ourselves on our back and say at least we're not as bad as that person. But compared to the holiness of God, we are all filthy sinners. The Bible says even our good deeds are like filthy rags compared to the purity of God.

I was standing in line at the grocery store the other day waiting to check out and I was glancing some of those magazines they try to get you to buy on impulse. I think this one was *The Star*. The cover advertised an article entitled, "Why Normal Women Stalk Their Ex-Boyfriends." I found myself thinking, "If that's normal, then what do you have to do to be strange?" There really isn't any such thing as a normal person. Someone said that "normal is a setting on a dryer." Actually it is *normal* for us to do bizarre things because sin is the normal for human beings! Secondly, you must:

B. Submit yourself to Him

If you've got an illness or disease, you must first admit your problem, but then you must make an appointment and go and actually see the doctor. When you go into one of those little rooms and sit on that uncomfortable padded table covered in paper it's your way of saying, "I'm here, Doc, and I need your help."

Dr. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) You've got to seek Him and say, "Dr. Jesus, I've got a sin sickness I can't control. I need your help." When you do that, Dr. Jesus is ready to give you the cure. And finally, you've got to:

C. Commit to His Plan

Your doctor may say, "We're going to give you a certain medicine, or put you on a special diet." Dr. Jesus says, "Here, I'll take away your sin. You're forgiven. But now I have a plan for you. It's a great plan to prosper you and not to harm you; a plan to give you a hope and a future. I want you to follow me every day of your life. I will live in you and give you the strength to do all things." Are you willing to commit to Dr. Jesus' plan for your life?

CONCLUSION

I'm not a great shopper, because I don't like to browse. I prefer to rush in and buy what I'm after and leave. But like most people, I enjoy finding bargains. In some stores, you often find a section where they have merchandise for sell cheaper than anything else in the store. These may be items that are slightly damaged or were display models. There is usually a sign above this area that says, "AS IS." Or you may sometimes see a used car for sale "AS IS." We all know what "AS IS" means. The prices are cheaper because these products aren't perfect. The seller is giving you

fair warning, if you buy this product you're going to find a flaw, a stain, a zipper that won't zip, a scratched or dented surface, or a TV with no operating instructions. The seller is saying, "When you find the flaw in this item, don't come whining to us." When you read the words, "AS IS" it means "no refunds, no returns, and no guarantees."

Have you discovered that all of us are flawed? We should all wear a sign around our neck that says, "As is." And sometimes we look at others and we decide that we aren't willing to accept them "as is." We want them to change before we accept them. But the good news is that Jesus accepts people "as is."

I know some people who are talented enough to buy scratched furniture and sand it down and make it look like new. Others can take inferior products and make them better than the original. I've seen Wayne Shay take a rusty old shell of a 1959 Cadillac and restore it to something that looked better than the showroom original.

Jesus does the same thing with "AS IS" people. When Jesus looks at us, He doesn't just see the "AS IS" sign around our necks He also sees something more—He sees "what I can be" when He takes possession of my life. He delights in accepting "as is" people and transforming them into something wonderful. He saw Matthew "as is" and saw what he could become. He didn't just see a despised tax collector, Jesus saw a "facts collector" who would one day use his pen to write down His words and deeds. Jesus accepted the woman at the well in Samara "as is." He knew she had a jaded past and was living in sin, but he looked beyond that to see she could be a relational evangelist bringing her thirsty friends to find the living water. Jesus looked at little Zacchaeus and saw Him "as is"—another despised tax collector. And He saw He could become a generous giver. Jesus looks at each of us and accepts us "As Is." Then He says, "I see what you can become." And we should look at people the way Jesus looks at people. We should be willing to accept them "as is" and rejoice as Jesus makes them into something beautiful.

I love that old song Gloria Gaither wrote. "Something beautiful, something good; All my confusion; He understood. All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife; but He made something beautiful of my life."

The Great Physician is here today. You don't even need to make an appointment. He still makes house calls. Invite Him into your home and into your heart and your life will never again be the same.

OUTLINE

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- B. Invite Him into your home
- C. Want to introduce all your friends to Him

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- B. Submit yourself to Him
- C. Commit to His Plan

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes