

Episode #738 - Matthew 9 Part 2: Mercy and Fasting

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. In Matthew 9, the Lord healed a lame man who was brought to Him, but first He told him, “Your sins are forgiven.” The scribes thought this was blasphemy, since only God can forgive sins, but He proved His power to do so by telling the man to rise up and walk. Next, the Lord dealt with a different kind of sickness when He called the tax collector Matthew to follow Him as His disciple, and Matthew did it. Today, we will consider what happened next, and the Lord’s power to heal sin and sickness in the heart.

III. Matthew the Tax Collector. Matthew 9:9-13.

- A. Verse 10. The house = Matthew’s? Tax collectors and sinners had been hated so long they were doubtless tired of it. They found out life did not consist in the amount of wealth possessed! Sinners were those who were disfellowshipped by the scribes and Pharisees, not necessarily worse sinners than any other men. No one would hire them, buy from them, or sell to them if they could help it. Now these ate together or feasted together with Him. More than on food; they enjoyed the great grace of God!
- B. Verse 11. The Pharisees tasked themselves with making sure everyone followed their decisions on excommunication. To sit down to eat with someone in that day was a sign of close companionship, the highest possible social significance. Now the Lord is eating with these despised, outcast people! “Teacher” is the Greek *didaskalos*, meaning a master-teacher who had disciples, devoted followers. This is its second occurrence, 8:19, the man who said he would follow Him wherever He went. Notice they call it eating, whereas Matthew calls it feasting.
- C. Verse 12. The Lord was always ready to answer when the cowardly leaders took their complaints to His disciples rather than to Him. This man was sick, but a different kind of sick from the lame man. The Pharisees took pride in condemning this kind of sick, but the Lord was the Good Physician who dealt with sickness of the heart.
- D. Verse 13. He quotes Hosea 6:6, Bullinger says see 6:1, 5:13, 7:1. These leaders would carefully follow all the sacrifices, but had no desire to show mercy. Desire = Greek *thelo*, one of the words for “will.” “To call” here means to invite or bid. “Repentance” is again *metanoia*, meaning after-mindedness, submission, or yieldedness.

IV. The New and the Old. Matthew 9:14-17.

- A. Verse 14. To fast, of course, is going without food. The law demanded this once a year, but the religious in Israel did it more often, some say twice a week.
- B. Verse 15. “Friends of the bridegroom” = sons of the bridechamber, meaning the groomsmen. “Can” is *dunamai*, have (inherent) power to. In Greek, where rhetorical questions must be answered, this is “No!” or “Surely not!” Fasting was considered as a sign of mourning, eating of rejoicing. A wedding is no time for sorrow! The disciples had plenty of time to fast after the Lord left them.
- C. Verse 16. Christ did not come to take His message and ministry and make it a patch on what the Pharisees did, or even on what John did. Patch = *pleroma*, that which fills up or makes full. Often the changes and revivals that take place today are nothing more than putting a new patch on an old garment!

D. Verse 17. They would skin a sheep through the mouth, then tie up the natural openings and use it as a container for wine. Holding wine would greatly stretch these skins, and they could not be used again for the same purpose. We do not take the truth of God and put it into the old teaching of some denominational creed.

V. Conclusion: The Lord feasted with tax collectors and sinners, but the Pharisees criticized it. The Lord defended His actions and revealed God's attitude towards those who so desperately needed His help. John's disciples were confused by the fact that they and the Pharisees fasted, whereas the Lord's disciples did not. The Lord revealed the reason for this, and spoke of the different character of His work and ministry. Do we cling to the ever-new teaching of the living God, or do we attempt to mix it with the tired traditional creeds of men? Let us always prefer the living truth of God!