

Jesus' Heart for those Far from God

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- [0 : 0 0] Our reading comes from Matthew chapter 9. Please follow along on the screen in your bulletin or your own Bible. In Matthew 9 verse 1, we read, And getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city.
- And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.
- And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, This man is blaspheming. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why do you think evil in your hearts?
- For which is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.
- He then said to the paralytic, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home. And he rose and went home. When the crowd saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.
- [1 : 0 6] As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man 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 table in the house, Behold, many tax collectors and sinners came, And were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?
- But when he heard it, he said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means.
- I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?
- And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.
- [2 : 1 0] No one puts a piece of unshrung cloth on an old garment, For the patch tears away from the garment, And a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins.
- If it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, And the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, And so both are preserved.
- Amen. This is the word of God. Great. Good morning, everybody. And wonderful to see you. Thank you, Karen and Pui, for reading God's word to us.
- And welcome, all watermarkers and those that may be visiting. If you're a guest of ours, so great to have you with us today. A warm welcome to you. If you don't know me, my name is Kevin. I'm one of the elders and the pastors here.
- And it is great to be able to look at God's word together this morning. I wonder if you'll join me as we pray together. Let's come before our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and pray for a few minutes now.

- [3 : 10] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, the Triune God, we come before you this morning, not in any sense of self-sufficiency or self-righteousness. We've come, God, very aware of our own depravity and our brokenness. We've come, God, very aware of our need for you, our foulness and our finiteness. That you are God and we are not. And, Lord, we really do come with a sense of need for you. Come and speak to our hearts. Come and encourage us. Come and minister to us this morning. Not just in the sermon, but, God, as we sing these songs of worship and devotion to you, I pray that you, the Spirit of God, will stir our hearts to see you freshly this morning. God, we pray that as we come to your word in Matthew 9, that it will be you that is speaking to us. God, your word is not just pages on a screen. It's living and active. We need it, God, to come speak to our hearts, to cut open to our hearts, Lord, and to really speak to the depth of us.
- [4 : 17] And so we ask you to come and have your way as we look at your word. God, come and show us more what Jesus is like, what the gospel is like, we pray. But we also just pray for every watermarker, those maybe that are watching, those who maybe aren't, those that are going through a difficult time. You know where all our hearts are at. You know where our lives are at. You know the pains we face, the struggles we endure, the difficulties we're going through. We pray for your grace to really minister to us this morning and this week, God. Come and minister to us, we pray, God. Lord, we also pray, won't you send us out. As we look this morning at this passage, we see your heart, God, for people that are far from you. We pray, God, for us as a church. Won't you make us like you, Jesus. May you send us out into the city, God. May Hong Kong be better off because there is a simple church called Watermark Church here that is participating in your kingdom come adventure of being salt and light in the city. And so we pray, God, may we become more like you, Jesus. May we love and serve those that are far from you. May we also this morning recognize our own need for the gospel. Come speak to us, we pray.
- [5 : 30] God, we also just this morning want to pray for our city, Hong Kong, that's going through so many changes and so much that's going on, both here at home in Hong Kong and across the world. We pray, God, won't you come and lead in, guys. We pray for our leaders, our political leaders, God. We pray that they will serve the citizens of Hong Kong with fear and trembling, that they will do what is good for the people of our city. We do just pray for our city and all government officials. We pray for peace in our times. We pray for flourishing. We pray that people's lives will be lifted up, God. We pray for the poor and the marginalized, that policies will be put in place and the church will respond in a way that serves our city. God, we bring all these things before you and you're wonderful in your gracious name. Amen. Amen. Okay, well, we are looking at this passage in Matthew chapter 9. We're working through Matthew's gospel for a couple of weeks and months. And seeing what does it mean to follow Jesus in all of life. And today, in our passage, the passage that we look at, if you've got a Bible in front of you, is often broken up into two sections.
- [6 : 41] There's verses 1 to 8, and then there's verses 9 and onwards. And in most Bibles, this is divided into two sections. And we can tend to think of this as two separate incidences.

But I think actually Jesus wants us to see this as one holistic picture. And the reason is twofold. The first reason is because in all of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, these sections where Jesus heals the paralytic and where Jesus calls Matthew actually go together.

And I think the Holy Spirit has done that for a reason. He wants us to read these two incidences as one flow of thought. But the second reason is because there's a clear link. There's a theme that is linking them.

In both Jesus' healing of the paralytic and his call to Matthew, Jesus is comparing physical health with spiritual health. Or maybe you could say he's using physical health as an analogy, an illustration of what spiritual health and vitality looks like.

And so Jesus wants us to look at this section together. Additionally, you may have seen when we read this, when Priya and Karen were reading to us, that in the three sections in the passage today, Jesus responds to three objections or challenges.

[7 : 58] In each one of these, somebody comes up to Jesus with a challenge. And Jesus responds. In the first one, some scribes come to Jesus and say, Jesus, who do you think you are? How can you say that?

That's blasphemy. In the second one, some Pharisees come to Jesus and they say, how on earth can you eat and feast with such scoundrels, such sinners? And in the third passage, John's disciples come to Jesus and they say, Jesus, all the devout Jews are fasting.

You and your disciples are not fasting. What's wrong with you? And in each one of these, Jesus responds to these misunderstandings, these misconceptions of who he is.

And today, what we're going to see is three ingredients that are absolutely essential to have genuine faith in Jesus. Three things that you must know about Jesus if you're going to be a Christian at all.

If you take out any one of these three ingredients, you will never really get to know the life transforming power of the gospel. Take out any one of these ingredients and forever, your Christianity will feel like a duty or a dry religion.

[9 : 06] But that's not what Jesus has for us. And so this morning, we're going to look at these three things. We're going to look at his identity, who Jesus is, his mission or his purpose, why he came, and then his call, what it means to follow him.

Okay, so let's dive in the first one, who Jesus is. Look at the first passage with me in Matthew 9, verses 1-8. Now, we looked at this briefly last week.

So let's look at it briefly again this morning. Jesus is back in Capernaum. That's his hometown. It's not the town where he grew up, but it's kind of his adopted hometown during the time of his ministry.

It's where he often retreats after going out to ministry, comes back to Capernaum, his adopted hometown, and some people bring to him a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They've heard of the miraculous power of Jesus.

They've heard of what he does. And so they come to Jesus with a clear request. They want Jesus to heal their friend. But Jesus doesn't do for them what they initially expect. Look at what he says.

[10 : 09] Jesus simply says, Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven. Now, that really upsets the religious leaders. And you can understand why. To heal someone of their paralysis, that's the realm of doctors and miracle workers and wise sages, religious leaders, possibly.

But to forgive someone of sins, that's the prerogative of God alone. Only God can do that. Remember in Psalm 51, that amazing Psalm in the Old Testament, King David has committed this outrageous sin.

He's committed adultery with Bathsheba. And he's challenged on this. And he writes this incredible Psalm of confession and repentance, Psalm 51. And what he says there, he says, God, against you and you only have I sinned.

Now, obviously, David did sin grievously against other people, right? Bathsheba, her husband. But David knows that primarily sin is vertical before it's horizontal.

That whenever we sin, God is the offender, the agreed party, primarily. And so, when Jesus says, I forgive you of your sins, to the Pharisees, this is blasphemy, because Jesus is taking on the prerogative of God himself.

[11 : 19] But look at Jesus' response. He wants them, but he also wants us to know, to be absolutely clear on who he is. And that's why he does two miracles. He does a visible one and an invisible one.

Look at what he says. He says in verse 6, that you may know that I have the authority to forgive sins. Then he says to the man, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.

Jesus visibly heals this man of this paralysis, because he wants everyone to know he's not just a wise teacher. He's not just a sage of religious genius. He's not just a compassionate miracle worker.

Rather, he's nothing less than the one who hung the stars in space. He's nothing less than the one who knit this man together in his mother's womb. He's nothing less than the one who with a word can give life and take life away, because he's nothing less than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their forefathers that they worshipped and endured.

He is God coming to them in human form. And that's why throughout the Gospels, Jesus is constantly drawing the anger of the crowds, of the people.

[12 : 26] They want to throw him off the cliff. They want to crucify him. They want to murder him. They come to plot to destroy him. Jesus is constantly drawing the ire and the irritation of the people, because he's constantly making claims that make no bones about it, the fact that he is God.

And Jesus says he's not just one of a plethora of gods. He's the one true God. He is on par with Yahweh himself. He is the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth, along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This is who he is. Now, simply knowing who Jesus is, his identity is not enough. If all you know about Jesus is that he's God, that he's divine, that he has authority, you still don't know him very well.

We saw this last week in the passage preceding this. Jesus, remember, he gets off the boat in the area of the Gadarenes. And two men that are demon-possessed come up to him. And the demons speak to Jesus through the men.

And this is what they say. They say, What have you to do with us, O Son of God? They know exactly who he is. They know that he is God himself, the Son of God, the divine second member of the Trinity.

[13 : 39] But that doesn't help them very much. Simply knowing who Jesus is, his identity, is not enough to make you a Christian. And it's not enough to help you understand or encounter the life-transforming power of the gospel.

In order to really understand who Jesus is and know him, in order to really encounter his grace, you need to know not just who he is, but why he came.

Why he came. Now, in almost nowhere in all of scripture is this more beautifully portrayed than in our passage there. And it's so rich, we could spend hours on it.

And we're not going to do that. You'll be pleased to know. But in this passage, in Matthew chapter 9, verses 9 to 13, we see this incredible picture of not just who Jesus is, but why he came.

Matthew shares the story of what happened in his own house. And Matthew is a tax collector. We'll talk about that in a minute. He's recently become a follower of Jesus. And he throws this massive get-together banquet party for Jesus with all his friends, his cronies, at his house.

[14 : 46] Now, in ancient times, houses were fairly open affairs. They weren't behind gated communities. You didn't have security guards at the front. They were fairly open.

Everyone could see into the house and see what was happening. Many times, you could actually kind of walk through the outer perimeters of the house, the portico, and actually even interact with people on the outskirts of the house, or the property.

And so, Jesus is here at Matthew's house. Everyone can see in what's happening. And to the horror of the religious leaders, there is Jesus with his disciples in the midst of this great big get-together with all the people in society that you would not want to be seen with.

Jesus is there in the middle of the party. And look at what Matthew says. He's there with tax collectors and sinners. Many of us will know that tax collectors were the most hated members of Hebrew society.

And the reason is because they were Jews that were collecting taxes from the Jewish people on behalf of the Roman government. And so, in many ways, they are seen as traitors.

[15 : 58] They are those that have colluded with the enemy to tax their own people. But more than that, in ancient Israel, there was no regulation to how the taxes were collected.

It was very just open to interpretation. And so, one day, you set up your tax booth on the toll road and you've got your license and one day, you charge 10 denarii for anyone that's passing through.

And the next day, maybe you charge 12 or 13 denarii. And then, the next month, maybe the tax collector, it's his son's birthday and he wants to buy his son a very special present. And so, for a week, he charges 20 denarii.

It was very arbitrary. And so, what happened, what that meant was the tax collectors were not only traitors, they were extortionists. They were those that were robbing their own people to line their own pockets and to aid and facilitate the foreign government.

The Mishnah and the Talmud, these ancient rabbinic documents, lumped tax collectors together with murderers and thieves. Tax collectors were not allowed to witness in a court of law.

[17 : 01] They were not considered trustworthy or honest enough. Their testimony was considered meaningless. And so, in some ways, think of a Jewish person sidelining or informing the Nazi German government in World War II how to capture other Jews.

That's kind of how Israel felt about tax collectors. Not only have they turned their back on their own people, they've sought to live for themselves and for their own pleasure.

And so, in this close-knit, family-orientated, unashamed culture, this is the ultimate act of betrayal and unfaithfulness. And here is Jesus.

Jesus. This popular teacher who crowds are attracted to Him. And He's in the middle of this great big get-together party with tax collectors and other sinners.

That means prostitutes and pimps and murderers and thieves. And He's not preaching at them. He's eating with them. He's feasting with them. About a year ago, I was down in Central on the corner of Peter Street and Queens Road.

[18 : 12] You know, where the new decathlon is. Now, I'm on the street corner there and I see a man with a loud hailer, a megaphone. And he's standing on the street corner shouting out, Repent!

You sinners! Repent, Hong Kongers! I think that's what the Pharisees wanted Jesus to do at this party. But that's not what Jesus is doing at all. He's not preaching at them. He's not scolding them.

He's not rebuking them and telling them what dirty rotten scoundrels they are. He's eating with them. He's eating pork chops and bacon, probably. He's drinking Gentile wine.

Jesus is doing the very thing He's not supposed to do with the very people He's not supposed to be with. And why is He doing it? Well, He tells us. Look at verse 12 and 13.

Jesus says, Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but I've come to call sinners.

[19 : 14] I've come not to associate and hang out with those who got it all together. My purpose for coming was to call people who are far from God back into relationship with God.

That's what He means when He says, Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. It's a quote from Isaiah chapter 6 where Jesus is saying, What I desire is covenant relationship.

That's what mercy means. Like I said, covenant relationship with people. I want to be really nice. I want people that are far from me to come back and experience my love and my mercy. I'm not just interested in religious devotion and practices.

I'm not interested in people feeling entitled. I want covenant relationship. I've come to call people back to God. Douglas O'Donnell says this, Christ stands close to those who know they are far from Him.

Why? Because that's why He came. He came to call sinners. Not after they've shown interest in Him or cleaned up their act. But while they are still 10 feet deep in their sins.

[20 : 24] Friends, at the heart of Christianity is this claim that all of humanity, all of us, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Hong Kongers, mainlanders, Malaysians, Koreans, South Africans, Australians, all of us, face a massive problem that we cannot solve on our own.

And that is that as a result of our sin, which is really us turning our back on God and living for ourselves, we are under God's judgment. We are alienated from the life that God has destined us for and the love that He's designed us and made us to experience.

And there's no way back. We cannot buy our way back. We cannot earn our way back with good behavior. We cannot merit our way back with religious devotion and duty.

All of us have turned our back on God. We've gone our own way. In a sense, we are our own tax collectors and sinners. And so Jesus Christ, God Himself, God in human form, the greatest physician ever has come to us to bring healing and redemption and reconciliation.

Jesus has come to call us back to Himself, to make a way for men and women, people like me and you, to be reconciled to God. This is who Jesus is and this is why He has come.

[21 : 49] If you look again at the first pericope, the first story of Jesus healing the paralytic, Jesus says to the paralytic, I've got good news. Take heart, my son.

Your sins are forgiven you. And Jesus challenged, how can you say that? And so look what He says in verse 6. He says, that you may know that I, the Son of Man, have authority to forgive sins.

And He turns to man and says, pick up your mat to rise and walk. Jesus is doing more than merely proving His credentials. He's doing more than merely proving that He's God. Jesus is making the point that more important than a renewed body is a renewed heart, a renewed soul.

Jesus is making the point that He hasn't just come to improve our lives, He's come to solve the deepest problem, which is the problem of sin in our hearts, the cancer of sin.

Jesus is demonstrating that merely healing this man's body would have been wonderful, but insufficient. To restore His health would perhaps save Him from a couple of decades of suffering, but to restore His soul, to restore His heart, to restore relationship with God, that's going to save Him from an eternity of suffering and damnation.

[22 : 59] Friends, Jesus says in verse 2, His declaration, that the forgiveness of sins may not have been what the paralytic wanted to hear, but oh, it was what he needed to hear.

And friends, that's true for you and I as well. One of the most important scriptures in the whole of the Bible, and I want to encourage you to memorize this scripture, learn it off by heart, is this, 1 Timothy chapter 1.

The Apostle Paul, the great Apostle Paul, writes this. He says, this saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. That means this is absolutely true and you can bank your life on it. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And then he adds this amazing line, of whom I am the foremost, of whom I am the very worst. Friends, remember we mentioned it last week, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and she says, Mary, you are going to be with child and the child within you is going to be called Jesus.

God saves, for he is going to save his people from their sins. Right at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, his disciples come to him and say, Jesus teaches how to pray. And Jesus teaches them famously the Lord's Prayer.

[24 : 12] And right at the center of that is, forgive us our sins as we forgive those that have sinned against us. At the end of his life, Jesus, the night before he goes to the cross, he's having a meal with his disciples and he grabs a glass of wine at Passover meal and he says, this is the blood of my covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Friends, Jesus, the next day, he's hanging on the cross, nails smashed to his hands, he's struggling to breathe as his body is weighed down and he dies of asphyxiation and he cries out with his dying breath, Father, forgive them.

They know not what they do. Friends, Jesus rises from the grave and he's walking on the road and he meets two disciples on the way to Emmaus and he says to them, this it was written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to every corner of the world.

Friends, this is the heart of Christianity. This is what the entire Bible is about from beginning to end. This is what Christians worship. This is why we sing songs of adoration and glory. This is why we rejoice in who God is.

This is why we sang like we did this morning. This is why we live with hope in our hearts because though our sins are red as crimson, friends, though our sins are as many as the sand on the seashore, though our sins are as high as the skyscrapers of Hong Kong, Jesus Christ came into the world for people like you and people like me to take our sins upon himself.

[25 : 49] Jesus says, those who are well, those who are perfect, have no need for a physician. I've come not just to do religious duty.

I've come not just to bring a new religious system. I've come not just to start a new religion. I've come to call sinners to myself. Now, in one sense, the religious leaders in Jesus' day, they would not disagree with this.

They would acknowledge this is what all prophets do, all wise men, religious men, all the prophets in Israel were constantly calling Israel back to God, to repentance for their sins.

But in another way, they completely miss Jesus. They see it, but they don't see it. And they miss Jesus. And they miss Jesus, I think, for three reasons. And it's the same three reasons that we miss Jesus.

Friends, my guess is that for many of us this morning, this scripture where Jesus said, I came to call sinners, is probably not new to us. But we miss it for three reasons. The one reason is this.

[26 : 58] We tend to think of other people as the sinners that Jesus came for. The scribes and the Pharisees in Jesus' day, they would nod their heads and say, that's very good.

You're right, we need to call sinners to repentance. But it was those people out there. It was the tax collectors. It was the prostitutes and the sex workers. And friends, we can do the same. We can think it's those drug dealers out there on the streets.

It's those ladies that work in the red light district. It's those Wall Street bankers that are greedy and full of greed. It's those people that we need to organize a mission to go out there and save them.

We need to send some church planters there to go and speak to those people. And yet we miss the fact that Jesus has come for us. For us. Here's another way that we miss it.

We tend to think of ourselves as sinners but in a generic sense. We kind of tend to say, yes, yes, it's true. We all sinners. I too am a sinner. And when we tend to think of our sins as things like, you know, six months ago I lost my temper in the traffic and I swore at another car when he pulled in front of me.

[28 : 06] And it's true. I shouldn't have done that and I'm glad that Jesus came for my swearing. I really need Jesus to help me with my road rage. Or we tend to say things like, I guess I haven't really read my Bible so much in the last month and that's true.

I really should do a better job. I should be more committed. So we tend to think of ourselves as we all kind of sinners in a very generic sense. But we don't see what's really going in our hearts.

We don't see the anger in our hearts. We don't see the self-righteousness. We don't see that when people challenge us the anger that rises is not merely because they're challenging us.

It's because of a sense of self-righteousness in our hearts. Friends, I've got to tell you that happens to me so often. People challenge me and correct me and I don't take it very well.

I don't like to be challenged because my heart is bent into myself. I like the Pharisees. I've turned away from God and I want to live for myself. I want to be my own God.

[29 : 05] There is a God that sits on the throne of my life and his name is Kevin. And I constantly want to be my own God. I find ways to prop up the idolatry of my own heart.

And I'm a sinner and I need Jesus. But I don't like to admit that. So it's easier to compare myself to others and think of those people out there. But here's the third way to do it. Sometimes think of ourselves as Jesus came to save us from our sins but it happened a long time ago.

Back in 1978 God radically saved my life. I was a drug dealer. I was doing this. I was doing that. And God saved me. And you know he really revolutionized my life.

Yeah yeah 40 years ago God came and saved a sinner like me. But notice what Paul says here. Paul says this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. That Jesus came to the world to save sinners.

He says of whom I am present tense. Of whom I am the very worst. Jesus is not Paul is not just saying you know I was really bad. Long time ago when I was a Pharisee I was so bad.

[30:10] He's saying right now the current reality of my heart is I'm the worst sinner I know and I need Jesus grace today. John Newton was this amazing man who well he was actually a dreadful man when he first half of his life he was a ship captain in the transatlantic slave trade used to captain ships that went along the coast of Africa Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa capturing men and women tying them up and then selling them as slaves to the new colonies in America.

He was a slave trader and he encounters the gospel he encounters Jesus his life turns around a couple years later he leaves shipping he then becomes a pastor and many years later he writes this amazing amazing hymn Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that God could save a wretch like me I once was lost now I'm found was blind but now I see but towards the end of his life John Newton says these amazing words he says though I am an old man now and my memory is failing two great things I shall never forget I am a great sinner and Christ is a great savior my dear friend do you know that Jesus is a great savior and that he came for you he didn't just come in a generic sense for the sins of the world he didn't just come for those scoundrels out there he came for people like me and he came for people like you friends Jesus came for us and you know why because of his unquestionable love for us because of his love for you and his love for me it wasn't the nails that hung Jesus on the cross it was his love for us

Jesus came for us and that leads us to the third and final thing which is that if you want to know who Jesus if you want to really experience the life transforming power of Jesus you've got to not only know who he is not only know why he came you've got to know what it means to follow him look at the third story in our passage today this time it's not the Pharisees but it's John disciples who come to Jesus and they ask him a question and they say to him why is it that neither you nor your disciples fast like the other rabbis and the Pharisees now what's going on here is that in first century Israel all devout Jews fasted twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays why Mondays and Thursdays I'm not too sure that was just the custom Mondays and Thursdays all devout Jews would fast but Jesus and his disciples are not fasting in fact we can't prove it but I like to imagine that Jesus is at

Matthew's house having this great big feast this get together on a Thursday night and so all the other devout Jews are fasting and they are devout and they are hungry and here's Jesus and these other Jews when everyone else should be fasting and they're feasting it up and so they come to him and they say Jesus it's Thursday what are you doing why aren't you guys fasting and Jesus gives them three mini parables and essentially what he says is this if you try and add me or squeeze me onto your religious system it's not going to work you can't have your religious system and just try and tag me on like a piece of cloth either you've got to follow me or reject me you've got to orientate your whole life around me or you've got to discard me you can't just admire me and you can't just add me onto your life so the disciples John's disciples the Pharisees are coming saying

Jesus we can see you're a good man you're a good teacher you can do miracles we see you're following the traditions of our fathers etc why don't you fast like the others and Jesus says I haven't come just to join your system I've come to completely overhaul it either you've got to follow me or reject me but don't just admire me and Jesus gives you three parables and let's just look at two of them in modern day context imagine this imagine you engage to be married and you're trying to find a wedding date and your fiancée comes to you and says I've got great news the venue that we wanted and the date that we wanted works we've got our wedding venue on our wedding date and you look at the date and you say oh love I've got bad news I've just started this this new diet and according to my new diet I'm going to be fasting on that date do you think we can find another day for our wedding friend your fiancée is going to either slap you or kick you out she's going to say listen it's either the wedding or your diet right don't just attach me to a little part of your life you either take me or you take your life but I'm not just an add-on that you can attach to your life your wedding takes preference over your eating habits imagine this

[35 : 17] Jesus says you go down to the IFC mall and you see this you've got this old jacket on that your dad gave you or your mom gave you or some special person gave you and you love this jacket but it's getting a bit old it's got a few tears but it's got sentimental value and you see in the shop window this new jacket and it's beautiful lovely cloth and fabric just the color you want and you think oh I should get that but you don't let go of the sentimental item of clothing that you have and so you think I know what I'll do I'll cut off the sleeve of the new one I'll sew it onto this one and then I can have the best of both that'll work no friends that's not going to work well at all you either wear the new one or the old one but you can't try and merge them together do you see what Jesus is saying he's saying either you're going to be my follower or you've got to reject me but you can't simply add a little bit of me to your life you can't simply patch me onto your life you need to reorientate your entire life around me you need to choose your wedding or your diet you need to choose the old jacket or the new one you need to choose whether you're going to follow me or you're going to follow yourself remember two weeks ago some man comes to

Jesus and says Jesus I'm going to follow you I'm with you just give me a few months I just need to tie up some loose ends I've got a big inheritance that's coming in just let me type some things then when everything's sorted I'll come and be with you Jesus says let the dead bury the dead you come and follow me and sometimes we say well you know Monday to Friday is a prioritized work Saturday it's the kids Saturday night it's friends and Sunday morning if I'm up to it Sunday morning I'll give to Jesus Jesus no no no you orientate your entire life around me you follow me or you follow yourself you can't just add a bit of me here and there now as we come to a close in verses 8 and 9 Matthew shows us two responses one negative and one positive to show us what it means to follow Jesus let's look at the negative one verse 8 look what happens here Matthew writes this this is after Jesus heals the paralytic right verse 8 when the crowd saw it they were afraid that means they were filled with awe and they glorified

God who had given such authority to men now at first this seems like a wonderful response the crowd see what Jesus do and they say brilliant this is amazing they glorify God but actually unfortunately that's all that they were they were they were honored they were amazed but they never came to Jesus for more than that why do I say that a couple of chapters later in chapter 11 Jesus says this about the very people in Capernaum he says you Capernaum will you be exalted to heaven no no no you'll be brought down to Hades for if the mighty works that I had done in you had been done in places like Sodom and Gomorrah they would have repented a long time ago I tell you it'll be more bearable in Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than it will be for you what's Jesus saying Matthew's warning us against following the crowds in Matthew's gospel like in life and particularly in a digital world social media the crowds are always deceptive

Jesus is never without a crowd the crowds are always right there they're howling they're cheering him on they're applauding him they're loving what he's doing but these same crowds are never described as following him with faith and repentance they may be amazed they may say generic platitudes of praise and wonder but they may even be grateful for who Jesus and what he does but they never turn to Jesus in faith and repentance they never come to Jesus for forgiveness of sins and they never experience the life transforming power of his grace the crowds of Capernaum they see Jesus in flesh and blood more than anyone else Jesus considers their city his hometown the crowds hear his sermon live and in person they witness his miracles with his own eyes they are amazed they are astonished they are filled with awe but friends are never filled with faith and they never follow him and they never experience his life transforming power of the gospel contrast that with verse 9

Jesus is walking along the roads and he sees this man called Matthew Matthew is a tax collector one of the most hated men ancient Israel society but don't feel sorry for him he's chosen that job because it's well paying he makes a lot of money Matthew may not have respect of society but his bank balance is pretty good Jesus comes up to him and he says follow me and Matthew gets up and he leaves everything behind and he follows him Matthew doesn't say you know geez I've got a big bonus coming in Matthew doesn't say just give me a couple of months I just need to tie up some family deals some loose ends in the ancient world tax collectors that often paid up front a license to collect taxes they paid a big sum up front and then they could collect the taxes retrospectively Matthew walks away from all of it he says Jesus you have my life friends can I ask you this morning are you one of the crowd or are you like Matthew are you one of those that have in some part inspired by

[40 : 43] Jesus you're encouraged by the testimonies you're wired by the miracles you're grateful for his grace but you're not really willing to follow him completely who are you like Matthew one who has seen your need for Jesus that Jesus came not just for the sinners of the world but he came for you he came for me friends have you like Matthew completely orientated your life around him friends you'll never know him you'll never experience the life transforming power of his gospel and his grace unless you come to him and know who he really is that he is God almighty he's not just one of many gods he's not just one religious leader he is the one true God heaven and earth true king friends you'll never experience the life transforming power of the gospel unless you come and see why he came he came for people like you and people like me friends you'll never experience the life transforming power of the gospel until we completely orientate our whole lives around him until we follow him and say Christ have your way in my life let's pray together

Lord Jesus Christ we do come before you this morning and we are deeply challenged by this passage God Christ when we have eyes to see it we have to acknowledge that our own hearts God are not that far from the tax collectors and the sinners we might look respectable on the outside but father in our heart of hearts we too have turned our back on you we wanted to serve ourselves and our own interests Jesus thank you that you came for sinners like us thank you that you came to redeem us and rescue us to bring us home thank you Jesus that you didn't just come to deal with sin as an a generic debt but you came for sinners for people for people like us people like watermark people like us in Hong Kong Jesus you came to set us free father I pray won't you send your Holy

Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts to see and understand the gospel to see you God for who you are to see you for why you came and to give us the faith to turn our lives towards you to orientate our entire lives around you to not just trying to attach you onto our lives as one more piece of our already busy schedule but to say Jesus come and have your way Christ give us the faith to do that we pray come and have your way in your wonderful name Amen