

Intro

How should God's people relate to the world?

Some think combat. In America, we're in a culture war. We need to do whatever we can, by any means necessary, to win the battle. We need to regain lost ground. Non-Christians are the competition.

Some think retreat. America is too far gone. There's no coming back. We need to construct a Christian counter-culture that protects us from the world's influences. Non-Christians are the danger.

There's some truth to both. We should seek the good of our nation and its people. Christians should be engaged in politics, working for just laws and a peaceful society conducive to human flourishing. And we should beware of moral compromise. As our culture drifts further from its Christian-ish origins, we must be cautious to maintain a biblical worldview.

But a better model than combat or retreat is engage. Be a public Christian that neither antagonizes non-Christians nor isolates from non-Christians. We're called to be in the world, not of the world.

In Matthew 5, Jesus said that as we're salt and light in the world, sinners are converted. We can't be salt and light if we're combative. We can't be salt and light if we're retreating. And being salt and light requires time with sinners.

As we look into Matthew 9, we see Jesus doing just that: spending time with sinners.

CRUCIAL QUESTION: How does Jesus engage people?

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

FCF: lack of mercy; desperation

Grace given: forgiveness and divine help

Point 1: Jesus pursues sinners (9:1-13)

READ 9:1-13

Explanation

In the first episode, Jesus returns to Capernaum and he's greeted by requests to heal a paralytic (someone who couldn't walk). News has spread that Jesus can heal and "*Jesus saw their faith.*" But he also saw saving faith in the paralytic. So Jesus declares, "*Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.*"

Jesus' claim didn't sit well with the scribes (religious establishment) who questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins. How could a man declare another man to be forgiven of their sins? Only God can forgive sins. So they thought Jesus was committing blasphemy. To prove his authority to forgive sins, Jesus asks a question:

For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?

In other words, it's easier to make claims (your sins are forgiven) than it is to demonstrate your authority to do so. Anyone can make claims. But no one can make a paralytic walk. With a command ("*Rise, pick up your bed*

and go home") the paralytic walks. The crowds who witnessed the event are in awe and they glorify God = God is behind the healing.

Summary: we see Jesus doing what only God can do: forgiving sins. And we see the religious establishment opposing Jesus while his fame spreads.

In the second episode, Jesus calls Matthew to be a disciple. *Sitting at the tax booth* = Matthew was a tax collector.

Tax collectors were despised because they were considered both a traitor and a thief. They worked for Rome and they took from the Jews. They could impound goods when they suspected the goods hadn't been declared for taxation. And they charged more than required to keep some for themselves. Because they worked for the enemy and stole from their countrymen.

Matthew follows Jesus. In doing so, he gave up employment, wealth, and security to follow Jesus' in his travels. We shouldn't think of Matthew deciding on the spot to follow Jesus without prior knowledge. He'd likely seen miracles and heard Jesus teach. Matthew's response illustrates what we learned last week: disciples pledge their allegiance to Jesus, despite personal cost.

Next there's a gathering at Matthew's house (see Mark and Luke). Present at the gathering are Jesus, Matthew, tax collectors, and sinners. Sinners indicates an undesirable group like prostitutes and thieves. So Matthew was introducing his friends to Jesus. In that culture, sharing a meal was an act of identification and acceptance. Meals defined peer groups and social status.

This was a problem for the Pharisees. From the Pharisees' perspective, how could a holy teacher associate with sinners and fellowship with them? Didn't he know how wicked they were? Why would he befriend them? Spending time with sinners was foreign to the Pharisee mentality. They asked,

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus responded:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

This is a jab at the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought of themselves as well and righteous. They sacrificed, but were merciless. They thought they were acceptable to God and without need of forgiveness. But they were blind. This is what the Sermon on the Mount was getting at: Jesus desires transformed hearts that love God, their neighbors, their enemies, sinners, not external conformity to God's law. Better than refraining from murder is loving people.

The sick are sinners. People who recognize they've broken God's law and need mercy. People who recognize their need for mercy. People who show mercy because they've experienced God's forgiveness. The Pharisees are unmerciful because they've never experienced God's mercy. They're sick and they don't know it. They think ritual is enough. They have no heart for sinners.

Application

The obvious point is Jesus came to pursue sinners. And we should do the same.

Helpful is meditating on the mercy and forgiveness you've received. Any good in you, in me, owes to Jesus not ourselves. Apart from the Spirit, we were dead in our sins. Slaves to sin. Rebels. Helpless. Ruining ourselves and others. Yet the Father sent his Son, Jesus, to die in our place. And he sent messengers to us with the gospel. And he opened our hearts to heed what we heard. We've experienced mercy. We're called to extend that same mercy to sinners.

Jesus pursued sinners by sharing meals with them. We can do the same. Having sinners in your home assumes relationships with sinners which assumes contact with sinners which assumes time for sinners. This needs to be intentional, a priority. Too many church events = no time for sinners. If you don't have a suitable home, join your friends when they welcome sinners into their homes.

The local church is called to engage the world, not avoid the world or shun the world. We're called to engage people who aren't just like us. Including sinners who make us uncomfortable. Some are gifted with hospitality, but we all should be hospitable in some way. If sinners want to be in your home, it's a good thing.

My failure/struggle

- never had neighbors in our home & barely talked
- kids playing with a neighbor's kid and we're too concerned about our kids being led astray (will they learn bad words?)
- good with co-workers and forced environments, but not good at creating relationships
- never spent time with co-workers outside work because of too much schoolwork, church activity, and young family = never intentionally prioritized it
- will I be led into sin if I go out to eat with them?
→ too much fear and too little love for unbelievers
- no non-Christian co-workers = need to manufacture it & I really struggle = I am a learner just like you

How do we do it?

- 1) Pray for opportunities
- 2) Interact don't isolate
- 3) Be a good acquaintance = express interest in people's lives
- 4) Be a neighbor for the long haul
- 5) Invite to your home for a meal, to small group, and to church
- 6) Intentionally take part in town functions that puts you in company with non-Christians (basketball Thursday, coaching, historical society) = be a fellow citizen
- 7) Be ready when people ask
- 8) My brother's pursuit (Sam and Keith)

I'm not saying go to strip clubs or dance clubs. I'm saying have non-Christians in your home. I'm not saying violate your conscience. I'm saying spend time with non-Christians. I'm not saying accept and approve immoral behavior. I'm saying care about non-Christians.

A word of caution. People aren't projects. We can befriend people, we can be a trusted resource, but we can't force people to follow Jesus.

- Duchesneau
- Gary's Bible study

Church goal = outward focus (ensure you're cared for while insuring we're working to reach our community = every member ministry)

If you're despairing about unbelieving family and friends. If it appears they're locked into anti-Christian ideologies, false religions, specific immorality, contentment in a life of pleasure, remember Matthew. Matthew was a despicable tax collector, yet he gave up sin and became an apostle = anyone can be saved. All I have to do is remember myself.

Point 2: Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him (9:14-34)

READ 9:14-34

Explanation

Last week we looked at some similar events. We saw Jesus' authority over illness, disease, nature, and demons. Jesus wasn't a mere man. Jesus was God the Son in human flesh. We saw the nature of exceptional faith: Faith trusts in God's ability. Faith humbly asks of God. And faith submits to God's will.

In the first episode, John's disciples are troubled by the fact that they and the Pharisees fast (twice a week per Luke 18:12?), yet Jesus' disciples don't. Jesus explains the reason: wedding guests don't fast while the bridegroom is with them. They fast when he goes away. Jesus is the bridegroom. He disciples shouldn't be fasting while he's with them. Now is a time for celebration, not mourning. The kingdom has arrived and God is fulfilling his promises (e.g., the Messiah has come per Isaiah 53). They can fast when Jesus is taken away (e.g., when he's crucified). Just like you don't put new wine into old wineskins, you don't fast while God the Son, the Messiah, is dwelling with you. You fast when he's gone.

Illustration: parents don't mourn while their children are in the house...they mourn when they have an empty nest

The second episode adds a new wrinkle: Jesus has authority over death. A ruler (Jairus, a synagogue ruler – Mark 5:22) approaches Jesus. His daughter has died, but he believes Jesus can revive her:

"My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

On the way to Jairus' daughter, a desperate woman pursues Jesus. She's suffered from menstrual bleeding for 12 years. Mark tells us she had spent all that she had on several physicians, but they couldn't help her (Mark 5:25-26). She trusts Jesus can do what doctors can't:

"If I only touch his garment, I will be made well."

Jesus responds:

"Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

Faith didn't guarantee her healing. Jesus had to will her healing. But Jesus responded to her faith affirmatively. **Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him.** Healing was immediate. Jesus made his way to Jairus' home where he encountered paid, professional mourners playing the flute and a large crowd. Jesus assured them the

girl wasn't dead, but they laughed at him. Apparently, raising the dead was assumed impossible. Jesus touched her hand and she arose.

The third episode features the healing of two blind men. This is notable in two ways. First, restoring sight to the blind was unheard of.

John 9:32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

Second, these men called Jesus the Son of David = they believed he was the Messiah. Two men, in their blindness, pursued Jesus crying out:

"Have mercy on us, Son of David."

They followed Jesus even to the house where he was staying. He questioned their faith:

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They responded affirmatively: *"Yes, Lord."* Jesus responded: *"According to your faith be it done to you."*

Again, Jesus responded to their faith with yes, I'll heal you. **Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him.** But Jesus warned them not to spread news of these healings. Jesus didn't want the fact that he was Messiah getting out. He didn't want to incite the Romans or the religious establishment. And he didn't want a mob to look to him for freedom from Roman oppression. Jesus came to die as a suffering servant, not to overthrow Rome. The Jews expected a Messiah that would overthrow Rome.

The fourth episode involves demons once again. A demon-oppressed man was mute and couldn't speak = the cause of his inability to speak was demons. Jesus cast out the demon the mute man could speak. Like the healing of the blind, *"Never was anything like this seen in Israel."*

While the crowds marveled, Pharisee opposition grew. They attributed his power to Satan. Please note a demon directly caused this handicap, but demons don't cause all handicaps (e.g., the man born blind in John 9:1-3).

Application

Matthew presents Jesus as God the Son, the Jewish Messiah. He has authority to forgive sins, he heals where doctors are helpless, he raises the dead, he restores sight to the blind, and he casts out demons. Because he's God.

We also see that **Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him.** Jesus responds to desperate sinners. Jesus responds to faith. Jesus helped with physical needs. He helps in other ways too. If you find yourself in a season of desperation, turn to Jesus. Humbly ask Jesus for help, like a toddler approaches their parents for food and drink. Help comes in numerous forms = hope of eternal life, comfort, new perspective, strength to endure, fellowship and support. Believers, **Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him.**

→ sometimes help is resolving the problem...sometimes help is strength to endure the problem

→ relational challenges, physical challenges, financial challenges, breaking sinful patterns

If you wouldn't identify as a Christian. While Jesus doesn't guarantee physical healing, he does guarantee spiritual help if we pursue him desperately. If we trust in him, not ourselves. If we pursue Jesus on his own terms, he'll meet us in our desperation. **Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him.** The path to help is faith and repentance. Faith that Jesus is good. That he cares. That he'll forgive us of our sins if we trust in him (sin = breaking God's law). Repentance meaning a changed posture towards sin. The attitude that sin is treason against God and it destroys us. Repent by pursuing Jesus rather than sin.

If you find yourself unable to overcome your sin, you're not alone. The entire human race is infected by sin. But Jesus sends help when we turn to him. Like Jesus can make the blind see, he can change the desires of our hearts and set us free from destructive patterns. Need help = see me.

Conclusion

Jesus came to save sinners. He pursued sinners and dined with them. Likewise, we his followers, should do the same. Jesus calls us to engage the world. To pursue sinners, mingle with sinners, and extend hope to sinners through the gospel.

Jesus helps desperate people that trust in him. Trust in Jesus, not yourselves. If Jesus can raise the dead, he can set you free from destructive patterns.

Befriend sinners. God may use you to extend blessing to desperate people.