**Notes on Matthew 9:9-17**

* Vv. 9-13
  + “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. 10 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. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 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.”
    - After Jesus healed the paralyzed man, He left the house where He had been teaching. Mark tells us that Jesus went down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee there by Capernaum. A crowd of people followed Him—but Jesus’ ministry on this particular day wasn’t limited to teaching or healing. He was on a mission to meet one man: Matthew (a.k.a. Levi) the tax collector. Because Capernaum was one of the key cities on the Sea of Galilee, a tax collector would have been stationed down by the port to collect taxes from those who came ashore. We don’t know what history Matthew and Jesus had up to this point, but we do know that Matthew was ready and willing to follow Jesus. Perhaps Matthew had seen Jesus heal the leper, or maybe he had witnessed Peter and Andrew’s miraculous haul of fish. Whatever Matthew had seen, it was enough to convince him that Jesus was the Messiah.
    - Later that evening, Jesus ate a meal at Matthew’s house. Luke calls it “a great feast.” However, the religious leaders weren’t thrilled with the guest list. One tax collector was bad enough, but Matthew’s house was filled with his coworkers. They were considered by the Jews to be filthy traitors. Not only did they collect taxes for the Romans (the enemy), but they overcharged their fellow Jews in order to maintain their luxurious lifestyles. Matthew also tells us that there were “sinners” present. Throughout the gospels, this word is used by the Jews to describe those who were irreligious or reprobate. In Luke 7, there is a short account which illustrates this fact. Luke 7:36-39 says, “And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. 37 And, behold, a woman in the city, **which was a sinner**, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known **who and** **what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner**.” As you can see, the term “sinner” is being used to describe a “woman of ill repute.” This was a title reserved for those who had obvious sin in their lives. John 9 describes an interaction between a blind man who Jesus had healed and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The healed man said, “Now we know that **God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth**. 32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. 33 If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.” You can see that this blind man used the term “sinners” to described individuals who were irreligious. In Jewish culture, there were two main types of people (from a religious perspective). There were “good people” (Luke 18:18-19), and there were “sinners.” Everyone seemed to be reading from the same dictionary. Those who didn’t follow the Law as interpreted by the Pharisaic traditions were the “sinners,” and those who did follow were the “good people.” Even the tax collector in Luke 18 called himself “a sinner.” In Jewish eyes, there were “good people,” and there were “bad people.” Everyone understood this—except Jesus apparently.
    - The same religious leaders who had been present at the healing of the paralytic man were here as well. They had gathered from all over Israel to see this “Messiah candidate”—and they were very puzzled with what they saw. First, Jesus forgave a man’s sin—and proved that fact by healing him. Then, He shared a meal with a bunch of “sinners.” How could this be? Wasn’t the Messiah going to destroy “sinners?” Wouldn’t He elevate the “good people?” Jesus corrected their misunderstanding very quickly. “But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 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.” Doctors are, essentially, problem-solvers. If a person showed up at their doctor’s office and said, “I feel fantastic,” their doctor would probably respond, “So, why are you here?” Jesus could have asked the same question of these Pharisees. Back in Matthew 1, an angel instructed Joseph, “thou shalt call his name Jesus: **for He shall save his people from their sins**.” That was Jesus’ role—the great Spiritual “Problem-Solver.” It isn’t as if the Old Testament didn’t say that the Messiah would fulfil this role. Isaiah 53:4-5 said, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Jesus was doing exactly what the Old Testament said that He would do. To find Jesus in a house full of sinners should have seemed as natural as seeing a doctor in a hospital.
    - “Go ye and learn” was a phrase that Rabbis in Jesus day used before they were about to explain a particular passage of scripture. That phrase carries the sense of “If you listen to what I’m about to say, you will understand what this passage means.” Jesus wasn’t saying, “Go study this passage and come back when you have figured it out.” He knew what the passage meant, and He was about to explain it to them. The passage He quoted was Hosea 6:6. Within its context, it says, “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. 5 Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. 6 For **I desired mercy, and not sacrifice**; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. 7 But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me. 8 Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood. 9 And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so **the company of priests murder in the way by consent**: for they commit lewdness. 10 I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.” In this passage, God bemoaned the fact that His people were unrepentant sinners. They had no goodness. That’s why He sent messages of judgement through the prophets. He wished that they would have humbled themselves before Him, admitted their sin, and received His mercy. But instead, they had continued to perform outward acts of religion (sacrifice) without any internal transformation. The passage in Hosea even names the religious elite as the culprits—“the company of priests.” Could any passage have been a more fitting rebuke of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day? Instead of humbling themselves and trusting in the mercy of God, they continued to go through the motions of fake righteousness. Jesus told them, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Jesus did not mean that the Pharisees were righteous (and therefore, did not need Him). On the contrary, Jesus was comparing them to the religious leaders in Hosea’s day—those who refused to recognize their own sin. As Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one:” In Jesus eyes, there were two types of people in Israel, and those two types weren’t “good people” and “sinners.” The two types were: sinners who refused to recognize their own sin, and sinners who did recognize their own sin. As long as a person remained in that first group, there was nothing that Jesus could do for them. They didn’t realize they were sick, so they wouldn’t accept the cure He was offering. However, everyone in the second group could be helped. Their problem could be solved. That’s why Jesus was there with them—to offer the cure to those knew they were sick.
* Vv. 14-15
  + “Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? 15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”
    - As we talked about back in Matthew 6, the Pharisees typically fasted twice in a week (on Monday and Thursdays). Whether John the Baptist’s followers fasted on those same days or in the same way is unclear. However, John the Baptist’s disciples did fast regularly (as did the Pharisees).
    - Jesus used a marriage illustration to answer their question. In the Jewish culture, marriages were similar to festivals. The celebration would typically last for a full seven days. If the town was smaller (as most Jewish towns were), the whole town would be invited and expected to attend. To fast (considered a sign of mourning in their culture) would have been perceived as inappropriate or even offensive. The application of Jesus’ illustration is obvious. At this point, it seems likely that John the Baptist had already been incarcerated by Herod Antipas. His disciples had lost their leader. For them, the groom had already departed. The party was over—but for the disciples of Jesus, He was still there. It would have been inappropriate for His disciples to mourn. What did they have to mourn about? The God Who created the universe was there with them every day!
    - However, Jesus did mention that the celebration of His earthly ministry would not last indefinitely. Jesus had come to save His people from their sins—and that’s what He was going to do. The cross was on the horizon. Once Jesus returned to heaven, then it would be appropriate for His followers to fast.
* Vv. 16-17
  + “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. 17 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.”
    - Jesus used two common illustrations from their day to explain these His departure from tradition (eating with sinners/not observing traditional fasts). First, Jesus used the illustration of patching clothing. In our day, patching clothing isn’t nearly as common as it was in Jesus’ day. In the first century, clothing was very expensive. This is evidenced by the fact that nakedness was equated with poverty (James 2:3, 15-16; Luke 10:30). Because clothing was so expensive, old garments were regularly patched until they were beyond repair. However, no one was dumb enough to waste a new piece of cloth on an old garment. The first time the new piece got wet or sweaty, it would shrink as it dried—pulling the garment apart and creating a new tear. New cloth was used for new garments. Old cloth was used for patching. Second, Jesus used the illustration of wine skins (the word translated as “bottles” here refers specifically to leather bottles). When the grapes were first crushed, the resulting juice would be placed into new wineskins. As the chemical reaction between the yeast and the sugar took place, it produced ethanol and carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide would bubble up to surface and cause the wineskin to expand. If the wineskin was new, that was no problem. New leather naturally expands. However, if an old wineskin was used, that created a problem. The leather had already been stretched. As the carbon dioxide was released, the wineskin would attempt to expand, but eventually burst. No one in Jesus’ day would have made such a silly mistake—either with cloth, or with wineskins. New cloth was used for new garments, and new wineskins were used for new wine.
    - But what was Jesus’ point? Jesus point is clear in both Matthew and Mark, but an additional detail in Luke really drives it home. At the end of this explanation, Jesus says in Luke 5:39; “No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.” In other words, a drunk man isn’t going to reach for fresh-squeezed grape juice. He’ll have to get sober first. Only then will he make the right/better choice. The coming of the Messiah marked the beginning of something new. Jesus was the new cloth. He was the new wine (fresh squeezed/unfermented juice)—but the Pharisees were drunk with their old ways/old wine. Jesus compared their traditions and rituals to worn out garments and fermented grape juice. According to Jesus’ illustrations, no one in their right mind would choose old garments over new ones. No one in their right mind would choose old wine over fresh-squeezed grape juice. Only a person who was intoxicated would cling to their old rags or reach for the fermented wine. Yet, the Pharisees were drunk with tradition, ritual, and their own interpretation of the Law. They couldn’t see clearly. Which is better: free salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice, or the impossible pursuit of salvation through works? Which is better: the perfect sacrifice offered once, or flawed sacrifices offered a thousand times? Anyone in their right mind would have made the correct choice—but the Pharisees weren’t in their right mind. They were drunk.