

The Jesus Way / JESUS CHRIST DISCIPLEMAKER
Come and See: The Way of Mercy
Matthew 9:9-13

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." Matthew 9:9-13

I don't consider myself an evangelist; though I *do* the work of evangelism. I'm more like young Timothy whom the great Apostle Paul exhorts, saying "Do the work of evangelism."¹ Timothy was a pastor-teacher, not an evangelist, and yet he was exhorted to do the work of evangelism. Maybe you feel like I do – not necessarily gifted as an evangelist, but desirous of seeing others come to faith in Christ.

One of the greatest joys I've had in ministry over the years was seeing a young couple, named Daniel and Isabelle, come to faith in Christ while we were serving in France. They lived just down the street from us. Though a little younger, they had children the ages of our own. It was certainly through our children that God provided the contact with this family. I've discovered that sometimes children are the best evangelists we have!

Daniel was an agnostic and Isabelle a non-practicing Catholic. I'll never forget the initial opportunity that I had to speak with Daniel about spiritual things. He was suffering from a back injury and was confined to his bedroom for a period of weeks. Since the bed was too soft, he was sleeping on a firmer surface – the floor. The doctor had given him strict orders to lay flat on his back for three weeks to see if the problem would resolve itself. I soon realized that I had a captive audience.

While open to talking about spiritual things, Daniel was no where near placing his faith in Christ. He probably thought, like some of our neighbors at the time, that I was a secret CIA operative in disguise! He was skeptical of both me and the gospel.

Once Daniel was back on his feet, we discovered some common ground in riding bikes together. Now these were no leisurely rides around the neighborhood. Daniel had previously been training for the Tour de France! I more often than not found myself straining to keep up...or not keeping up at all.

We would ride through the mountains and vineyards surrounding our village and then return to sit on my back porch. As we sipped our favorite wine together, Daniel would begin to ask questions about the existence of God, life, death and eternity. At the same time, Mary Alice had invited Isabelle, his wife...no, not to cycle, but to begin to read the Bible together.

After nearly a year, Isabelle decided to place her faith in Christ. Then finally, after another six months, Daniel made that same decision. We had the joy of seeing them both take the step of baptism in our local church. They began to invest in the Christian scouting ministry through our church. Their children were baptized and in 2003 I had the joy of marrying their oldest boy who, for years, was our oldest son's best friend. Each time I return to France I stay in their home and witness their growth in the grace of God. God has and is using them to impact the lives of others for Christ.

For nearly a year-and-a-half the invitation that we extended to Daniel and Isabelle was "come and see." Oh, we were "going and showing." But they also were "coming and seeing." They saw our lives. They saw our family life...however imperfect both were. They came to our church and saw the life of Christ in other believers. There was no pressure. No hard-sell tactics. Just friendship and open discussion...and a lot of prayer.

Here in Matthew 9 Jesus is also in this "come and see" phase of making disciples.ⁱⁱ And his primary objective during this "come and see" phase is to help the spiritually curious *explore* his claims as the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

Jesus is probably walking alongside the Sea of Galilee not far from Capernaum when he sees a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. The five disciples – Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael – whom Jesus' had already called to "come and see" are probably accompanying Jesus, as well as other curious followers. They are about to see the master disciple-maker model for them how best to reach people with the gospel.ⁱⁱⁱ As we look at this account, we discover some important principles of how we too can explore the claims of Christ with those who don't yet know him.

Verse 9 tells us: "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth." Notice...Jesus "saw" this man, Matthew. If we are to invite others to "come and see" and taste of God's mercy, we must first "see" them, we must be aware of them, we must be thinking of and praying for those who are yet missing from the family of God, the church. We must see and Jesus saw. We cannot invited unbelievers to "come and see" until we "see and go."

Verse 9 goes on to say: "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him." Now this is no insignificant decision. It's really amazing that Matthew responds so readily. After all, Matthew is a tax-collector. His job was to collect the customary surcharge as people traveled from city to city.^{iv} Matthew had a lucrative position, collecting taxes from travelers as they made their way on the caravan route from Damascus to the East. These "tax-collectors" were known for their extortion and injustice. These were the renegades, the cheaters, who – under the authority of the Roman government and the supervision of a local "tax-farmer," overcharged the populace and pocketed the surplus. Matthew was what was called a custom-house official. He collected duty on imports, exports, tolls on roads, bridges and all sorts of other taxes. These custom-house officials were notoriously greedy and hated by the general populace for their oppressive abuses. They were classed in the same category as harlots, thieves and murderers. They were thought of as "licensed robbers." Because of his role, Matthew as a tax-collector, was considered by the religious leaders as being "unclean."^v And yet Jesus said, "Follow me."

Jesus doesn't see us for who we are in the "spiritual raw." But he sees us for what his grace can do in our lives. And look at how God's grace worked in Matthew's life! After all, this is the same person who later wrote this gospel! From despised tax-collector to revered gospel writer.^{vi}

Maybe today you feel like Matthew may have felt – despised, rejected, guilty and irreparable. There is no "mess" in our lives that a miracle of God's grace cannot cure. In fact, God specializes in saving messed-up sinners like you and me. But not only that, the first requirement for salvation is to be ... a *sinner*. That becomes so clear as we move on in this story. Jesus didn't come to save those who think they are already righteous. No, you *have* to be a sinner to be saved. And at the foot of the cross, the ground is level. "For *all* have sinned and come short of God's righteous standard" (Romans 3:23). The second requirement for salvation is to recognize that you are a sinner. And the third requirement for salvation is to find forgiveness for your sin in the very one who never sinned, Jesus Christ. Maybe you are at that point today. You recognize your need and you desire forgiveness. You can experience the way of mercy by simply saying "yes" to Jesus and "no" to your own strategies to save yourself. Would you place your faith in Christ today?

Something else that you may not have caught – Matthew is giving us here his own personal testimony of what God's grace has done in his life. This is a basic principle of the "come and see" phase of making disciples. Tell your story. Your personal story of what God's grace has done in your life is a powerful tool in the hands of God. Write out your testimony. Think through your testimony. Share your testimony with others.^{vii}

But the extent of God's grace doesn't stop here. Not only does Jesus call to himself one who is considered an outcast and unclean by the majority, but he even goes to his house and shares a meal with so many others just like him! The next verse (verse 10) says: "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, *many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.*"

Now this was no small meal. The parallel account in Luke 5 says that this dinner was a "great banquet."^{viii} Matthew – having been called by Jesus – immediately puts his resources towards a different end. He wants his friends, cohorts and fellow tax-gatherers to meet this Jesus who has just called him into his service. Here Matthew adds another category of curious "seekers." He describes them as "sinners." This was sort of a "catch-all" category for those who failed to measure up to the meticulously imposed standards of the religious experts.

Sometimes, the most effective evangelists are those like Matthew, who have just met Christ. They still have a natural web of relationships with friends who don't yet know Christ. And here, Matthew takes the opportunity to introduce these friends of his to Jesus. Basically, he's saying, "Come and see." Jesus just called me this afternoon, but already I know something has changed. Come to my party and hear this man who speaks of forgiveness!

There is no impact in the lives of unbelievers without contact with unbelievers. And one reason why so little "come and see" ministry is taking place through believers is because so few believers have any type of friendship with those who don't yet know Christ. Why? Sometimes because we are so busy with our "Christian" activities where we feel so good, so comfortable, so

warm and fuzzy – that we have no time left to interact with those who really do want to “come and see.”

Not so with Jesus. This is but a snapshot of what characterized so much of Jesus’ ministry.^{ix} From the whoring life of the woman at the well, to the adultery of the woman thrown at his feet, to the intimate association with such people as the despised tax-collectors, Jesus was always missional in his life and service. All the while living a life of radical holiness, he also was characterized by intimate involvement in the lives of those outside the traditional boundaries of the religious class of His day: He received the caresses of a prostitute, he touched untouchable lepers, he mixed with the riff-raff of society, and he dined with “sinners,” scandalizing the religious community. The point is this. He took the time to be with people who most recognized their need. And he calls us to do the same.

TESTIMONY: Over the last couple of years, Karen Curry, one member of our church family stepped out and took the risk.

Two years before kids camp, my daughters reminded me to ask our new neighbor gir. We didn’t know the family very well so I hesitated to do so. By the third night the girls’ promptings finally got through, so I went ahead and invited Breanna. Not surprisingly, her parents said no. I think they thought we were part of a cult or something. We don’t drink, smoke, or sing country karaoke, and are always going to church. Feeling chastised, I decided if we wanted Breanna to come with us, I needed to let the family get to know us better. I started stopping by to say hello as I saw them on the porch. Breanna became a frequent guest of Natania’s and often took home a warm batch of homemade cookies. Glen talked to the husband more and initiated backyard water fighting and included a strip of their grass in his mowing. Last year when kid’s camp came again, we were ready. Natania took over the brochure and this time the answer was yes! I assured the mom that I would be there and it was no issue to give Breanna a ride; after all, we were going anyway. Breanna was excited to receive and decorate her kid’s camp T-shirt and had no problems leaning the songs since she and Natania had practiced them together. I didn’t want cost to be an obstacle, so I’d paid for her registration myself. On the third evening of Kid’s Camp, Breanna told me she had accepted Jesus as her Savior. The small sacrifice of \$15 and making room in our car—or sometime bringing two cars was worth seeing her smiling face acknowledging Jesus was her new best friend. Since then, the father has lost his job and the family has moved, so we don’t see them as often. One thing from Kid’s camp remains constant: Jesus is still Breanna’s best friend!

We pick up the story in verse 11: “When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” The parallel account in Luke adds that they “complained.” That’s an emotion-packed term that even sounds like what it means – *gogguzo*. The *New Living Translation* says that they “complained bitterly.”^x

The Pharisees reasoned that if Jesus were really who he claimed to be, he would have sought out *their* company rather than the company of such “sinners” and tax-gatherers. In fact, the Pharisees would *never* have responded to such an invitation to the house of the likes of Matthew. You see, to eat with someone in the culture of the ancient near east indicated intimate fellowship and familiarity. And at this, these Jewish separationists were not merely surprised, but stood aloof and in acute judgment of Jesus’ lifestyle.

The Pharisees admittedly have received a lot of bad press. There were some Pharisees who deeply cared about God. On the other hand, Jesus had some of his harshest words for the Pharisees. Their name means “separated ones.” They had a particular passion for ceremonial purity. They demanded strict separation from Gentiles, Samaritans and really from anyone who didn’t see eye-to-eye with them on the interpretation of the Law.

It was their interpretation of the law that got them into trouble. The Pharisees added new laws for new situations that were as equally binding as Scripture. For example, a person couldn’t wear false teeth on the Sabbath. That was because, if they fell out, they would have to carry them in their hand and that would be working. There was one very orthodox group of the Pharisees known as the “bruised and bleeding.” They were particularly focused on the problem of lust. So whenever they were in the presence of a woman, they would not only *not* talk to her; they would close their eyes so they couldn’t see her at all. There was only one problem – they would run into all sorts of things like walls, doors, fences. That explains their name!^{xi} No wonder they were having such a hard time with Jesus’ example of hanging out with such questionable people!

We may laugh, but I find that we are all too like the Pharisees. I will not do it, but if I were to ask you to raise your hand if you have intentionally spent time with an unbeliever – sharing a meal, a cup of coffee, a game of golf or a friendly discussion – for the purpose saying “come and see” what Jesus has done for me, how many of you could raise your hand? *When it comes to the gospel, there is not impact without contact.*

I must add that I believe that by God’s grace, the church is beginning to wake up to this. Just maybe we are beginning to grasp that the best way to “make disciples” is to follow the example set by Jesus.

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.” Matthew 9:12-13

It’s as if Jesus is saying: Oh you religious folk, you bigoted, self-righteous hypocrites. Why do I eat and drink with such people? Because my mission is “seek-and save” not “search-and-destroy.” The Pharisees thought they were “healthy” and thought they were “righteous.” They only receive Jesus’ condemnation. But Matthew’s friends knew they were sick and sinners, and they receive Jesus’ salvation.

Jesus hits home when he quotes the prophet Hosea who says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). What is Jesus saying? The “sacrifice” he’s speaking of – and that the prophet Hosea is speaking of – is outward religious form with inner substance. These Old Testament Jews were

bringing their sacrifices, but not obeying. They had a “form of godliness, but denied its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Jesus desires “mercy” – care for the poor, and not “sacrifice” – concern for our religious agenda.

Jesus desires “mercy” – brokenness over those lost without Christ, and not “sacrifice” – concern over whether or not our favorite hymn or chorus is sung in the Sunday worship service.

Jesus desires “mercy” – an urgency to move out into the life of that undesirable neighbor, and not “sacrifice” – urgency to get to my next Christian activity.

Jesus desires “mercy” – *doing* what is right, and not “sacrifice” – *looking* right.

Jesus desires “mercy” – a heart of love and compassion on the inside, and not “sacrifice” – a good appearance on the outside.

Jesus desires “mercy.” Is this what you desire? You see, this is where “making disciples” begins. Jesus said, “Going, make disciples of all the nations...” Jesus here models what that is all about. “Making disciples” begins, not in the Sunday School classroom with longtime Christians who want to know the meaning of the Greek word in a particular verse. It’s not about training Christians who train Christians who train Christians. It’s first about reaching those who are yet “missing” from the family. Those who need the invitation to “come and see.” It begins with *exploring* the claims of Christ with those who don’t yet know him. It begins with mercy.

ⁱ 2 Timothy 4:5

ⁱⁱ This same account is also found in Luke 5:27-32 and Mark 2:14-17. The similarity of the stories shows that all three evangelists are recounting the same event. Though found in Matthew 9, this event took place *before* the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Jesus is still in the early phase of ministry and his ministry is focused on the area of Galilee. The events in the gospels are not always recorded in chronological order. That’s not the writer’s intent. They are rather arranged in thematic order in such a way to accomplish the author’s purpose in writing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Coleman has said “Never go anywhere alone; always take someone with you.”

^{iv} John MacArthur, “Why Jesus Began in Galilee,” 114. This part of Palestine was heavily populated. Josephus writes that in there time of Christ there were over 200 villages in this tiny area of 25 miles wide and 50 miles long. None of these villages had less than 15,000 people, making a total population of over 3 million for Galilee. The Romans were known for their oppressive taxes levied against those living in the provinces. A tenth of all grain and a fifth of wine and fruit. But beyond that there was the poll tax. These taxes were collected in the provinces by people known as “publicans.” The word is derived from a Latin term – *publicanus* – referring to a man doing public duty. These publican bought the right of collecting taxes. Matthew as considered unclean and an outcast from Jewish culture.

^v J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 154-55.

^{vi} No emphasis here on the “cost” of following Jesus. This is why it is very difficult to reconcile what has become known as the doctrine of “lordship salvation” with Jesus’ manner of working with his disciples. Jesus waited until only ten months before his death to first introduce the idea of the cross to his disciples.

^{vii} The Bible is full of testimonies. David in the Old Testament says, “Come and listen, and I will tell you what God has done for me” (Ps. 66:16 NCV). In John 4 we read that many of the Samaritans ...believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn. 4:39). The man born blind whom Jesus heals says, “...I know this: I was blind but now I see” (Jn. 9:25). Peter and John, after the resurrection say, “We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20 NLT). And on six different occasions Paul used his personal testimony to share the Good News with unbelievers (Acts 22-26).

^{viii} Luke 5:29.

^{ix} For Jesus, this intimate involvement with this kind of people was not a one-time occurrence. As we see from such passages as Matthew 9, 21 and Luke 18, Jesus hung out with these kind of people on a regular basis.

^x The OT uses this same term to refer to Israel's complaints against God while in the desert (Ex. 15:24; 16:7-8; Num. 14:2, 26-35; 16:11).

^{xi} Rebecca Manely Pippert, *Out of the Salt-Shaker & Into the Word* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 85-86.