

7/6/25

A Table of Mercy

Matthew 9:9-13

Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church

Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am the Executive Pastor here. It is my pleasure to welcome you, whether you are watching online, like my family in Wisconsin, or if you are in our beautiful Sanctuary, I am glad you have chosen to worship with us.

This morning, I would like to start out by asking you a question — are you ready? What was the best dinner party you have ever been to? When I was thinking about this question, I had two thoughts that jumped to my mind. First, it had to be Christy and my wedding dinner party. Christy and I are coming up to our 28th anniversary in a few weeks. After the wedding ceremony, we had a time of celebration over a meal with our family and friends. We had appetizers, lots of food, wedding cake, and a dance, to celebrate our families coming together. The night was filled with joy, fellowship, happiness, and love, as we marked the beginning of our marriage.

The second dinner party that comes to mind is more like an extended family gathering. My parents, siblings, and their children come together for a four day party at my parents' house. There will be 20-24 people packed into my parents' house in July or August. Each of my siblings and parents will take turns making the dinner meal. One night it will be Mexican, another night Italian, pizza, hamburgers, and brats — and, of course, we have s'mores at night. The days and nights are filled with conversations, playing games, eating great food, and enjoying amazing fellowship. There are countless stories that are told over those days; some stories are funny, and others are just embarrassing. I look forward to those dinner parties and opportunities for fellowship with the family, and reliving those memories.

Do you know who also likes dinner parties? Jesus. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was frequently sharing meals with all kinds of people. Jesus shared meals with his disciples, tax collectors, sinners, outcasts, and his followers. Jesus also invited himself to many dinner parties as well.

Today we start a new series, titled ***“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”***. In this series, each week, we will look at a different story from the Gospels where Jesus shares a meal, and we’ll reflect on the spiritual, cultural, and relational impact of those moments.

We will see how Jesus turned a simple dinner into transformational encounters with his audience. Jesus often took the time to listen, learn, love, and challenge the people he was with.

Today's scripture passage is *Matthew 9:9-13*. Let me read it to you.

“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.’”

Do you know what makes a great coach in high school, college, or the pro's? A great coach can see the potential of every athlete. They can see how that athlete can add value to the team. The coach often knows how the athlete can fit in and make the team better. Also, a great coach knows how to draw out the potential of the athlete. He knows how to get their best and maximize the player's talent. Often, the player can only go so far on their own. A great coach knows how to communicate in such a way to get the player to maximize their talent. Great coaches often see the potential in people that most people cannot see in themselves. When I think of a great coach, Jesus comes to the top of my list.

Going back to the story of Matthew, Jesus could see something different in Matthew. Jesus could not only see the potential in Matthew, but Jesus could see clearly how Matthew was going to make an impact for his kingdom.

Who was this guy named Matthew who was in the tax collector booth?

Matthew was a Jewish man, who worked for the Roman government. Matthew was in charge of collecting taxes from his own Jewish people. The tax collectors would give to the government what they needed to, and then pocket the rest. Tax collectors were wealthy individuals.

Does anybody here like paying taxes? Nothing has changed in 2,000 years. Tax collectors were hated and despised by their own Jewish community. They were viewed as traitors, crooked and dirty. Matthew was probably a loner, who kept to himself. He may have been wealthy, but people did not like him.

Going back to the story, Matthew must have known about Jesus. Jesus had done miracles, taught, and preached. People knew there was something different about the man named Jesus. Matthew must have seen Jesus at work. Matthew was sitting at the tax collector's booth, and Jesus came by. What did Jesus say to Matthew? Jesus simply said, "**Follow Me!**"

Those two words changed everything. "**Follow Me**" meant more than meets the eye. Jesus is saying to Matthew: Come with me. I want you to be my follower. I want to teach you everything that I know, and then, one day, I will expect you to teach others. The other disciples were there as well. Their jaws must have dropped when Jesus said to Matthew, "**Follow Me**". The other disciples must have thought, "Why would Jesus call a tax collector to join our group? What is Jesus doing???" Matthew must have wondered to himself, "Why would Jesus ask me to follow him? I am a nobody. I am despised by my community. I am a loner. What would I have to offer Jesus? Is it worth me giving up my job, my way of life, and my wealth? Why would Jesus want me to follow him?" Jesus saw the potential and the final work of Matthew. Jesus can see what nobody else can see. Jesus wanted Matthew to be a follower and a disciple.

What does Matthew do?

Matthew **got up immediately and followed him**. Matthew was willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. Jesus extended the call of mercy to Matthew. Jesus could already see how God would use Matthew in the future, like a great coach. Matthew, as many already know, becomes one of the twelve disciples. He wrote the gospel of Matthew. He became a great leader in the church.

1. Jesus Extends the Call of Mercy

In the story, we see that Jesus extended the call of mercy to Matthew. Jesus asked Matthew to "come and follow me". I believe that Jesus still does that today. Jesus wants each person here to be a follower and a believer in Him. Jesus did not care about

Matthew's history of what he did. Jesus did not care if he was a good person, or not. Jesus simply said, "Follow Me". Jesus extended mercy to Matthew. Jesus also extends mercy to us, as well.

I believe there are people here, today, who Jesus is speaking to. Jesus has been speaking to you for a while. Jesus is simply saying: Come and follow me. Let me come into your life. Trust me. Put your faith in me.

If that is you, surrender and follow him, today. Let Jesus come into your heart. I will tell you, that will be the best decision you will ever make.

The story did not end there. Matthew decided to have a dinner party. *Matthew 9:10* says, "**While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.**" Matthew became a follower, and the first thing that Matthew did was to have a dinner party for Jesus and his disciples. Matthew invited all of his friends to this dinner party. Who were Matthew's friends? This should not come as a surprise to you — his friends were tax collectors and sinners.

"**Tax collectors**" were considered outcasts, traitors, and thieves, as I mentioned before. "**Sinners**" referred to the morally compromised and the ritually unclean. These were people who society looked down upon. These were the misfits of society, the people who no one wanted to hang out with. Yet, Jesus had a meal with them.

Why is this so significant — Jesus eating a meal with these people and having fellowship? Jesus talked with them, listened to them, and enjoyed his time with these misfits of society. This was a huge deal. In the Jewish culture, table fellowship, or having a meal together, was an intimate experience. You did not eat with someone unless you accepted them. Having a meal together meant deep acceptance, belonging and compassion.

Jesus was breaking social barriers that existed at that time. Jesus was making a statement, and extending mercy and love towards tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts. Jesus was associating with less fortunate people. Jesus was willing to go and meet and talk with anyone, no matter what their spiritual condition or social status in society. Jesus was saying that his table is always open to anyone. All are welcome at Jesus' table.

2. Jesus Offers A Table of Mercy

Jesus understood that all people, everyone, is in need of him. Jesus was willing to go and spend time with people, in fellowship, who were hurt, who needed a friend, who were going through a rough time, who may not step into a church. Jesus offers a table of mercy. Jesus was willing to embrace and love people who society may have given up on. Let me ask you this morning: Are you willing to go and spend time with people who need Jesus? Are you willing to go and spend time with people who are spiritually or socially marginalized? Are you willing to go and spend time with people who may never step into a church? Are you willing to show the mercy and love of Jesus?

A number of years ago, I had a friend from church who invited me to the Hole-in-One for coffee and donuts. He asked me to come down on Friday mornings from 6:00 to 7:00 am. He let me know that he was there pretty much every day. Friday came, and I went for coffee and donuts, to see my friend. What I did not realize was that there would be seven to ten local guys showing up, as well. These guys ranged in age from 65 to 90. They talked in a large group — they would tell jokes and share their stories. Most of them would never step into a church. To be completely honest, I was uncomfortable. I was out of my setting. Sometimes, I did not know what to say.

I have kept going one day a week, for the past eight years. They all know that I am a pastor. Sometimes, they refer to me as “The Rev”. They would often tease me that they are a bunch of sinners and I am just there to save them. Sometimes, they would tell jokes just to see how I react or respond. The more I kept going, the more I got to know these guys as individuals, and friends. Every one of them has needs, hurts, and joys in their lives.

Over the course of time, I have been able to be a listening ear, offer words of encouragement, and have even been there to help a few of them out in times of struggles and grief. The coffee and donuts are a weekly reminder for me of how much these guys need God’s love and mercy. I believe that is what Jesus wants us to do.

There are many of you in this congregation who are doing this. You are showing God’s mercy and love at your workplace, in your neighborhood, and with your family. I want to encourage you to keep showing God’s mercy. Don’t give up on people, just like God did not give up on you. We need to continually offer a table of mercy to people. We need to continue to have fellowship, to love people where they are.

3. The Truth of Mercy

Continuing on in the story, there was a certain group of people who did not like what was happening at all. The Pharisees — the religious people — could not believe what Jesus was doing.

“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’” (Matthew 9:11-13).

When I read these verses, I find it interesting that the Pharisees asked their question to the disciples and not to Jesus. The Pharisees were shocked and appalled that Jesus would be hanging out with these types of people. The Pharisees prided themselves on holiness, and separation from those who were unclean. They could not understand why Jesus would associate himself with unholy people. To the Pharisees, there were only two categories of people — there were clean versus unclean, righteous versus sinners. Unfortunately, the Pharisees could not see their own sickness, they assumed they were healthy.

Jesus responded, ***“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”*** Jesus used a common-sense analogy: a doctor goes to those who are sick. Jesus compares himself to a physician. He wanted to go and spend time with the needy, broken, wounded, overlooked, marginalized, and outcasts of society. Mercy recognizes that we all are unworthy. Jesus came to restore relationships, while the Pharisees came to reject.

A simple illustration to help me remember this is: a lifeguard does not patrol a desert, a fireman does not wait at the ocean, a doctor does not avoid the sick. In the same way, Jesus came to the people who needed him the most.

Jesus simply comes and meets us where we are. We do not have to clean ourselves up for Him. In fact, Jesus often comes in our messes, our failures, our secret shame, and our guilt. That is where Jesus extends his mercy and his love for us.

The second thing that was important to Jesus was the Pharisees’ hearts. The Pharisees excelled at ritual sacrifices, keeping the rules, offerings, and appearances. The

Pharisees' activities were often without heart and love. They lacked mercy, compassion, grace, and love towards other people.

Jesus quoted *Hosea 6:6*, “**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice.**” **What is mercy?** Mercy is undeserved kindness. It's love in action. It's grace that sees past the failures of others, and chooses compassion over condemnation and judgement. Jesus said, “**I desire mercy, not sacrifice.**”

Jesus' mission is clear. His mission is to seek and save the lost. Jesus did not come for the good ones, because none of us are good. Jesus came for those who need him the most. He came to restore all people to Him.

Unfortunately, so often, we are like the Pharisees. We want to keep the law. We want to earn God's favor. We think that if we do this activity, then God will love us. If I go to church, God will surely be happy with me. If I am a good person, then God will bless me. This is not how God works. God is not compelled by human effort or moral striving. As one commentator put it, “**The greatest desire and the greatest effort does not impress God. Why? God is so much greater and holier than we can imagine.**” *Isaiah 64:6a*, “**All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags**”.

There is nothing I can do to earn God's love and favor. There is nothing I can do to have God love me more than he already does, right now. God's character is one of mercy and love first; it just oozes out of him.

Jesus showed the importance of mercy in the story. The “table of mercy” is for those who need it the most — the broken, the hurt, the outcasts, and us. Jesus says that we are all welcome at his table, just like Matthew.

As Christians, God wants us to show mercy and love to the people who he brings into our lives. We should do this because of the love and mercy that Jesus has shown us first. Remember, the church is not for self-righteous people. The church is not a museum of saints who do nothing wrong; it is a hospital for sinners. It needs to be a place where people experience God's mercy and love.

Remember this one thing: everyone is invited to Jesus' table. God loves you. He is asking this question to all of us: Are you willing to “Follow Me”? I hope you say “yes” to him. Jesus can, and will, change your life for the better. You just have to put your trust in him and Follow Him. Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord, Thank You that You see beyond what others see — beyond what even I see in myself. Thank You for calling me, not based on who I've been, but on who You're shaping me to become. Help me to follow You fully, and to see others with the same grace-filled eyes. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. If you were starting your own business or team, what qualities would you look for in prospective employees or team members?
2. In Jesus' choice of Matthew, what is surprising about their interaction? How could this have been offensive to the other disciples, and to other Jewish people? Why?
3. What kind of people joined Jesus and His new followers for dinner? What is the significance of Jesus sharing a meal with them?
4. Why were the Pharisees disturbed by Jesus' attendance at Matthew's social function? Who do the Pharisees complain to? How does Jesus respond to their complaint?
5. Jesus responds in verse 12, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*" How does this metaphor explain Jesus' mission and identity? What does it say about how we should view ourselves and others?
6. In verse 13, Jesus says, "*I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.*" What does Jesus mean by this quotation from *Hosea 6:6*? How can religious activity and rituals sometimes replace true mercy and compassion that Jesus wants us to show others?
7. Have you ever felt like an outsider, unworthy to sit at Jesus' table? How does this passage encourage you?
8. Remember, the church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. What would it look like for your church or small group to be a "table of mercy" to those who need Jesus the most? What can you do this week to extend mercy to those who need Jesus?