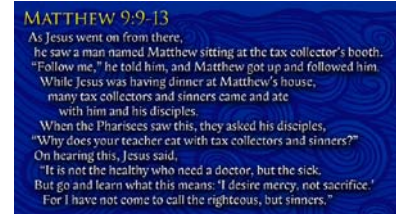


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Matthew 9:9-13
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Today we are going to look at the red letters in chapter 9:9-13 of Matthew's Gospel.

After Jesus had healed the paralytic, he moved on and saw a man by the name of Matthew, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Matthew got up and followed him. They ended up at Matthew's house for dinner, where Matthew had invited all of his friends (fellow tax collectors and sinners) to eat with Jesus and his disciples. I'm sure Jesus knew that he was going to receive criticism for his actions. Matthew was an outcast. It was against all the Jewish rules for Jesus to befriend Matthew. Tax collectors in that day were viewed as traitors and crooks as they were working for the Roman Government. Being a tax collector, Matthew had daily contact with unclean sinners who were considered unclean.



The Pharisees were outraged for what Jesus was doing. "They asked the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus when he heard them replied, *"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.**"*

Mercy is an important beatitude. The Christian life without mercy becomes a religious tradition rather than a compassionate lifestyle.

What is Mercy?

First, let's look at what mercy is not:



Mercy is not reaching people who are just like you. When I became a senior pastor in 1982, I think I was the pastor of the smallest church at that time with 12 people. Debbie and I had moved to East Wenatchee with a two-week-old daughter and lived in the basement apartment of the church for the first 3 1/2 years. I will be honest with you. My goal was to grow the church any way I possibly could. I also had stars in my eyes. I thought that within the first year we would be running 125 people and 500 people by 5 years. Man was I wrong. I thought that all I would have to do is put an ad in the paper open the doors and people would flock to the church. Debbie and I started inviting every new visitor over for dinner to our apartment. Shortly after, we decided to stop that practice when people would never come back to church after our dinner together.

The church grew slowly with other Christians that transitioned from other churches in the area. However, I knew that wasn't why God had us there. I remember going to Bible Study on Wednesday night and it would be Debbie and our baby and four other people. We would play choruses on a tape player. After the service, I would go into the apartment, fall into my chair and ask God, "Why did you send me here, to punish me?"

Mercy is not merely humanitarianism. ^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 13:3** If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. The Mercy that Jesus desires goes far beyond just doing good deeds for people.



What is Mercy? The Greek word is Eleos, meaning "Actively Compassionate" It is a kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them. Mercy is an attitude or a spirit. It involves the way a person feels and thinks. Mercy is seeing others as Christ see's them . ^{NIV} **Luke 6:36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Mercy is action. Mercy that comes out of the heart must express itself in a way that it can't be hidden.



Four years later, after trying everything I knew to do, a fellow AG pastor invited me to travel with their staff to Phoenix First AG for their pastor's school. It was there that God showed me that our little church *could make a difference if we became merciful.*

Luke 14:12-22 NIV¹²*Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵*When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*

¹⁶*Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'*

¹⁸*"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

¹⁹*"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*

²⁰*"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

²¹*"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

²²" 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

²³"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

I looked around and I saw a church in Phoenix that obeyed this scripture and had gone out into the streets and built relationships with people who had needs. I realized that I had been trying to get religious people to church who felt they had no needs. I also was determined that from that day on, I was going to see myself not as a pastor of a small church, but I was going to be a pastor to a community that had needs and desired mercy. When I got home, I began to see needs all around. I began to preach about it. Before long, our people started seeing the needs of people and ministries began to spring up.

One of the greatest connection points our church made into the community was through these compassion ministries. I remember hearing a quote from Robert Schullar years ago, "Find a need and meet it."

1. We created a food distribution for the needy. – Our people met with all of the grocery store managers and asked them what they did with all of their perishable items. Most of them were throwing away perfectly good food. We offered to serve them by taking these items once a week and distributing them to needy families. Every Tuesday, hundreds of people would come to the church to receive free groceries. We were ministering to over 1,000 people a week.



2. Lighthouse café downtown Wenatchee- One day a group of our leaders showed up at the Lighthouse Tavern, and walked around it claimed it for the Lord. Shortly after the tavern closed down. Three separate restaurant owners tried to make a go of it. They all failed. We were able to partner with a youth ministry in town (Solomon's Porch) and leased the building so we could be open three hours a day



every weekday to offer free lunch for those in need. We would leave and the Youth ministry would use the facility for latch key kids after school.

3. Serve Wenatchee Valley. I took a group of pastors down to the Dream Center in L.A. When we returned we started praying together weekly. We prayed that the Lord would help us in compassion ministries for the Valley. Bob



Shepherd, the pastor of the large Presbyterian Church, shared with us that God was calling him to resign his church and lead a compassion ministry. We raised \$90,000 for the first years budget and formed a non-profit ministry called Serve Wenatchee Valley that is still going strong today.

How can you become Merciful?

First, Remember your own need for Mercy. ^{NIV}

Galatians 6:1 ¶ *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*



Allow Christ to be merciful to you.

^{NIV} **Romans 9:16** *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.*

I am so glad that God was actively compassionate towards us in that while we were sinners, he sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. That is what I call mercy.

Find someone you can be merciful to.

I have to tell you what happened on our way home from Pasco Saturday afternoon. Tim Greely and I were the last ones to leave on our bikes and we always make it a plan to stop at Minors in Yakima. We joined up with Debbie, Melissa and Barb Williams and had dinner there. After dinner I was walking outside with my leathers on and I noticed that this guy was following me. I am tired and I just want to get home. He would point at one bike, "is that your bike?" he would ask. No, then he



would point at another and ask again. We finally reached my bike and I said this is my bike. He said, oh that is nice!

I said, that bike was given to me as a gift. He was blown away. I said, "yeh, when I was pastor in East Wenatchee, two men in the church invited me to go riding one day. They took me to a garage, and inside was this bike. Handed me the keys and said, "This is yours." I said, "Oh, I get to ride this one today." They said, no you don't get it.

This is yours, just keep it clean, keep it insured and use it for ministry." By now the guys chin is dropped. "No way, he said,"



I said, yes and my wife and I speak at biker events and talk about "Authenticity, like the Harley "Authentic Auto Parts." I said, people need to be authentic with their faith, because the Bible says we have all blown it." That's why Christ came to earth to wipe out our failures and he forgives us." By this time Tim Greely is pulling out a Hope for the Highway New Testament and said, "this book has a lot of great stories that I think you would like to read.'

The guy still wouldn't leave. He said, I doubt that I will ever be able to ride. I have lower back problems. The doctors thought they could fix it by surgery, putting pins in it but they have only made it worse. I said, what is your name? He said, Rick. I said, Rick I want you to know that we are going to be praying for you. Jesus is concerned about you and he loves you. He also has the power to heal you. He said, I would appreciate it if you guys would offer up a prayer for me.



Let's say like Jesus today, "I Desire Mercy"