



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 9:9–17

Gospel of Matthew

“When Sick Men Reject Their Doctor or,
Growing Opposition to the King”

TRANSCRIPT

We are in the 9th chapter of Matthew at the 9th verse, so in your New Testaments I'd like for you to turn there and listen as we read verse 9 through verse 17. Matthew chapter 9 verse 9 through verse 17. Our subject for today is “When Sick Men Reject Their Doctor or, Growing Opposition to the King.”

“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, ‘Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?’ But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, ‘They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”

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Some of you may have texts in which you do not have the words after, sinners, “to repentance,” because in the most ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew those words are not found. However, in the Lukan account of this incident they are found, and it is evident that our Lord said it. Some early scribe, knowing the Lukan account, inserted them into the text, so it is a valid addition in the sense that it belongs to the occasion: “sinners are called to repentance.”

“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples fast not?’ And Jesus said unto them, ‘Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from the, and then shall they fast.’”

Our Lord alludes here to an example of the culture of the times by which, when two people are married, a marriage feast was held for about a week, and there were many who were intimate friends of the bridegroom who practically became house guests for the week after the two had come together in marriage. In other words, the honeymoon was not a honeymoon alone, but with the sons of the bride chamber who were there. And it was a time for rejoicing, and a time of happiness over the fact that God had ideally brought together two young people in marriage. The customs were different then; you can judge for yourself whether they were better. [Laughter]

Now having said that in verse 16 and 17 the Lord concludes with an illustration—I won’t say much about this in the message—which is designed to show that the ancient Judaism had become contaminated and polluted by ritualism and sacramentalism. And he rejects that, not rejecting true Judaism, but Judaism overlaid with traditions and says, in effect, in the new age, when men come to the knowledge of forgiveness by the grace of God, we have something that is entirely different. And using the illustration of the piece of cloth on an old garment, he tries to point out that

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there is no real harmony—compatibility—between the old, false Judaism and the new, genuine Christianity.

There would have been, of course, perfect compatibility between Judaism, as taught in the Scripture, and Christianity as taught in the Scripture, for one is the natural complement of the other.

Verse 16:

“No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.”

May God bless this reading from his Word.

We are living in days in which, according to the interpreters of the human scene, humanity has fallen on evil times. The pessimists are about us, and they call upon us to wallow in the human predicament, impressing upon us the fact that famine, overpopulation, inflation, pollution, and the other ills of our day are surely to cause our demise if we do not do something about it.

And then we always, it seems, have the humanists with us. The humanists are gloriously optimistic, as usual. They are the greatest believers of all. If Christians could believe in their doctrine as the humanists believe in their doctrine, this would be the greatest age since the apostles.

The humanists believe that men are good, and that out of our strengths, and out of our own capacities and abilities, we can make this world a millennial kingdom. Just recently—and it seems at least startling that it was just recently—Kathleen Knott, who is a humanist, writing about the humanists, has said concerning the present situation that they have (that is, the humanists) the first opportunity to invent the human being—an amazing, absurd statement about the potentialities that exist in your nature.

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Now as an outgrowth of this, it seems to me—and this is only my opinion—our society has an identity crisis. We know, of course, that one of the most popular questions of the day is: who am I? This is the age of self-inquiry. Who am I? And it’s startling, at least to me, to find the Christians among the interrogators, when after all, all that it appears to take is a look into Holy Scripture to find the complete answer to the question: who am I? And not only for the Christian, but for the non-Christian, too.

It was characteristic of the Lord Jesus—and you can see the evidence of it in this passage that we have read for the Scripture reading today—that he had no identity crisis. He did not, for one moment, have to ask the question: who am I? It is evident from the beginning of his ministry to the end of his ministry that by relying upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he was in total control of the circumstances of his life. He had no identity crisis. He always knew exactly who he was.

And the exalted nature of his self-knowledge makes this assurance even the more astonishing. It might not be so astonishing for a man to know who he was if he was not much, but in our Lord’s case, it’s astonishing because of the exalted nature of his own self-knowledge. Other men, he said, were sick. “I am not sick;” but not only did he say he was not sick, he said he was the one who was called to heal the others. He was the physician.

Other men were sinners. He not only was not a sinner, but he had come to call sinners to repentance. He who never had to repent calls all other men to repent. He was the bridegroom over whom the sons of the bride chamber were to rejoice, because he was in their midst. And finally, other men were born. Now, our Lord was born, too, and one time he says that he was born, but only once. The characteristic expression that he uses to describe his coming into the human scene was: I was sent, or I have come.

Now if I were to speak to you and tell you about my life, I would probably begin by saying I was born on September 13, 19 hundred and [pause, followed by silence]. Now, you think I’m embarrassed to tell you the time. [Laughter] I’m like an old fiddle; the older it gets, the more mature it is. 1915. Now I say, I am born. Our Lord Jesus only once says he is born. He says, I have come.

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I would not describe my entry into the human scene by saying I have come. I wouldn't say that I was sent except in a very secondary sense—It's sixty in case some of you are down there trying to figure out [sudden, boisterous laughter]. [Dr. Johnson laughs] Mathematics is a little weak on the left side of the auditorium here [sustained laughter]. But our Lord only once says that he was born.

And the interesting thing about it is that the one time the Lord Jesus said that he was born was to a Roman prefect who probably would not have understood if he had said, I have come, or I have been sent. And so to Pontius Pilate he said, “For this cause I am born (and realizing that is not totally adequate for an understanding of his nature, he added) for this reason, I come.” So here is an amazing person who had a total self-knowledge of his exalted character and seemed absolutely assured about it.

What we are and what he is comes out in the section of Matthew in which the most prominent elements of Israel's society face his claims and blindly begin to oppose him and his Word. We shall notice as we make progress through the Gospel of Matthew this resistance to the claims of the Lord Jesus builds and builds and finally reaches its climax long before the time of the cross, making it necessary for the Lord Jesus' ministry to take on an entirely different character after that climactic occasion.

Now the instances that come before us today are instances which illustrate that as well as some other facts of his ministry. So now let's look at the 9th verse in which we have something which might be entitled, “The Lord and Matthew” or “The Call of God.” This is a very brief incident, and yet it is full of significant spiritual truth.

The two characters are the Lord Jesus who is the Savior, and Matthew the publican. It's very striking to me—I don't know how much to make of this—but it's striking to me, at least, that Matthew states that as Jesus passed forth from there, he saw a man named Matthew. Now the striking thing about this to me is, first of all, the Lord Jesus, when he looks upon this man, Matthew, sees him in a quite different light from the way in which you and I might see him.

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When we look at men, we look at their position. We see their position, their influence, their personality. We see the way they look. We notice their age, we notice their sex, we notice various other things about people which are, generally speaking, outward things. When the Lord Jesus looks upon a person, he has faculties and capacities that you and I do not have, and he sees beneath the outward to the man. He saw a man named Matthew. He sees the real being within. Something we cannot see. And evidently, by the Holy Spirit’s direction, for he ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, he sensed that this man was a man in whom God had been working, and his heart was ready for a call from him. So he understands it. He sees what is transpiring. He recognizes that the field is white to harvest before he gives his command.

Now this is amazing when you think of the man. Probably no one in all of the New Testament is a more unlikely apostle than this tax collector. Now we all know that tax collectors are not the most popular men in our societies, and even in the United States, our tax collectors are not the most popular citizens. Now I happen to have some friends who are with the Internal Revenue Service, but I would imagine that most of us feel just a little uncomfortable in the presence of an IRS agent, particularly when you get that telephone call that says we’d like to see you down at the office two weeks from now at 10 o’clock in the morning to go over a few things on your return. If you’ve ever had that experience, you’d know exactly what I’m talking about.

The year that Goldwater was defeated, on the very next day after the election, my wife got a call from the Internal Revenue Service. And I was not party to the call, but I imagine they called up and said, “Are you Mrs. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.?” and she said, yes. “Well, we would like to have an audit of your income tax return.”

She called me excitedly about ten minutes later and said, “That’s exactly what happens! You vote for Goldwater one day and the IRS calls you the next morning!” [Laughter] Those were her words to me. Well, after some time, they paid me twelve dollars. I was very happy that time, I assure you. For IRS agents, they were very polite, very nice; I had nothing to complain about, but I just feel a little uncomfortable in their presence.

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Now Matthew was a much more hated tax collector, because you see, in Palestine at this time, Matthew served under an occupation army. And so he was a Palestinian who was an employee of the hated Romans, and was required by them to accept or collect the taxes from the Israelites. And anyone who was such a traitor as that was a equivalent to a quisling. And so it's rather strange that this man was picked out as an apostle of the Lord Jesus.

And not only that, but the Jews believed that only God was king, and for another king to exact taxes was contrary to the express teaching of Holy Scripture, and later on, they seek to catch our Lord by asking him whether we should pay taxes to Caesar or not. So this man was a rather unusual man; a “revenueur” as the mountaineers in the state of Tennessee or western North Carolina might call him. Not very popular. A hated tax collector, but he not only was to become a disciple of the Lord Jesus, but one of the apostles, perhaps to illustrate the fact that our history, no matter what it may be, is not against us when it comes to relationship to the Lord Jesus.

Now Matthew was engaged in the ordinary business of the day, for we read, when Jesus passed forth from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And so the call of our Lord Jesus comes to us, generally speaking, in the process of ordinary business, sitting at his desk, the Lord Jesus passed and saw him. The sovereign, majestic call to discipleship often comes in the midst of the domestic affairs of life. You do not have to be in a church, for example, to have a call from the Lord Jesus to the following that Matthew is given here.

Now remember, Matthew already knew the Lord Jesus. That seems evident from the preceding, and also from this particular call. He must have known something about him, so evidently it was a call to discipleship; he knew him. Right in the midst of the process of business. So I say to you this morning, if you are a housewife, it's entirely possible that the call of God may come to you while you're washing the dishes. Or if you're a businessman, the call of God may come to you in the midst of your business, even in the midst of your appointment. God speaks. And he spoke to Matthew as he sat at his desk.

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There are two simple consequences of this call that I want to notice. Our text says here, “He arose and followed him.” Now, I think it’s striking that in the Gospel of Matthew, very little—in fact, nothing—is said afterwards about Matthew. Luke tells us in chapter 5 and verse 29, I think it is, he arose and gave a great feast and invited the tax collectors and other sinners, and the Lord Jesus was there at that feast. But that’s all we have about Matthew. We know he was a tax gatherer. We know he became an apostle. We know that he was called by the Lord Jesus, and we know that he made a great feast and had the Lord Jesus as a guest there. That’s all we know, so that in a sense, the history of Matthew concludes with the statement, he arose and followed him.

And what a beautiful thing. How wonderful it is to be known in Holy Scripture and according to tradition as a man who arose and immediately followed our Lord Jesus when the call came to him. What an epitaph in the Word of God.

Now Luke tells us something else about him. Luke tells us that he left all and followed him. And I want to say a word about this, because I think, occasionally, we’re inclined to overemphasize this “left all,” for actually, of course, to follow the Lord Jesus is not to leave all at all, but to gain all. A man doesn’t leave everything when he becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus. We’re inclined to glorify outstanding sinners who make an unusual decision, and we invite them, as I mentioned last Sunday, we invite them immediately into our pulpits to tell just what, exactly, they’ve given up in order to become a follower of the Lord Jesus, and then we ooh-and-ahh over the sacrifices that they have made.

Well I’d like for you to get a better perspective on this. Scripture does say he left all. But we’re not to understand by that that that means that he didn’t get anything, for he got a whole lot more than he ever lost. O true, he lost a job, but he found a life. It’s true that he lost a good income and obviously a high standard of living, because many of the tax collectors become wealthy men. Some of them had the privilege to exact as much taxes as they possibly could, provided they paid the Romans a limited amount. So anything they could get above that, in any way possible, was theirs. So

it was not long before many of them were extremely wealthy. So he lost a good income, but he found true riches in Jesus Christ.

He lost the material security of this high standard of living, but he gained the eternal security of union with Jesus Christ. And he lost the privilege of serving as a tax collector in order to become an evangelist who writes one of the great books that has ever been written by a man and stands today as a testimony to what God is able to do through a sinful tax collector.

Now I don't think Matthew left all, I think he gained all. And as a matter of fact, he is now enjoying, even to the present day the life that he gained then, and probably is saying at this moment, “Preach it, Lewis!” [Laughter] When we leave all and follow him, we don't leave all. It's when we don't do it that we really leave all.

Now then, after that little incident, Matthew describes another occasion—this following immediately upon that one—which might be entitled, “The Lord and the Publicans” or “The Compassion of God,” and it's a beautiful example of the gratitude of a saved man and the compassion of the Lord Jesus.

In those days, when a person made a feast, and made a little bit of noise, and a number of people gathered together due to the construction of the homes and the size of the cities, and the people in the community in their close relationship to each other—everyone knew what was going on. And so when the feast was made, others besides those who were invited knew about it. And frequently, they would stand around on the edges of the crowd that was celebrating at the feast and even carry on some conversation between the invited guests and themselves.

You probably have been in occasions like that. A couple of years ago I was at Aspen, and in the midst of a large area, at one of the mountain resorts, there was an unusual party that took place. And it was right out in the midst of a courtyard, and everyone else that was there sat around and looked. And evidently, this occasion was something like that.

And we are told in the Gospel of Luke that the individual who made this great feast—it was described as that—was Matthew. Now, he doesn't call it a great feast, and he doesn't even say that

he’s the one who called it. But Luke tells us that, which tells us a lot about Matthew, incidentally.

And so he made this great feast, and the Lord Jesus was there.

Now I don’t think it takes any imagination at all to know why this feast was held. Why, Matthew was so grateful over what had happened to him that he wanted to express his gratitude for his relationship to the Lord Jesus. He invited all of his business associates and his other friends, and they’re included under that common designation of tax collectors and sinners—tax collectors especially and sinners all the rest of them—and the Lord Jesus was there. And I can just imagine that he told them the whole story of how he came to know about the Lord Jesus, and how the Lord Jesus called him, and how he was giving up his office, and how he was becoming a disciple of the Lord Jesus. And I can just imagine he asked our Lord to say a word [laughter], and we had a sermon from our Lord.

Well, on the occasion of this, the Pharisees, when they saw it, did not come directly to the Lord Jesus. It’s characteristic, often, of people who want to be critical of Christian things to go not to the individuals but to speak to the disciples, the followers. And seeming to be afraid to face him, shunning him, the Pharisees speak to some of his disciples, and they bring up some of this critical attitude, why eateth your master with tax collectors and sinners? And evidently, our Lord overheard it.

And when Jesus heard it, he turned and said to them, answering in parabolic form, or illustrative form, “They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick.” Now this parable about a physician and his relationship to those who are sick is full of instructive information.

Now this text, first of all, shows us that God very mercifully regards sin as a disease, because he could regard it as something worse. Because sin is a disease all right, but it is a fatal disease. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures also describe us as being individuals who are dead in trespasses and sins. To say that we are diseased is really a little bit of mercy. It says there is still some kind of life, but we are hastening down the path of destruction to an end. Paul likes to speak of the unsaved as “the

perishing.” They’re on the road that leads to destruction and certainly leads there, but they haven’t breathed their last, yet. So in this, it’s a mercy that God speaks of us as having a disease.

This disease that we have, and which the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus speak of as “sin,” is a hereditary thing. It’s something that we derive from our head, and our head, remember, is Adam. In the Garden of Eden when Adam fell, we fell under the judgment of sin, every one of us. We come into this world under sin and condemnation. Condemned men.

And furthermore, we possess a sin nature—a corrupt sin nature. We are the victims of original sin. Now, you might not like that. There are reasons—I don’t have time to speak about it now—but there are reasons why this is a very gracious attitude on our Lord’s part, and why this arrangement is really an arrangement for our benefit, because—I’ll just mention this—it makes it possible for God to deal with us through a “last Adam” by whom we may have through his work for us, an eternal salvation.

But our disease is hereditary. We inherit it. We are born sinners, every one of us. Last weekend, I had a house guest, Pastor Dwight Custis of the Central Bible Church of Portland, Oregon—a very large and influential church that Dr. Jack Mitchell was the pastor of for a number of years.

Dwight went to school with me, and they lived, he and his wife, across the hall from Mary and me, and we’ve been friends now for many, many years. And they have a daughter who is in the city, and who I think is in the auditorium this morning, and they have a son who is to be a senior at Dallas Seminary this fall. So, when we get together, we always talk about the family and old times.

And they have a son whose name is John, and he is a doctor. He did some of his interning right here in the City of Dallas, after he graduated from medical school. Has a number of friends in the city. And he now is practicing in Portland. And he listens, incidentally, to the tape ministry every morning. He has about 30 minutes from his house to the hospital, and especially, he listens to the Systematic Theology tapes, half of the message in the morning, the other half in the evening. He’s becoming, so his father says, quite a theologian.

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Well his father has a little bit of physical trouble associated with old age. He has a little gout. Well, he went to see his son for some diagnosis and I guess some prescription, and he was telling us about it last weekend. Joking about it, he said, “I went in, and John took a good look at me, and he said, ‘I’m very sorry to report to you that you have gout.’ And he said, ‘I’m very sorry, because it’s a hereditary disease.’” [Laughter] The disease of sin is hereditary. We all have it.

Not only that, but it’s polluting. You don’t realize how sinful you are until you become a Christian. After you’ve become a Christian, then you realize how sinful you are. Now of course, anyone, to become a Christian, must know his need. As we shall see in just a moment, the Lord Jesus said, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance—only those who know their needs are those who are the subject of salvation. But you never really know your needs until you have the light of Christianity to glow upon it.

And it is certainly true that after having become a Christian you discover how sinful we really are, for you can get down upon your knees and pray, and right in the midst of your prayers, just like a buzzard flitting across the sky, there will come the thought, “I surely am getting along in the Christian life, praying all of the time now.” Right in the midst of the most holy exercises, you can sin. And when you finish that prayer and say, amen, you get up off of your knees and say, “I doubt that there are many of my friends who are quite the prayer warriors that I am.” [Laughter]

In the midst of our faith there is unbelief. In the midst of our repentance, there is incomplete repentance. So even in the holiest of exercises, we prove the sinful character of our nature. Sin is polluting. And it is mortal, because it leads immediately and ultimately to death. It leads to the damned condition of the lost.

Now, we throw that word around quite a bit. We talk a lot about hell, and we talk a lot about being damned, and we talk about it entirely too lightly. If for one moment there ever came to your mind the full meaning of what it was to be cast into a Christless eternity, or if for one moment you should ever be given a glimpse of someone who was cast into the lake of fire, your next words would be, “What must I do to be saved?” Sin is a fatal disease, and leads to death.

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Now it’s the mercy of God that we read here that the Lord Jesus is a physician. He states, “They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick.” I don’t know whether you’ve ever noticed this or not, but that is a tremendous claim on our Lord’s part. He doesn’t say, I’m not sick. That’s true. He was not sick. But he goes beyond that to say, “I not only am not sick; I’m the physician.” I’ve come to heal. I don’t have any need for healing; I’m the healer.

The Lord Jesus didn’t come to explain sin like a teacher. Moses did that. He gave us the Ten Commandments from God, and those Ten Commandments reveal the nature of the human heart. If you think for one moment that you are not referred to here by the Lord Jesus when he said that he came to call sinners to repentance, take a look at the Ten Commandments and then measure your life by them. Not now, this moment—but measure it from the time you have first drawn a breath, and then see if that law does not condemn you as it has condemned the greatest of the saints of the Old Testament.

Moses expounded the depths of sin by the law as the full knowledge of sin, but the Lord Jesus came to eradicate sin. He came to save us from our sins. And incidentally, he did not come to save us in our sins, that we may continue in our sins with the hope of heaven, but he came to save us *from* our sins. A man who is drowning cannot speak of having been saved from the waters if he’s sinking beneath them. A man who has been frostbitten cannot speak of being saved if he’s still stiffening under the cold winds that are blowing upon him.

And so if the person thinks that through the salvation of the Lord Jesus all that is necessary is for him to receive the assurance of heaven, and he may live exactly as he has before he came to the knowledge of the cross-work of the Lord Jesus, he’s only deceiving himself. For when a person comes to genuine salvation, there is a definitive change in his life, and sanctification begins and progresses—not completed, of course, until he enters into the presence of the Lord—but that’s the difference between the non-Christian and the Christian, and that difference is a different plane of life. He saves us from our sins. It’s a good test for every one of us: if we say we are believers, is there a change in our lives?

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Now, I say it’s a beautiful grace of God for the Lord Jesus to be the physician. Has he a right to practice? Has he a diploma? Now the law requires us, and requires physicians before they hack on our bodies [laughter], or before they feed us those poisons that they have a diploma and proper training. “It’s been tartly said,” so Mr. Spurgeon says, “that a doctor is a man who pours drugs of which he knows little into a body of which he knows still less.” [Laughter] That’s probably a little too hard. But, a diploma is probably the best way we have devised to eliminate the quacks and the charlatans from the practice of medicine.

And so we ask, and rightly so, have you gone to school? Do you have a medical degree? Have you also done the other training necessary beyond that? And I’ve noticed this also, incidentally, about our leaders in the country who have access to the finest of doctors. Generally speaking, they do not select one who is just out of medical school. More is required than the education and training and internship and other special training: experience in dealing with men and their diseases.

So, the Lord Jesus—does he have a diploma? Why the Holy Scripture says that he has been commissioned by God as the Messiah, commissioned to preach the good tidings to the meek. He has been sent to bind up the broken-hearted. He has a divine commission, he has a divine diploma, given him by the Father to which he has perfect right. He has the proper education. He knows all of human sickness. He has taken all of our sins upon himself. He knows, intimately all that sin is, and for 6,000 years he’s been practicing the salvation and healing of souls.

And incidentally, much better than even all of our best doctors—I have to be careful, there are quite a few doctors in Believers Chapel [laughter]—has he been successful? Even more successful than ours. He’s never lost a patient. The disease from which he heals us never returns. The healing is perfect. What kind of medicine does he use? Himself. That’s his medicine. Himself. The relationship to the Lord Jesus is the perfect medicine that heals from sin.

Have you taken it? Have you put your trust in him?

Well that’s a great claim to make: I am the good physician. I am the physician. And, incidentally, he makes it without fanfare. He doesn’t say, having finished preaching in one place, now

next week, John, I’m going to go to Nain. Will you set things in order? Send out the advance men; put out the signs in order that the people in Nain might know next week when I come there, the Great Physician is coming. It’s all without fanfare. There is the perfect trust in the power of God to work the miraculous healings through the Lord Jesus.

He’s not panting for acceptance by people. He’s not disturbed. He doesn’t have to ask the question, who am I? But he knows. And in the sovereign majesty of one who can count upon the sovereign majesty of God, he rests in his guidance and carries on his ministry. I’ll tell you, that is a needed thing in evangelicalism today, for men who preach the Word, who are also confident that God leads and directs and guides in ways that bring glory to him, apart from our own unusual, disturbed, panting ways of seeking to do the will of God.

Now he speaks plainly, too. He says I want you to go and learn what the Scripture means when it says, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” For the Pharisees were individuals who were interested in ritual and sacramentalism. True Judaism, that which God had given as revelation, had become corrupt and distorted by the time of the New Testament. And so he speaks to them, reminding them of the ancient Scripture from Hosea that mercy is that which our Lord must have.

And these men are saying that these individuals with whom the Lord Jesus is spending time are sinners. They are saying, why does your master fellowship with these sinners, tax collectors and others? Now, if they were true shepherds, as they thought of themselves, they would be in the midst of these sinners. And so our Lord had doubly rebuked them, rebuked their own understanding and their own ministry, for they had pulled up their skirts and would have nothing to do with the sinners.

And he adds, “For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” He’s not suggesting that there are any who are righteous in themselves. He means righteous in their eyes. I have not come to call the righteous, the self-righteous, because the self-righteous have no need of me. And those who sense no need of me are not the objects of my ministry. I have come to call sinners to repentance.

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Now when he says, I have come, remember, he’s saying, in effect, I existed before I was here. I have come—not, I was born, remember. I have been sent—not, I was born. I have come, I have been sent, I existed. I am the preexistent Son. And further, I have come. I have not—my coming is a coming in which I have perfectly acquiesced.

And when the Father sends me and I come, it is because of the eternal agreement, or the agreement of ages past between the persons of the Trinity, in which the Father assumes a certain position in the program of redemption, and the Son voluntarily takes another, and the Holy Spirit still another. And this eternal compact of redemption is worked out in time through the coming of the Son of God, voluntarily, because he has as the object of his ministry, sheep—sheep—that belong to him. To use John’s terms, “those whom the Father has given to him.”

So I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. If you’re not a sinner, you’re not one of the elect. Now all of you are sinners. And so being a sinner, why this text is perfectly suited for you. And if you’re in the audience and you know you’re a sinner, why you can have eternal salvation by turning to the Lord Jesus and receiving as a free gift, eternal life.

Well, at this point the disciples of John come, and I must stop for just a moment or two, and our time is up. Then came to him the disciples of John. Now, the disciples of John—John, remember, said, concerning these leaders, “You are a generation of vipers.” But the disciples of John, evidently, have lost touch with the spirit of their master, for they come and they say, “Why do we and the Pharisees”—they now have become associated with the Pharisees. It’s amazing how opposition to the Lord Jesus can make friends of people who are not friends at all.

Sad but true. In the day of the cross, Pilate and Herod had fellowship, even though they hated each other. There is one thing that unites humanity, and unfortunately, it’s the one thing that really, ultimately, makes it unable for them to ever have an ecumenical relationship. It’s their sin: opposition to Jesus Christ.

And the Lord replies to the question, why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples fast not?, “Can the sons of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with

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them?” Now is a time of joy, not sorrow. The wedding feast is going on. The true disciples are being called to the Son. A relationship is being established. Joy is to be experienced now.

And incidentally, you’ll notice, that he claims here to be—when he calls himself the bridegroom—he claims to be a royal king. It was the custom in those days for the new husband and new wife to be addressed by the sons of the bridegroom chamber as king and queen, not for a day but for a week. And so the Lord Jesus claims here to be the king, and he darkly hints at the coming cross, for he says, “But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

Now I said a few words concerning the last section, and I’m going to pass it by for the sake of time. Let me close by just saying this. We have here in this incident another impressive picture of the royal king who has no identity crisis. He is the divine physician who heals the sick.

If you have an identity crisis, the answer to the question is found in the Word of God. Perhaps you are saying at this time, “Well, I do recognize that I am a sinner, but I’ve been a sinner for so long.” All the more reason why you should come.

Or, I know I’m a sinner, but my sins are so terrible. All the more reason why you should come.

Or, I know that I’m a sinner, but I don’t feel my sin, as some of my friends apparently do. All the more reason why you should come. The fact that you don’t feel it is evidence of your own deepening sin.

So if by the Holy Spirit, you’re able to come to the Lord Jesus and say to him, “Lord, if you wish someone to heal, I’m the man!” then you have been brought by the Holy Spirit to the proper place. May God speak to your heart to that end.

There was a pastor of a very important church in the city of Washington many years ago, who had the custom of receiving new members into the church publicly. It was the Calvary Baptist Church of Washington, DC, and Dr. Green, on the morning that he was to receive some into the

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church received the Honorable Charles Evans Hughes, whom you may remember at one time was a Supreme Court Justice, in fact the Chief Justice.

And at the same time he received a Chinaman and a washerwoman. And when the three were introduced to the congregation, he said to them, “My friends, I will have you notice that at the cross of Jesus Christ, the ground is level.” We’re all sinners, and Christ came to save sinners.

So I call upon you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. If God the Holy Spirit has brought conviction to your heart, may you turn to him and receive from him the forgiveness of sins. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, who has come to call sinners to repentance, the love of God the Father who sent the Son, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit who applies the redemption, be and abide with all who have come to know him in sincerity.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.