

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Matthew 9:9-13**  
**“The Wrong Crowd”**

**Intro:**

- *One of a parent’s greatest fears is that our kids will end up hanging with the wrong crowd*
- Kids tend to become like the people they hang with – so we are afraid that our kids might hang with – and become like – kids who are into alcohol or drugs or sex or tattoos or body piercings or the Goth look or satanic music or extreme rebelliousness or hostility to authority or hatred of school
- *But, of course, there are more subtle dangers with being influenced by the “right crowd” as well – social snobbery // materialism // self-centeredness // hypocrisy // superficiality // obsession with physical appearance or popularity //*
- The right crowd can be a very exclusive club that is difficult to break into – indeed, impossible to break into for many kids
- *One of the primary reasons why many kids end up hanging with the wrong crowd is that they have been rejected by the right crowd*
- And almost all kids are looking for acceptance
- *Acceptance and rejection are often two sides of the same coin – maintaining a group identity – validating the self-worth of the group members – means accepting some kids into the group while excluding and even feeling contempt for other kids who are significantly different*
- Not just indifference – but actual enmity can develop between groups – each group convinced that “*I would never want to be like Them!”* leading to “*I refuse to be friendly toward or extend any kindness toward Them*”
- Each group develops its own sense of its identity and values and rules and standards – *defining who’s In and who’s Out – distinguishing Us from Them*
- It is often an unwritten rule that maintaining a secure status and acceptance by the Us group requires being mean – or at least coolly indifferent – toward Them
- *Being overly nice or friendly toward one of Them could bring scathing criticism or ridicule from one of Us*
- So it’s best to play it safe and stick to one’s own kind
- Within 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish society, there were certain well-defined groups: namely, *the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the Zealots*
- Of course, all of these groups would have nothing to do with Samaritans or Gentiles – but even among fellow Jews there tended to be very little fellowship or socializing across these group boundaries
- Though not unique to them, the Pharisees are perhaps best known among these groups for their *Us vs. Them* mentality

- *Not only were Samaritans and all Gentiles clearly regarded as Them – which is to say – as Scum – but even fellow Jews who did not abide by the rules and standards of their group were regarded as Them as well*
- The term the Pharisees used to describe the common Jews who did not keep the Law in accordance with all their own regulations and traditions was *the people of the land* – a title of contempt
- *As much as possible, Pharisees were to avoid traveling with them, doing business with them, extending hospitality to them, eating with them, or entering their homes*
- *The people of the land need not be criminals or notoriously immoral or complete losers to earn the contempt of the Pharisees – most ordinary Jews who did not measure up to their standards of righteousness and law-keeping would have been put in this category of sinners*
- The word *Pharisees* means *Separated Ones*
- The Pharisees regarded themselves as the guardians of doctrinal purity and moral righteousness within Judaism
- *Some non-Pharisees admired their religious zeal – other Jews just considered them to be self-righteous prigs*
- The mission of the Pharisees was to protect and propagate the laws and teachings of the Bible and to protect the purity of orthodox Judaism from the corrupting influences of the surrounding Gentile world as well as from the lax standards of the people of the land
- *One of the ways the Pharisees protected the laws of God was by putting fences around the biblical commandments*
- For example, if God said *Thou shalt not do any work on the Sabbath* – the Pharisees would add some fences around that commandment to safeguard it – such as *Thou shalt not pick any grain on the Sabbath or Thou shalt not heal people on the Sabbath*
- Over time these man-made fence laws became just as binding as the 10 Commandments themselves – and those who did not keep these fence laws were regarded as sinners
- *Jesus himself was regarded as a sinner by the Pharisees because he violated some of their fence laws*
- *Some Christian groups have their own fence laws*
- The Bible teaches us to avoid all sexual immorality – *fence laws forbid dancing or movies that might lead to sexual immorality*
- The Bible teaches us to avoid drunkenness – *fence laws forbid all consumption of alcoholic beverages because a glass of wine at dinner might lead to drunkenness*
- Some Christians regard a violation of the fence laws as being just as sinful as breaking a biblical commandment

- *Fence laws are not necessarily all bad – as long as we do not confuse them with God’s commandments and judge others for not abiding by our fence laws*
- *Yet we must not portray the Pharisees only as bad guys – lest we fail to see ourselves in their mirror*
- *The Pharisees were upheld the authority of Scripture as the Word of God*
- *The Pharisees were excellent Bible students and Bible teachers*
- *The Pharisees were zealous to obey the laws of God*
- *The Pharisees emphasized the importance of religious education*
- *The Pharisees shared their faith with others*
- *The Pharisees were faithful tithers*
- *The Pharisees looked forward to the coming of the Messiah*
- *The Pharisees stood firm against the moral corruption that was creeping into Jewish society from the decadent Gentiles*
- *The Pharisees were the original God and Country patriots*
- *Many people would say that the Pharisees were to 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judaism what Baptists and conservative evangelicals are to American Christianity today*
- *So it should be somewhat troubling to us to realize that the Gospels record Jesus having his most serious clashes with the Pharisees – rather than with the people of the land or with Samaritans or Gentiles or other such sinners*
- *Why?*
- *Perhaps because it was the Pharisees who claimed to be the ones speaking for God and upholding the truth of God and His Word more than any other group – when in fact they were misrepresenting the true nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and His Gospel*
- *Of course, Jesus and the Pharisees did not disagree about everything*
- *But it is vitally important that we understand where they did differ*
- *Why?*
- *Because central to our purpose as a church is developing fully devoted followers of Jesus who will extend his love to others*
- *In order to hit that mark, we need to understand clearly who Jesus is and how he related to other people – and how he is different from the Pharisees*
- *Imagine being parents seeking to make disciples of your children – or a church seeking to make disciples of our members – and thinking that we are on target in developing fully devoted followers of Jesus – only to discover that in fact we are missing the mark and developing Pharisees who withhold love, mercy and acceptance from the very people Jesus came to save*
- *If you as parents want to make sure that you are raising Christ-followers – and not little Pharisees --- then we need to understand from the Gospels: What are the key differences between Jesus and Pharisees? – so that we can train our children to become little Christs rather than little Pharisees*

- Our passage in Matthew 9 clearly delineates some of those key differences between Jesus and the Pharisees:

**I. DIFFERENT ATTITUDE TOWARD SINNERS & SOCIAL OUTCASTS: *Spiritually Sick* – or *infectious contaminants* ?**

**Matthew 9:9-11** As Jesus was going down the road, he saw Matthew sitting at his tax-collection booth. **“Come, be my disciple,”** Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup>That night Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisees were indignant. *“Why does your teacher eat with such scum?”* they asked his disciples.

- Matthew – also called Levi – was a Jew who probably worked for King Herod to collect taxes for the occupying Romans
- *Tax collectors – not popular in any age – were particularly hated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century*
- The Romans occupied the land of Palestine – and in order to collect taxes, the Romans hired private contractors
- *These private contractors in turn hired local Jews to do the actual collecting*
- Tax collectors were required to collect a certain fixed sum of money in a given area and turn that over to the Romans
- *Anything above and beyond that required amount was theirs to put in their own pockets*
- Needless to say, this system invited abuse
- *So tax collectors were doubly hated by their fellow Jews because tax collectors entered the service of their country’s conqueror’s – and they amassed their fortunes at the expense of their fellow citizens’ misfortunes*
- Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and professional robbers
- **No tax collector would be accepted in any synagogue in the land**
- *Yet Jesus called the tax collector Matthew to become one of his disciples – a man who was not only a sinner and a cheat – but also a despised traitor*
- That would be something like trying to start a church in France in 1946 and selecting as one of the church’s elders a Frenchman who had publicly collected taxes for the Nazis during the German occupation of WW II
- *Not a popular choice among most of the townspeople*
- Didn’t Jesus know that selecting Matthew as one of his disciples would severely damage his reputation and social standing among many Jews?
- *Then – to compound the public relations problem – Jesus attends a dinner party at Matthew’s house – a house paid for with the excess taxes Matthew had collected from the Jewish townspeople*

- Needless to say, no tax collector could ever be accepted into the Right Crowd of Jewish society – so the only friends Matthew had all belonged to the Wrong Crowd
- *The house was filled with many other tax collectors and other sinners and social outcasts belonging to the Wrong Crowd*
- The kind of people who would not be welcome in any synagogue
- *Not just the Wrong Crowd – but the dregs of the bottom of the barrel of the Wrong Crowd*
- No righteous Jew would ever be found socializing with such a Wrong Crowd
- Yet there Jesus was – *partying with **Them** – hanging with the **Wrong Crowd***
- **Scandalous!**
- *You can be sure that this scandalous behavior did not escape the watchful eyes of the Watchdogs of Jewish society – the Pharisees*
- Typical of religious watchdogs – they did not go directly to Jesus to confront him face-to-face with his scandalous behavior -- *instead they went to his disciples and asked in a most disapproving tone of voice: **Why does your teacher eat with such... scum?***
- What were the Pharisees afraid of?
- *You see, most prejudice is fear-driven – whether prejudice toward blacks or Mexican immigrants or Goth kids or trailer park families*
- **The Pharisees were afraid of contamination – of being defiled by the sins of the sinners – dishonesty may be infectious // immorality may be infectious // Sabbath-breaking may be infectious**
- So it's best for Us – the Righteous – to be as separate and as segregated as possible from Them – the Sinners
- **The first major difference between Jesus and Pharisees is how they view sinners and outcasts**
- **The Pharisees view sinners and outcasts as *infectious contaminants* – and therefore the behavioral response is to stay as far away as possible from them**
- *Put them in quarantine – and keep them away from our kids and families*
- **Jesus views sinners and outcasts as *spiritually sick* – people who need to be healed by God's saving grace – and therefore the behavioral response is to reach out to them and eat with them and befriend them and extend God's love to them**

**Matthew 9:11-12** The Pharisees were indignant. “*Why does your teacher eat with such scum?*” they asked his disciples. <sup>12</sup>When he heard this, Jesus replied, “**Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do.**”

- *Scum are scum and will always be scum*
- *Losers are losers and will always be losers*

- *Infectious contaminants are infectious contaminants and will always be infectious contaminants*
- **But sick people can get well – sick people can get healthy with the help of a doctor who cares for them and treats them well**
- *Sick people are not hopeless losers – they just need the healing grace of the Physician of the Soul – and if they respond in faith to that healing grace – they can be gloriously transformed*
- Pharisees respond with fear to sinners and with contempt for social outcasts – afraid of being infected and contaminated by their sin – and afraid of losing their popular social status if found associating with an outcast
- *Christ-followers respond with mercy to the spiritually sick and seeking love for the social outcast – confident that they can be made new and whole by the healing grace of Jesus Christ*
- **The contrast could not be more clear**
- Pharisees respond to the world timidly // defensively // fearfully // exclusively – afraid of how the world is going to influence and infect and contaminate them
- *Christ-followers relate to the lost people of the world confidently and boldly and compassionately – confident in the transforming power of Jesus Christ and the Gospel to change the hearts and lives of sinners and to draw outcasts into the family of God*
- ***Christ-followers believe in the life-changing power of the Gospel – and live out that belief by reaching out to sinners and outcasts***
- How about you?
- How do you respond to sinners and outcasts?
- *When you look in the mirror of God’s Word – what do you see? A Christ-follower? Or a Pharisee?*
- And how about your children and youth?
- *How do they respond to sinners and social outcasts? As little Christs? Or as little Pharisees?*

## II. **DIFFERENT APPROACH TOWARD PLEASING GOD: *Seeking and showing mercy -- or performing outward acts of righteousness ?***

- I’m not aware of any other time that Jesus chooses an OT Scripture and tells people: *Go and learn what this means*
- But here it is – *so we best pay attention*

**Matthew 9:13 (NIV) <sup>13</sup>But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”**

- The OT Scripture Jesus is quoting is Hosea 6:6

**Hosea 6:6 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup> For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

(NLT): <sup>6</sup>I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know God; that's more important than burnt offerings.

- Now, of course, God Himself instituted the whole sacrificial system of the OT: ordering the shedding of blood of animals to provide atonement for the sins of Israel
- *Why? For what purpose?*
- Is it the killing of animals that pleases God?
- *God designed the sacrificial system to show the Israelites the gravity of sin // their desperate need of His mercy // the necessity of a substitute sacrifice and the shedding of blood to provide forgiveness of sins – and ultimately to point them to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God*
- And what was the heart response God was looking for through their receiving the mercy offered in the sacrificial system?
- *Humility of spirit – and being merciful to other sinners*
- **God wanted His people to know and experience His mercy – and then to extend that mercy to others**
- How did the Pharisees attempt to please God?
- *By their law-keeping and Sabbath-keeping and ceremonial hand-washing and meticulous tithing and fence-law-making and external righteousness and showy prayers and fasting and alms-giving and Bible studies and doctrinal correctness and avoidance of the appearance of evil and separation from sinners and practicing all the religious rituals set forth in the OT*
- **But they missed the part about mercy – thus showing that they really did not know God**
- *For mercy is the very heart of God*
- **No one can truly know God and miss the truth that his heart is merciful toward sinners and outcasts**
- **No one who truly knows and understands the heart of God for the lost and perishing would criticize someone for reaching out to sinners and outcasts**
- To the Pharisees and Bible-believing church people – then and now – Jesus says: *Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice*
- **It is not our outward acts of righteousness and church activities that please God – it is humbly acknowledging our own need of His mercy and then extending His mercy to other sinners – that's what pleases God**
- *It pleases God for us to acknowledge that His heart is merciful toward sinners – including us -- and then to reach out to sinners and extend them His mercy*

- **The Pharisees thought they knew God because they knew all of His laws – but they did not know His heart of mercy – and therefore did not really know God at all in spite of all their Bible knowledge and meticulous law-keeping**
- *So when God came in human flesh – they criticized Him – they found fault with Him – they grumbled against Him for showing mercy to the sick on the Sabbath – they grumbled against Him for showing mercy and acceptance to sinners and outcasts – and finally they sentenced Him to death – in the name of God*
- But the God they served was not the one true God – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
- *For if they knew the one true God – they would have recognized that Jesus Christ was simply expressing and putting into action the very heart of God by extending saving grace to sinners and outcasts*
- Studying the Bible and memorizing Bible verses and being active in the church and living a morally respectable life and abiding by all the fence laws doesn't make a person a fully devoted follower of Jesus – *such a person could just as easily be a devout Pharisee – **understanding God's heart of mercy for the lost and sinners and outcasts – that's what differentiates a Christ-follower from a Pharisee***

### III. **DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION: *Calling sinners to repentance – or clubbing with the righteous ?***

- By clubbing here, I don't mean beating someone over the head with a club
- *Rather, I mean clubbing in the sense of forming a club – an exclusive, members-only club – an exclusive, members-only religious club for the righteous and their families*
- If sinners and outcasts are infectious contaminants // and if God is pleased by our external righteousness and religious activities – then church or synagogue is a religious club for the already-righteous that provides services and programs for the benefit of its members
- **The contrast with the mission of Jesus could not be more stark**

**Matthew 9:12 - 13 (NIV) <sup>12</sup>On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup>But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

- *I have not come to join the religious club of the righteous – but to reach out to sinners and call them to repentance and new life*
- Jesus states this same mission with different wording – but the same meaning – several times in the Gospels:

**Matthew 4:19 (NIV)** <sup>19</sup>**“Come, follow me,”** Jesus said, **“and I will make you fishers of men.”**

**Luke 4:18 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup> **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,**

**Luke 19:10 (NIV)** <sup>10</sup>**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**

- *The Message* paraphrase of Matthew 9:12-13

<sup>12</sup>Jesus, overhearing, shot back, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? <sup>13</sup>Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.”

- *There will always be some religious insiders who will resist and criticize that kind of outward-focused mission*
- **It is the “line in the sand” that differentiates Christ-followers from Pharisees**
- *A strong commitment to reaching sinners and outcasts will eventually evoke grumbling from the Pharisees*
- Do you remember the context for the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
- *Jesus actually told three stories – all in response to a similar setting as to what we see happening at Matthew’s dinner party:*

**Luke 15:1 - 2 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him (Jesus). <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “*This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.*”

- Sound familiar?
- *It is one of the defining characteristics of Pharisees to grumble against the outreach ministry of Jesus and his followers*
- So Jesus told the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and the lost or Prodigal Son to defend his outreach ministry against criticism from the Pharisees
- *He also told these parables to set the record straight as to the true nature of the heart of God toward sinners*
- It wasn’t just a matter of Jesus’ feelings being hurt by criticism – it was a matter that the Pharisees – who claimed to know God and to speak the truth of God – were in fact misrepresenting God
- *If they knew the heart of God – they wouldn’t have been criticizing Jesus’ outreach ministry*

- So Jesus told these parables to clearly set forth the true nature of God's heart
- *God is like the shepherd who leaves the 99 righteous to search for the one lost sheep*
- *God is like the woman who searches diligently for the one lost coin*
- *God is like the Father who embraces his wayward, backslidden, prodigal son with extravagant mercy*
- And the Pharisees are like the dutiful older brother who becomes angry and envious and resentful that the father is lavishing so much attention and love on his sinful younger brother
- *The older brothers – who form the establishment of the exclusive, members-only Club of the Righteous – get agitated when too much attention is being focused on reaching sinners and outcasts*
- **They cannot fully support with a whole heart the mission of Jesus: *For I have not come to call the righteous – but sinners to repentance and new life***
- **To become a fully devoted follower of Jesus, you must give your heart, soul, mind and strength to the mission of Jesus**
- *That is why outreach is essential to authentic discipleship*
- Discipleship is not just about studying the Bible and memorizing Bible verses and living a pure life and believing in creation and being pro-life and attending church activities and staying within the boundary lines of the fence laws
- *The Pharisees did all of that – far better than most Christians today*
- **To become a fully devoted follower of Jesus, you must participate in his mission to extend God's love and mercy to sinners and outcasts**
- *Which means that Christians cannot become fully devoted followers of Jesus until they have some redemptive contact with The Wrong Crowd of sinners and outcasts*
- There are 3 basic ways that we – and our children and youth – can relate to the world: (1) *We can become conformed to the world and participate in their sins and false worldview and worldly values;* (2) *We can separate and segregate and isolate ourselves from the world and its people -- and club with the righteous like the Pharisees did;* (3) *We can penetrate the world and interact with its people-- extending Christ's love to them as salt and light and authentic Christ-followers*
- I knew my kids would get plenty of biblical input and church activity as pastor's kids
- *I knew there was some risk that they could grow up to be worldly – but my greater fear was that they would grow up to be Pharisees*
- So from the time they were little children – we prayed for them and taught them and trained them to become Christ-followers rather than little Pharisees
- *And that meant they needed to learn how to relate to non-Christian friends and learn how to invite their friends to church and learn how to talk with their friends*

*about Jesus – and that also meant that needed to learn how to be kind to sinners and outcasts who would never be close friends but still needed the love of Jesus*

- I knew my kids would get plenty of Bible teaching – but I also knew that would not be enough to develop them into fully devoted followers of Jesus
- *To become fully devoted followers of the One who came to seek and to save the lost – they would need to learn to become fishers of men – and you can't do that by exclusively clubbing with the righteous*
- 2000 years later, the heart of God has not changed
- *2000 years later, the mission of Jesus has not changed*
- ***Jesus is alive today – and he is still hanging with sinners and outcasts***
- *He is still mending broken lives // he is still setting captives free // he is still calling sinners and outcasts to repentance and new life // he is still out there looking for the one lost sheep*
- **And He calls us to become His disciples and join Him in His work**

**Matthew 9:36 - 38** <sup>36</sup>He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>He said to his disciples, **“The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. <sup>38</sup>So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields.”**

- *To become a fully devoted follower of Jesus, we need to understand his heart of mercy and compassion for the lost, and answer his call to go into the harvest fields of the world*
- Those harvest fields are filled with The Wrong Crowd – sinners and outcasts – the very people Jesus came to seek and to save
- **If we want to become an authentic Kingdom church, we will join Jesus in his work of seeking and saving the lost**
- *If we want our children and youth to become fully devoted followers of Jesus, we will not only teach them the Bible, but we will also encourage, train and equip them to extend Christ's love to sinners and outcasts*
- **Now – as then – Jesus is to be found with the sinners and outcasts – seeking and saving the lost**
- *If we want to experience authentic Christianity – if we want our kids to experience authentic Christianity – the fullness of Christ's life and presence and power – then we will join Jesus where he is doing what he does best – bringing healing and hope and mercy and forgiveness and new life to the poor and sinful and lonely and hurting people of the world*

Prayer

Hymn # 299 “Rescue the Perishing”

***Prodigal Son & elder brother***