



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Matthew 9:9-17

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English Standard Version

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## *“The Calling of the King”*

The 27<sup>th</sup> Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled  
*“The King and His Kingdom!”*

### **Matthew 9:9-17**

*“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. <sup>10</sup> And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when He heard it, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

*<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. <sup>17</sup> 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.”*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your hard teaching here. It’s hard we usually think we’re righteous, but we’re too easily revealed to be sinners. It’s hard because we’re forced to*

*admit we need You. So help us to consider what it really means to follow You. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *Imperfect Marble***<sup>1</sup>

If any of you have ever been to Italy, it's hard not to notice all the statues. Every plaza, piazza, and square is filled with world-class statues sculpted by historic renaissance artists. This is the story of one of those statues.

You see, centuries ago a number of workmen were seen dragging a great marble block into the city of Florence, Italy. It had come from the famous marble quarries of Carrara, and was intended to be made into a statue of a great Old Testament prophet. But it contained **imperfections**, and when the great sculptor Donatello saw it, he refused it at once.

So there it lay in the cathedral yard, **a useless block**. One day another sculptor caught sight of the flawed block. But as he examined it, there rose in his mind something of immense beauty, and he resolved to sculpt it. For two years the artist worked feverishly on the work of art. Finally, on January 25, 1504, the greatest artists of the day assembled to see what he had made of the despised and rejected block. Among them were Botticelli, Leonardo daVinci, and Pietro Perugino, the teacher of Raphael. As the veil dropped to the floor, the statue was met with a chorus of praise. It was a masterpiece! The succeeding centuries have confirmed that judgment. One of the greatest works of art the world has ever known — Michelangelo's **David**

A block of imperfect marble in the hands of one of the greatest artists of all time became one of the greatest works of art of all time. That got me thinking. **Ephesians 2:10** says, "*For we are His **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"

At our best, we're imperfect blocks, filled with flaws, and sometimes hard as marble. And yet the greatest artist of all time, our Lord Jesus Christ, says that we are His workmanship, we are His creation, we are His. And our text today in Matthew 9 gives us the story of this transformation from a flawed life to a follower of Christ. Christ saw in the flawed life of **Levi the tax collector** (as he's called in Mark and Luke) a work of great craftsmanship that we know of as **Matthew the Gospel writer and great evangelist**. He still sees men and women with His consummate artist's eye today. He sees in us what no one else sees. But this passage isn't really about us. And it's not even about Matthew. Hopefully, it will become obvious who it's really about.

Now in this passage, Jesus says, "My message is absolutely and utterly new. It is absolutely and utterly different. It's different than the religion of the Pharisees. It's different than the religion of the past. It's utterly different. My whole approach is **I don't like righteous people. I only like sinners.**" This whole passage tells us what a real Christian is. A real Christian is someone who has been called, someone who is a disciple, and someone who has been made utterly new. That's what the passage teaches. What does it mean to be a Christian, a real Christian? A real Christian is someone who is called, someone who is a disciple, and someone who has been made utterly new.

Now, I'd like to spend some time on this subject and look at it in a little bit more detail. What is a Christian? A Christian is someone who has had **the same experience as Matthew**.

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is adapted from *Preaching the Word: Mark, Volume 1* by Dr. R. Kent Hughes, pages 69-70.

And so that's where we'll start, Matthew 9, starting at verse 9, and the first thing we see is that

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**v. 9: A CHRISTIAN IS CALLED BY SOMEONE**<sup>2</sup>

*“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.”*

Now let me say something that may be somewhat surprising to many of you — you're not a Christian unless you have, like Matthew, **experienced a call**. **You're not a Christian** unless you're aware of having been called. Christianity is not something **you take up**. It's something that **takes you up**. Let me say that again — Christianity is not something **you take up**. It **takes you up**. I mean, that's a theme that often comes up in Matthew. In fact, I would say this is one of **the main ways** in which you can tell you're on the right path. You have a sense of being worked upon. A Christian is somebody **who is called**.

Now what does that mean? First of all, we have to be very careful not to assume that means God always works **in the same way**. If you read a little earlier, back in verse 1, which Dave Dorst unfolded for you last week, it says Jesus was on a boat. He crossed over and came to His own town. He went into a home. And we read ... **Matthew 9:2**, *“And behold, some people brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed.”* Now you have to see something here. On the surface, it looks like the way Jesus dealt with the paralytic and the way Jesus dealt with Matthew are totally different. The paralytic had a bunch of friends. We're told they were trying to get into the house where Jesus was speaking, and there were so many people around that they couldn't get in. So they went up on the roof, and they tore the roof of the house up. I wonder what the owner of the house thought. In Jesus' name, they tore up the roof of the house, and they lowered him down.

So here's somebody who looks like he's being extremely active, doing everything possible to get to Jesus. The way Jesus meets Matthew seems to be totally different. Here's Matthew. He's at work. Just imagine yourself. You're at the desk, and people are coming up to you, and they're paying you something. You're working in the ledger book, and you're saying, “Okay, Mr. So-and-so, Miss So-and-so, has given this amount.” You're crossing names off the ledger.

Suddenly, somebody shows up. *“Follow me.”* Matthew's not after this. Matthew's not looking for this. Matthew's not praying for this. In Jesus comes. So you say, “Well, this looks like Jesus operates in a completely different way.” Well, first of all, this tells us we have to be very careful about **standardizing** the Christian experience. We shouldn't do it.

It's really easy to think, “Because I came to Christ in a crisis, if somebody else didn't come in a crisis ...” You wonder. If you came because you did a lot of study and you came to Christianity through an intellectual experience, then you mistrust somebody who comes to it through an emotional experience. Some people feel like you have to walk forward in a service when a preacher makes an invitation. That's the only real way to do it. It's very dangerous to try to standardize that from these passages. Yet there's something **that is in common**, and here's what that is. Number one, to be called means ...

- **You Sense Jesus Is In Charge.**

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**2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the book, *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 377-388; **And the Sermons**, “*Christ Calls Us To Himself*” 9/10/95 and “*Mercy, Not Sacrifice*” 9/17/95, both by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 9/10/95, [sermons.redeemer.com](http://sermons.redeemer.com); Logos Bible Software 4: *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*.**

The first characteristic is to be **called**. You sense you're not actually the one who's in charge of this spiritual adventure. You sense there's an outside power that's really in charge. Now somebody says, "Well, I can see that in the story of Matthew. Here's Jesus coming in and calling Matthew right in the middle of a work day, but that's not the way it seemed to work for the paralytic."

Oh yes it was, just look. The paralytic **was not after the Jesus he found**. You see, the paralytic was after a magician. He thought Jesus was going to heal him. So he comes on down, and there he is. He looks up at Jesus, and what does Jesus say? "**Your sins are forgiven.**" "Wait a minute, that's not what I'm here for."

You see, Jesus is in charge. The paralytic **thinks** he is in charge, but he's not, Jesus is. The paralytic thinks he's the one seeking Jesus, but actually Paul says in Romans 3 no one seeks God. Anyone who's ever taken any kind of active spiritual search, if you ever find the real God, you will always and inevitably look back and realize you weren't actually **trying** to find the real God. You had another kind of god in mind. You had a god who would do **this** and **this** and **this** and **this**.

Then you discovered that God very often uses that kind of search **to find you**. Whenever He finds you, you're brought up short. To be called is to experience an alien power at work in your life. If you **don't sense** that, if you **don't sense** somebody is after you, if you **don't sense** something is going on inside, if you **don't sense** that, eventually ... well, that's not real Christianity.

Once you learn some of the Christian faith, it gets very hard to go back if you're a thoughtful person. I remember talking to somebody a couple of years ago who really didn't want to be a Christian. The person didn't want to be a Christian because there were some lifestyle issues he wanted to pursue that Christianity and the ethical standards of Christianity wouldn't allow. He recognizes the truth of Christianity, but he doesn't want it. Because he realizes that it demands changes, it demands transformation, and he doesn't want to change. So he gets mad at Christianity, and at Christians, and at the church. **Because He Knows**. ... And there's a man who's being called.

In fact, to some degree, when a person gets mad at Christianity and sort of obsessed and angry and feels like God's after them, I have a lot more hope for them than a person who says, "Well, of course, I've always been a Christian. I've always come to church. It's sort of comfortable. I think religion is a private thing, and I don't think you should get too excited about it." I don't care how many Sunday school pins that person has. That person's **not called**. The person **struggling** is called. There's a sense of an outside force coming in. If you're a Christian, you sense there's **something different** coming into your life, and **that's Jesus**, and **He's in charge**. That's the first way you can tell you're called.

The second way you can tell you've been called is when you realize that ...

- **You are confronted with a person, not ideas**

Jesus comes and says, "**Follow Me.**" He doesn't say, "Follow **that**." He doesn't say, "Follow **these**." He says, "**Follow Me.**" The real Jesus Christ is always picking a fight and talking about Himself. It's true. He's always saying, **Matthew 22:42**, "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?*" *They said to him, "The son of David."* He's amazing. You know, there's **a radical self-centeredness about Jesus**. If you look at the things He said, "... *before Abraham was, I AM.*" "*I and My Father are one.*" "*No one knows the Son except the*

*Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him."*

He says, "You must love Me and hate your father and mother," meaning, "The devotion you should have for Me is so much greater than the devotion you should have for anybody else, including your father and mother ... so much so that your devotion to your father and mother should look like hate compared to your devotion to me." Look at what He says about Himself. It's radically self-centered. Now what does that mean? The way you know you're being called is you're being confronted with **the radical self-centeredness of Jesus**.

Let me be as frank as I possibly can. When people are investigating Christianity, I'm never be very patient with this question. They'll say, "Well, I'm interested in Christianity. What is the Christian view of *this*? What's the Christian view of *that*? What's the Christian view of marriage? What's the Christian view of doing *this* or *that*?" I know what they're saying is, "I'm interested in Christianity, but I don't want it to be **too narrow**. I want to be able to live my life. Can Christians go to certain kinds of movies?"

When you ask that question, you're on the wrong trail, because the Bible says, "**First, First, First**, you have to decide **who He is** before anything else." Now over the years, I've had a number of people say, "What's the Christian view of homosexuality?" What they're saying is, "I'm interested in Christianity, but I want to know what your church teaches about homosexuality." Or they ask about evolution ... or the role of women ... or some other culture war issue.

And with all due respect, **WHO CARES? First** you have to ask, "**Is Jesus Who He Said He Is?**" If He is who He said He is, **then He's the authority**. Then you can figure out what He teaches about these issues. Do you realize how ridiculous it is to say, "I want to know whether I like your view of the issues? ... Is Jesus Christ the Son of God? Is He the Savior of Sinners? Is He the Creator? Is He the Judge?" You have to work on **that** first. Once you settle the question of authority, then you can ask these other questions.

Let me put it to you another way. I've had people say, "You know, I'd like to be a Christian, but some of these Scriptures say you can't marry a non-Christian and all these sorts of things ..." You know what I want to say? I say, "Are you kidding me?" If Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Judge of the earth and He says, "I want all Christians to only marry Christians ..." I mean, a lot of people struggle a great deal with that. **So What?** That's nothing. So the next 10 to 50 years I have to live with that command? That's nothing if I'm going to rule and reign with Him forever. If He really is who He said He is, then He has a right to ask for that. He's wise." Don't you see?

Could you say, "No, I want to marry whoever I want. Therefore, even though Jesus is who He said He is, even though He's the Son of God, even though He's the Judge of all the earth, even though He's the Savior who died for me, I can't come to Him." **Are you crazy?** What's the matter with you? You're not thinking. Jesus says you're misunderstanding Christianity. It's not a lack of **faith**. It's a lack of **sense**. If Jesus is who He said He is, then the **only rational response** is to do what He says, **regardless** of what He says ... if He's **the King** of the world, **the King** of the universe, **the King** of all Creation, then the **only rational response** is to **follow Him**. And you follow Him by doing what He says.

If He's not, then of course none of this makes any sense. That's what you have to work on. With all due respect, **who cares** what Jesus teaches about marriage? **Who cares** what He

teaches about sexuality? **Who cares** what He teaches about evolution? **First** you have to figure out **is He Him?**

He says, **“Follow Me.”** In other words, “I won’t deal with you about anything else until you decide how you are going to deal with Me. I’m not going to tell you about anything else. I’m not going to tell you why your life went this way or that way. You decide who’s the authority in your life. Is it you or me?”

**That’s the call.** Whenever I see people who just love to talk about theological issues or love to argue about creation and evolution or are fascinated with miracles and healing and so on, no offense, all these things are very interesting and very important, but that’s **never the first thing.**

If the Holy Spirit is really after you, if you’re really meeting the real Jesus who says, **“Follow Me!”** — You have to come to grips with that. You have to figure out **who He is**, and then you have to decide how you’re going to relate **to Him**. Then after that, you figure out what He teaches about **this** and **that** and what He’ll have us do. You don’t say, “Well, I’ll come to Jesus Christ **IF** I like His agenda.” You have to say, **“If He is** the Messiah, **if He is** the Christ, then I have to get with **His** agenda. His agenda would be life for me because He’s my Creator, He’s my Redeemer.” **Either He is** your Creator and your Redeemer and His agenda, whatever it is, is life for you, **or He’s not**, and you shouldn’t have anything to do with Him.

Have you heard that call? Have you heard Him come after you and say, **“Follow Me”**? Maybe today is the first day. Maybe for the first time you’re realizing, “Gee, Christianity isn’t just about getting more religious and adopting a set of ethics. It’s coming to grips with who’s **Lord** of my life, who’s **Savior** of my life ... me or Him? It’s all or nothing.”

First, a Christian is called **BY** someone, and that someone is Jesus. Next the way you know you’re called is because ...

#### **v. 10-13: A CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO SOMEONE**

Matthew’s life was revolutionized. So he decided to sponsor a reception in Jesus' honor, but a disagreement breaks out in the middle of the dinner. Notice Jesus and the Pharisees use two words back and forth that are very curious, starting at verse 10, *“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples.”*<sup>11</sup> *And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*<sup>12</sup> *But when He heard it, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”*<sup>13</sup> *Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the **righteous**, but **sinners**.”*

Now the reason this is curious is that elsewhere in the New Testament, both Paul and Jesus **reject** this way of talking about the **righteous** and **sinners**. For example, Paul says in **Romans 3:10**, *“None is righteous, no, not one.”* And in **Luke 18:19** we read, *“And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”* Now if Jesus says that and Paul says that, why are they using these terms here? Because this is how the Pharisees talk.

Let me show you what’s going on here. The Pharisees divide the world into good people and bad people. Matthew is a classic example of bad people. Matthew is a tax collector. Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the Romans, but they weren’t hated just because they were helping the oppressors, but because they bribed, lined their own pockets, and were corrupt.

It’s classic for people to say, “Well, there are little sins and there are big sins. There are good people who do little sins. I’m a good person. I do little sins. Of course, nobody is perfect.

‘To err is human, blah, blah, blah ...’ **However**, then there are the **bad** people who do the **BIG** sins.” Pharisee religion divides people between the good and the bad, between the little sins and big sins. What are the big sins? Well, things like bribery and extortion. Traditionally, crime and sexual irregularities are big sins.

So we see the bad people and the good people. The good people do things that are wrong, but they’re little sins. Ah, but you say, “Yes, but I’m beyond that now. I’m a tolerant person. I live in Northern Virginia.” But Pharisee religion is way more pervasive than you may realize. Pharisee religion is not just the way formal traditional religions operate; it’s the way the heart operates.

I was reading an interesting magazine article about what happened back in the 1950s. At the time Joe McCarthy was a United States Senator from Wisconsin. And Joe McCarthy was very much hated, all over the country, because he was going after people and accusing them of being a Communist.

It mentioned in the article that Joe McCarthy was a known sexual harasser. He was always grabbing and pinching his secretaries. He was always trying to embarrass them. He was always doing that sort of thing, but he was faithful to his wife. It says people tried very hard to bring Joe McCarthy down, but nobody ever thought about bringing up the issue of sexual harassment.

Why? **Because back then, that was a little sin**. If you were faithful to your wife, but you harassed your secretaries and were oppressive to women, that was a little sin. Being faithful to your wife, that was important. Adultery was a **big sin**. Sex outside of marriage was a **big sin**. Sexual harassment was a little sin. **Now it’s reversed**. Now sexual harassment is a **big sin**, and sex outside of marriage, not so much, won’t keep you out of elected office. Now here’s the point.

You may think, you may say, “These are big sins; these are little sins. I only do little sins. I don’t do the big sins. They’re the bad people. They’re what’s wrong with this world. They’re what’s wrong with this country. I’m okay.”

This means the reason you do these things, the reason you stay out of big sins and you only have little sins is so you can say, “God owes me. I’ve made sacrifices. I’ve said no all over the place. I’ve just said no to this and this and this. I believe in traditional values. I’ve done all these things. I go to church. I tithe. I fast. I do all these things, and therefore, God owes it to me to save me; God owes it to me to hear my prayers. God owes it to me. I only do little sins.”

And without actually coming out and saying it, the faith you’re professing with these kind of attitudes is that you think you’re really better than other people, you’re bringing your sacrifices, the things you’ve done. You defend yourself by your good works, by your sense of being superior to other people. You just look down your nose at lower-class America, the rest of the world, the other side of the County, you see? You feel superior. “I live here.” Look at your hearts. The Pharisees were obvious. The Pharisees brought their sacrifices, literal sacrifices. They brought their animal sacrifices. They brought their tithes. They brought their offerings. They looked down their nose at everybody, and they said, “God owes me a good life, because I have been better than other people.” **Luke 18:11**, *“The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’”* The Pharisee was obvious, but **everybody does it ... everybody does it**.

So Jesus comes and says, “I have nothing to say to people who live like that,” because you see, He’s descended into using the terminology of religious people. If **sinner**s means people

who do bad things, then *righteous* means people who think they're good. And there's a conservative and liberal approach to being a Pharisee. The conservatives say, "What's Jesus saying? What's He doing there, eating with the tax collectors and sinners? What are we talking about?" Jesus says, "These are the only people who will understand what I have to tell you. You have to see yourself as a moral failure, or we can't go on." The conservatives don't get that; the liberals don't either. They say, "Sinner? Sinner? How primitive! I'm okay. I'm better than most. Of course, I err. This is ridiculous!"

Do you know what Jesus says to all this? He says, verse 13, "*Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'*" He says, "I'm going to quote something from the Old Testament. I want you to go and learn what it means." He doesn't expect them to understand it right away. Being a Christian takes thinking. He says, "This is deep. It's going to take you a while to figure this out. I want you to study it. I want you to think about it. I want you to meditate on it. I want you to talk to other people about it. I want you to talk to Me." "***Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'***"

What's He mean? He's quoting from Hosea 6 and Isaiah 58, a couple of places in the Old Testament where the prophets come and say, "You fools! You bring your sacrifices to church, you bring your offerings, all this religious ritual ... Don't you understand that's not what God really wants?" This is what Jesus is saying. Now what does that mean? Well, I think it means a couple of things...

First of all, it means look at what God really wants for you; look at the love He requires. Look at the Law. Look where it says, **Matthew 22:37-39**, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*"<sup>38</sup> *This is the great and first commandment.*<sup>39</sup> *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" If God really created you (and 97 percent of Americans seem to believe this; that's what they report in the polls), then you owe Him **everything**. You should show Him tremendous love all the time. He should be number one in your life. Is He? Of course not. "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" is just the Golden Rule. Just treat your neighbor the way you would want to be treated. Meet your neighbor's needs the way you would meet your own. Does anybody do that? Of course not.

Jesus says, "Look away from your sacrifices and look at the mercy, look at the love God requires of you, and you'll be humbled into the dust." Do you know what this is? This is a mini version of the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "You've heard it said, 'Don't kill,' but I say to you, don't even resent." What does He mean? Look, here you are, and you're guilty of little sins, a grudge here or there, and here's somebody over there who has murdered.

He says, "Don't you realize the difference? Just as the entire oak forest at one time was in the acorn, and all it needed to let its power out was the proper environment (water and sunlight and so on), so murder is in your heart, no matter who you are. The only difference between you and that killer are the restraining forces that have kept your acorns on the shelf instead of letting them fall into some nice damp mud." If you look at your heart instead of your sacrifices, if you look at what God has required of you, it'll humble you.

Then, I think lastly, He's saying, "Look away from your sacrifices to the only mercy that'll save you ..." And **what's** the only mercy that'll save you? "... **Me!** I've come. Here I am eating with tax collectors and sinners." What He's really trying to say is the only way you will ever get out from under the problems you have is to look away from your sacrifices. "Don't

look and see what **you have done**; look at what **I have done**. Don't look at **your sacrifices**; **look at mine**." That's the thing that will smash the old wineskins. We're called **BY** someone, and we're called **TO** someone, and last, we learn that ...

#### v. 14-17: A CHRISTIAN IS CALLED FOR SOMEONE

*"Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made."<sup>17</sup> 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."*

Jesus Christ tells us, the Bible tells us, there has to be a breaking up of your old foundations. There has to be a revolution in the way you think about things. There has to be a smashing. Why? Because Christianity is new wine. When you put new wine into an old wineskin, the old wineskin doesn't have the flexibility. See how the metaphor works? The new wine begins to ferment. It begins to swell. It needs space, you see? It's organically and chemically active, and it will smash that wineskin. That's always the case with Christianity.

Look at Jesus Christ eating. Do you know what eating means? Eating was so much more to them than it is to us. To sit down and eat meant to have **close fellowship** with somebody. To eat with somebody is to say, "Let's have a **personal relationship**." Jesus Christ eats **with sinners**.

In fact, He says, "I **only** eat with sinners." Now first of all, are you like Jesus? How do you deal with moral failures? When people come and tell you about something they've done, where they've really failed, they've let themselves down, they've let God down, they've let your family down, how do you treat them? Are you impatient? Are you indignant? Do you say, "Why can't you pull yourself together?" Do they sense you really can't understand how they could have done such a thing? Even if you're not so stupid as to say, "You did what? How could anybody do that?" if that's your response, you are righteous in the sense that Jesus is talking about.

You don't believe that murder and all these awful things are in acorn form in your heart, then you don't believe you're a sinner like everybody else. As a result, you can't be sympathetic, and you can't give people like that hope. People don't tell you their problems. People don't feel embraced by you. You can't give them hope. You can't say, "Jesus runs to people like you. Jesus runs to the helpless. Jesus runs to the repentant. Jesus can't resist people who come to Him and open their hearts like this." Do you say that? Do they get that impression, or do they feel like you're kind of cold, you don't know what to do with people who do **that** sort of thing? How do you treat moral failures? That tells you whether you're a Pharisee or not. That tells you how much of a Pharisee there still is in your life.

Not just that, how do you deal with your own moral failures? When you let yourself down, when you fail and you're devastated and you can't face God and you can't face others and you can't face yourself in the mirror because you've utterly failed, that is also a sign your old self-righteous wineskin has never been smashed? When you let yourself down, when you let other people down, do you beat yourself up? Knock yourself around? Do you know what that shows? That shows that Jesus **isn't** your Savior; **you're** your own savior. Your God has died. There's nothing more despairing than that. Your real Savior is in ruins.

If Jesus is your Savior, if you've transferred all of your trust to Him ... well, Jesus eats with sinners. That's the reason why the Apostle Paul says, **Philippians 3:7-9**, "*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*"

"I used to look to my righteousness. I used to look to everything that I had done, and I thought, 'This means God owes me a good life.' I now realize my only hope is to be found in Jesus' righteousness." It says, "... **be found in Him** ..."

Jesus eating with these sinners is something that will just knock you flat if you understand it. It means **no matter** what you've done, **no matter** who you are, the distinction that Jesus recognizes is not between the good and the bad. The only distinction that divides humanity now is between **the proud** and **the humble**. That's the only one that counts. It's the only one that matters.

Are you willing to say, "Lord Jesus, I'm not worthy. You don't owe me a good life. You don't. You owe me nothing but wrath. God, be merciful to me, a sinner"? The minute that happens, He rushes in to eat with you. If you say, "You owe me a good life," the minute that happens, He says, "I haven't come for you." That's real Christianity. That's the gospel. That's simple. And that's profound. "**For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.**"

Think about that ... You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King, Your Son, our Savior. Thank You for giving us a picture of what it means to be a Christian. There are a number of us right now who probably don't even realize we're being called because our lives seem to be in tatters, but it could be You're trying to teach us Your strength is made perfect in weakness. It could be you're trying to get us to see our weakness, our need for You. So, Father, I pray the people here who realize they're being sought would answer Your call. Father, some of us are seeking very hard, and we can't seem to find You but, Lord, You will come to us if we say, "Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief. Show me Yourself." And most of all, help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.*

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### **Ephesians 2:8-10**

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*