Forgiveness
Matthew 9: 9-13
Jesse Blaine June 7, 2026
Christ the King Anglican Church, Denver

Good evening everyone! This evening we are going to be in Matthew chapter nine, which is the passage that Steven read from the middle of the sanctuary there. And there are pew Bibles in the pews in front of you or you can go there on your phones. We're going to be in Matthew chapter nine. And it is a passage that focuses our attention on the forgiveness and on the mercy of God that he offers to all people. And so this evening, I want to start out with a question for us to consider.

A Question of Forgiveness

When was the last time you watched the world, the popular world around us, whether it's on social media or the news or even just popular culture ? When was the last time that you saw the world truly and really forgive someone ? When was the last time you saw the world truly show mercy to someone and offer them a path to redemption and a way back ? Certainly, we can see things in the world where people sort of brush sin under the carpet and go back as if nothing happened. They just ignore it. But when is the last time you see in the world actually truly forgive someone ?

Now, I can think of many people in the last few years, even the last decade that have been called out or cancelled or even crushed. Some rightfully so. I can even think of people that I want to be called out or cancelled. Not crushed, but just, you know, sort of made to see justice. Hopefully, I'm not on that list in your own minds.

But when was the last time again you've seen somebody truly forgiven, truly shown mercy, truly given a path to redemption ? It truly is rare in our world today. And I want to go as far as saying that I believe one of the biggest reasons that so much angst exists out there in our culture and our society is that there are many paths for retributive justice.

That is many paths for punishment trying to punish those who are out of line but very few paths at least publicly for mercy and forgiveness and for restoration. So there's this existential angst that maybe you can feel in the world around you. Now this is why I am so thankful for a passage like this. I'm so thankful that this gives us the words of Jesus that calls us out of that anxiety of always looking to punish and not looking to forgive or to show mercy. I'm so thankful that this shows us the way that God deals with us and also the way that he wants us to carry his heart out into the world.

Desiring Mercy and Not Sacrifice

And it all centers around this verse that Steven read at the end there in the verse where Jesus says, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice". So this evening, we're going to look at this passage. We're going to look at desiring mercy and not sacrifice. We're going to ask what it means for us,

for the world around us, and how we can respond to God and how this is just such good news for us. So let me pray for us and then we'll jump into our passage here.

Lord, we do thank you for your goodness and your love. And we thank you that this is the core of your message that you want us to know about your life with us. Please help us to see this and to know this by the power of your Holy Spirit. Let this not just be knowledge or words, but would you carry this and plant it deep in our hearts so that we would know your truth and your goodness in our lives. We bless you, Lord, and we ask that you bless us now. In your name we pray. Amen.

The Controversy of the Tax Collector

I'll just start back in Matthew, and reread a little bit of this for you.

As Jesus passed on from there, doing ministry, healing people, teaching, and as he passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew called Matthew sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me". And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

So immediately as we open this passage, we are thrown right into the middle of controversy because the first line talks about Jesus calling Matthew who is a tax collector. And the problem with Matthew being a tax collector is that in that day in the life of Jesus, tax collectors were sort of like the worst of the worst of the worst kind of people. So during this phase in Israel's history, Israel in Jerusalem was under the occupation of the Roman power over them.

So Caesar was back in Rome and he sent these people to rule them and sometimes to oppress them. And so the Romans were there in charge of Israel. And the tax collectors were Jewish people who collected taxes on behalf of the Romans. So they were traders to their own people. They were agents of the oppressing power. Not only that, they were often people that would sort of say, you know, hey, you owe like $, this year, but I'm just going to say that you actually owe $, and if you fight back or you push I'm going to go tell those Roman soldiers that you said something bad about Caesar.

So, they were not only people that were agents for Roman traders, but they were actually often thieves. They were bad people. Oppressed people. They made them live in fear and they took their money and their resources that they deeply needed. These were bad people, these Roman collaborators.

And yet Jesus, as he goes by, he's doing ministry to all of these people in need, these poor people, those who are ravaged by the world. And yet as he goes by, he sees a tax collector of all people and he says, "Come and follow me". So immediately we're in controversy. Why would Jesus call a bad tax collector ? Not only does Jesus call him, but Jesus goes to dine at his house. And again, in our culture, we see this a little bit, but even further in this culture, if you were to dine with somebody, that would mean you have peace. You're accepted. You're friends.

You see each other eye to eye. You're in the same community together. So not only would Jesus call a tax collector, but then he dined with him. And then not only that, it says as he was dining with him, he was joined by many tax collectors and many other sinners.

The Pharisee’s Objection

So immediately Jesus who's supposed to be this champion for the poor and this bringer of the good news of God is there sitting with tax collectors and sinners and not just sitting with them but dining with them and saying you are acceptable in my sight. Very “cancelellable”. Then it comes to the next verse. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Jesus, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors" ? And so the Pharisees, rightly so, are deeply offended. Not only is Jesus just breaking the rules, but in the injustice of it all, they're saying, "Don't these people deserve to be ostracized ? These tax collectors, they're stealing from us. Don't they deserve justice ? Don't you at least deserve to tweet about them and to cancel them ? Like, these are the worst people. Jesus, why are you spending time with them ? Don't they deserve retributive justice ? And yet, you're not just associating with them, but you're dining with them". So, the Pharisees are mad. They're upset.

They're saying, "Jesus, how could you do this"? Now, before we pile on the Pharisees, who always seem to act as an easy foil in the Gospels. It's almost like in those movies where ominous music would come in as the Pharisees enter the scene. They're an easy punching bag for us . But the Pharisees are saying, "Why would you hang out with them"? And again, the them here are the tax collectors . These are real sinners . These are the ones that use their power on behalf of an enemy government to oppress all the people around them . Jesus wasn't just hanging out with down people that you'd naturally feel bad for, but for tax collectors themselves .

Now, there's so many present-day examples of this. Imagine Jesus came to be with us and there's all these down and out people and Jesus walked past them and he went to go meet with this meeting of CEOs that worked for specific kind of companies that knew that they were poisoning the water for whole populations and kept poisoning the water on purpose because it was good for their profits. And Jesus said, "Hey, I want to come dine with you". I think I'd be like the Pharisees and say, "Wait a second. Why are you hanging out with them ? Why would you hang out with these people" ? Or Jesus going straight to Congress and he says, "Who does insider trading and gets rich on the people ? Come out and hang out with me. Why would you hang out with these people" ? Jesus, these people deserve retributive justice. They deserve punishment. And so the Pharisees are sort of right here, but they need an adjustment. This is where Jesus speaks to the heart of the matter.

Jesus's Response and the Meaning of Mercy

He says, "Go and learn what it means that I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous but sinners". So Jesus says to them that his mercy, that God's mercy is so great that his mercy extends to normal people, people like all of us who are just trying to make ends meet, trying to live our lives, trying to do good. Jesus's mercy extends to the down and out,

those who have fallen into problems and patterns that don't honor him and have been self-destructive. Jesus's mercy is for them. And Jesus's mercy is so great and so big that it even extends to people that none of us in this room would like. That none of us in this room would think we deserve God's mercy. In fact, we would all say they deserve justice. I want to see them up on a billboard and I want to see their sentence. And Jesus says, "My mercy is so great. It extends even to these people". Now, the quote Jesus uses here is very powerful because it's a quote from the book of Hosea that we heard read up here.

The Parable of Hosea and Gomer

And if you go back to Hosea, Hosea is one of the strangest books in all of the Bible. Now, Hosea is a prophet in the Old Testament. And Hosea is someone that God sent to bring God's message of returning and repentance to the people. And so God gives Hosea messages. But if you read through the book of Hosea, God also calls Hosea to live a life that is a parable. And so Hosea's life and how he lives is meant to be a sign and teaching in itself. So the crazy thing and the strange thing that God asked Hosea to do is to go out and to find a woman of ill repute or a woman from the streets or a prostitute named Gomer and actually make her his wife.

And as you would guess, as Hosea marries this woman, there are times as they're living their life together where she's unfaithful to him and she leaves him and Hosea's hurt and he's angry and he says, "God, why did you ask me to marry this woman" ? He says, "I see your pain, but go and receive her back". And not only go and receive her back, but sometimes Hosea had to go and actually purchase her back at great cost to himself.

And so, if you talk about someone in the Bible that doesn't deserve mercy, I mean, even if you put Gomer on a talk show today, everybody would be like, "You're bad. You don't deserve forgiveness". If you talk about somebody who didn't deserve mercy, it was Gomer. And yet God calls Hosea as a parable of his life to go buy her and to bring her back into life together with him. This is the verse that Jesus quotes. This is the extent of God's great mercy. The mercy that extends to all people, even to tax collectors.

Spiritual Unfaithfulness and God’s Hesed

Now, here's where it hits us and what the Pharisees failed to pick up from the Old Testament: that spiritually we are all like Gomer. Spiritually, we're all unfaithful at times. Spiritually, we are all lured by what's present to us in the world. Spiritually, it's easy for us to sort of leave the goodness that God has for us and sort of seek our own path and to turn our back on God all the time to live for money or for comfort or for whatever the world calls us to live for.

Or it's easy for us to be spiritually like Gomer to walk our own way to look at the promises of the world and yet God's mercy extends to all of us. In fact this is the message of the entire scriptures. I know as you read through this book it can get confusing at times, but if you were to ask what is the message of the whole Bible, it is that God's mercy is extended to people that don't deserve it, which is all of us spiritually. That God loves us and he calls us and in fact even buys us back at great cost to himself by the blood of Jesus Christ because of his great mercy.

The parable of Hosea's life gives us this deep meaning of that word mercy or covenant faithfulness or “hesed”. Hesed is a relentless covenant-keeping boundary crossing stubborn kind of love that goes back time and time again to invite us back into life with him. And that's because of God's loving kindness and his mercy that is extended to all people.

Now, this mercy, it doesn't just, it isn't just a mercy that foregoes punishment or retribution for things that we've done. It's a mercy that says, "I'm going to move forward. I'm going to move towards you to fix this even at great cost to myself". It's a mercy that restores sinners, which is all of us. But even up to tax collectors, it restores them, those on the outside. It brings them to life with him.

And it even goes into dining together with him. It's a mercy that calls Matthew the tax collector and in the next chapter we'll see it's the same kind of mercy that calls Simon the Zealot. So Matthew the tax collector is someone who is an agent of Rome. He's an oppressor of the people and Simon the Zealot is like an anti-government warrior. He's an activist.

The Inner Circle: Matthew and Simon

And so God, for whatever reason, Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot to be in Jesus's inner circle because they both saw how great God's mercy was and it caused them to melt their internal divisions and what they were looking for. So what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees implicitly is yes actually Matthew does not deserve my mercy. You're right here. But actually no one does. But this is how big my mercy is. I offer my mercy to all people who would receive it because I desire mercy and not sacrifice. This is the great loving kindness of God.

So Jesus says to the Pharisees, "Go and learn what it means". He says, "Go and learn what it means. What you're seeing is sort of right, but I want you to change your perspective to know what it means to walk with me. Go and learn what it means that I desire mercy and not sacrifice". And for us, I just want to end here with three ideas that we can consider together.

Three Applications of Mercy

What does it mean if Jesus were to come into our lives and say, "Jesse, go and learn what it means that I desire mercy and not sacrifice" ? Three ideas for you. First, the way Jesus treats Matthew the tax collector changes how we see ourselves in light of Jesus's love. Now, Matthew is a reminder for us that none of us enter into the kingdom because we first cleaned ourselves up.

That is because we first made ourselves presentable to God. Notice when Jesus calls Matthew, Matthew is literally at the tax booth doing the thing he shouldn't be doing. And God meets him there and he calls him. Jesus always meets us where we are. There's no amount of spiritual showering or cleaning yourselves or changing your life before you meet Jesus that will ever get us to a place that will make Jesus want to love us more. Jesus meets us where we are always.

Seeing Ourselves Through Mercy

He always meets us in our places, whether it's shame or sin or guilt or if you find yourself in a rut or a pattern of addiction or suffering or continuing to return to the same sin. Jesus meets us in that place. Now, he never leaves us in that place. He always causes us to change. He doesn't say, "Matthew the tax collector, come and dine with me and then, after I've shown you my love, go back out and go oppress people". He never says that. But he doesn't make Matthew clean up his act first before going to meet him. He always meets us where we are.

And for us, he invites us to the table from where we are. So if you bring in today guilt or shame or pain or feel like you're too far from God, know that you're never too far from him. He always meets you where you are and he always invites you to come forward to receive from him. Now this perception of ourselves cuts both ways. We can never be too unworthy for God because we can never be worthy enough for him.

So we can never be like the Pharisees where we say, you know, I'm good. I don't really need this mercy because we always all need his mercy all of the time. So it changes the way we perceive ourselves.

Secondly, it changes the way that we perceive other people. If this is the mercy that we receive from God, this is part of the change that God calls us into. Because I don't know about you, but when I leave these doors here from this church and I observe the world around me, it's very easy for my brain to very quickly sort people into categories of responsible and irresponsible, of good people and bad people, of people who deserve a second chance and people who don't, people who sort of deserve what's coming to them and people who have been taken advantage of. It's very easy for our minds to sort people into that. But Jesus doesn't see people merely for what they have done. He sees them for who they can become through his grace. And thank God that he does.

Perceiving Others Through Mercy

And may we also see people in that way. So I want to invite you just quietly in your own heads, is there a name perhaps of someone who's hurt you ? Is there a name of someone that you're still keeping an account on, a ledger or maybe of a group of people that you're keeping a ledger against ? Maybe a spouse or a parent or a friend that's let you down. God's mercy doesn't pretend that hurt never happened. But mercy stops demanding a payment for what God has already covered in his cross and what he's done for us and extending mercy. So God's mercy that he gives to us changes the way that we enter into the world and we see other people.

Finding Peace in a Crazy World

Lastly, God's mercy changes how we can find freedom to live in peace in a crazy world. Now we prayed earlier this evening. Steven prayed it in the collect for this evening and the words of it are this.

Grant, O Lord, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by your providence that your church may serve you in quiet confidence and godly peace.

Now again, if we look at the world around us or if we look in the mirror even, would you say these words most aptly define you that you have a quiet confidence and godly peace ? Would you say that the world today is in a place that's filled with quiet confidence and godly peace ?

What I observe is a world that's filled with anxiety and outrage and scorekeeping and desire to press people down. That is a zero sum game where in order for me to gain, somebody else has to lose. That's sort of the world I see around me. But the prayer that we prayed is that we would enter into the world with a godly peace and a quiet confidence. How do we rest in this peace when we know that there's evil out there ? Because there actually is evil out there.

Is this a call that the Bible says for us to just sort of sit down, put our heads in the sand, and just sort of let evil have its day ? Is that what it means to be merciful ? We sort of let everything go and evil's going to win for now, and maybe one day God will come back. Is that what this is calling us to ? The answer, of course, is a resounding no. God calls us to be voices of light and peace and truth, to defend the weak, to bring about his justice into all the world.

And so, if we see people like tax collectors physically in our day, we should work against them to care for the poor and help those who are needy. But we don't do so with a frenetic anxiety as though it all depended on our efforts here and now. But we trust in God's providence that he is the ultimate judge, not us. Even Jesus Christ, as he hung on the cross, as he was reviled, as people turned to him and turned their backs on him, first Peter says that he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

We don't have to enter into the world with anxiety. We can enter into the world with peace and quiet confidence because the one who does judge the world, we know, gives us his forgiveness and does come to one day judge all things. There is a judge and it isn't you and it isn't me. So, we contend in our spheres of influence, but we do so in peace and trust, trusting that the God of wisdom and love has brought together mercy and justice in a way that we can never fully understand.

So I want to invite you today to know God's mercy for you. He calls you from wherever you are. He offers you his deep forgiveness for whatever you've done. If you're walking together with him for many years, know that we can never move past this truth that it has to anchor our lives together with him. May his mercy always astound us. And may we carry this mercy with peace and quiet confidence into the world around us. Go and be God's people. Go and learn what it means.that God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Let us turn our hearts to him. Let me pray for us. *Lord, we thank you again for your goodness and your mercy that extends to all people in all places, even to tax collectors, even to those we don't think deserve it, even to us when we don't deserve it. We thank you for your grace. Let us never take it for granted. Let us always walk together with you. Would you bless us by the power of your Holy Spirit ? We pray all of this in your great and holy name. Amen.*