

The sermon

Intro

During the advent season we remember the birth of a unique child: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, God the Son who took on human flesh, being born in a manger.

This advent season we'll consider the question, why did Jesus come? On Sunday mornings we'll look at four reasons Jesus gave in the gospels.

This morning we learn that Jesus came for the sick. What does physical sickness have to do with Jesus' mission?

READ PASSAGE

Body

BIG IDEA: Jesus came to cure sick human hearts

Point 1: Imitate Jesus by eating with sinners (9:9-11)

As Jesus passed on from there,

While walking Jesus saw a man sitting at a tax collector's booth named Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector.

Jesus says, "Follow me." Getting out of his seat Matthew follows Jesus, wherever he was going. This means giving up his lucrative job and going on the road with Jesus. **Luke 5:28** says, "*And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*" It appears he stopped collecting taxes on the spot.

We shouldn't think of Matthew deciding on the spot without prior knowledge. He'd likely seen miracles and heard Jesus teach. Matthew is in Capernaum (Mark 2:1), where Jesus had already made a name for himself by preaching, healing the sick, and casting out demons (Matt 4:13, 17, 23-25).

9:10

The scene shifts from Jesus' travel route to Matthew's house.

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. – 9:10

Luke 5:29 indicates the house was Matthew's and the feast was for Jesus: "*And Levi made him a great feast in his house.*"

So we have Jesus, Matthew, Jesus' disciples (including apostles like Peter, Andrew, James, John – Matt 4:18-22), and Matthew's friends who were tax collectors and sinners. Sitting down to enjoy a large feast with one another. Matthew was wealthy off his tax collecting.

Not everyone's happy about this.

9:11

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" – 9:11

Pharisees

The Pharisees held no power (e.g. priestly authority), but they were the most influential because of their popularity with the common people. They were the supposed experts of Old Testament law who devised scrupulous, extrabiblical

applications of purity, tithing, and Sabbath obedience. They were orthodox interpreters of Scripture: they believed in life after death, providence, the spirit world, etc.

Tax collectors

Tax collectors were despised. They were private contractors who paid Roman authorities for the right to collect taxes. Their rights included ability to impound goods when they suspected the goods hadn't been declared for taxation and confiscating flocks that used public pasture. That's stopping you on the spot to charge you unexpected fees.

They were traitors because they worked for the Roman Empire who occupied Israel. And they were thieves because they charged more than required in order to keep the extra for themselves.

Sinners

Sinners would include tax collectors, thieves, prostitutes, drunkards, gluttons, etc.

That's Jesus accepting an invitation to be the guest of honor at the home of someone who held the most despised occupation in the country. And sitting down for a meal with numerous ungodly people.

This disturbed the Pharisees: "*Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?*" Why would the Pharisees think like this?

- 1) Luke 18:11 indicates they think they're better than this sort of people.
- 2) They aren't interested in seeing sinners reconciled to God.
- 3) They might think contact with sinners defiles the righteous.
- 4) They might think eating with sinners will ruin their reputation, credibility, etc.

A holy man eating with sinners. Shocking!

- 5) They might think that shunning sinners is obeying God.

In the Old Covenant, they couldn't marry Gentiles or eat their food.

- 6) In that culture sharing a meal could be understood as affirming sin.

On the other hand, Jesus wasn't concerned about public opinion. Jesus wasn't afraid of defilement. Jesus had convictions for sure. But his convictions didn't prevent him from feasting with sinners.

Application

The picture is a new believer introducing all his unbelieving friends to Jesus and his followers. For us, the new believer introducing all his unbelieving friends and family to his new church friends.

Think your church leaders going to a feast put on by a newly converted drunkard where all his foul mouthed and drunken friends will be present. Would you want to go? Would you be a little intimidated and uncomfortable? Would you be afraid of appearances? Would you fear contamination?

Whose home would you feel uncomfortable entering? Muslims? Jehovah's Witnesses? A gay couple? A male and female couple who aren't married but live together? A liberal town selectman? A marijuana grower?

Who would you feel uncomfortable inviting into your home?

Evangelism is messy. Evangelism is uncomfortable. Evangelism is a spiritual battle. Evangelism requires standing firm in God's armor. Evangelism involves feasting with sinners.

Point 2: Imitate Jesus by showing mercy to sinners (9:12-13)

But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. – 9:12

The Pharisees addressed the disciples. Jesus overheard the conversation. Jesus describes the tax collectors and sinners as “*those who are sick.*” What exactly is sickness and disease?

Sickness or illness generally means the physical disturbances we experience: headache, sore throat, the shivers, hacking up phlegm, body aches, etc. On the other hand, disease generally means an abnormal condition in the body that affects the structure or function of body organs and systems.

[see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disease>]

In other words, something wrong on the inside creates external effects hacking up phlegm.

For example, the flu happens when someone with the flu coughs or sneezes on you. If you inhale droplets containing flu viruses, these viruses infect your cells and make copies of themselves. Once infected, these viruses trigger inflammation in your body, which produces the symptoms you experience (e.g., exhaustion, stuffy nose). It’s possible that the inflammation can be severe and cause major problems like lung damage.

[see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfX6xGdQco0>]

Jesus isn’t talking about physical sickness. He’s talking about a condition of the heart. Not the physical organ. No, our thoughts, attitudes, desires, affections, the things we love and long for, our emotional responses. Physical sickness is a picture of heart sickness. Our inner being is diseased.

Jeremiah 17:9 says it like this:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? – Jeremiah 17:9

So Jesus means there’s an infection in our thoughts, attitudes, desires, affections, the things we love and long for, our emotional responses, a structural and functional breakdown in our inner being that produces external symptoms: lies, theft, harsh words, violence, etc.

Illustration: Lewiston shooter

On October 25th Robert Card opened fire at a bowling alley and restaurant in Lewiston, Maine killing 18 and injuring 13 people. Maybe you’re wondering how could someone do that? My wife asked me what causes a person to go that dark. We believe everyone comes into the world with a sinful nature, sinful bent, but few go this far. Why?

Jesus has a brief answer that directly addresses the question:

*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, **murder**, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. – Matthew 15:19*

Do you see what Jesus is saying? Murder arises from an infected heart that is structurally unsound. Murder arises from an inner being that is diseased.

Jesus doesn’t seem shocked. He understands human brokenness. He states it in blunt terms. Murder is a direct cause of a disordered heart.

Ought we to be disturbed? Yes. Ought we to have a healthy fear of dangerous individuals? Yes. Ought we to be sad and grieved? Yes. Ought we to be angry? Yes. Ought we to be shocked? I’m not so sure.

As for explanations of how a person descends to this level of darkness, answers include:

- 1) In Romans 1, God gives people over to sexual immorality (Rom 1:24-28) because of previous failure to worship God (Rom 1:18-23).

There's a principle where repeated and settled rejection of God's truth leads to a dark place. That's self-inflicted darkness and God removing restraint.

- 2) 1 Timothy 4:2 speaks of consciences being seared.
- 3) In Exodus, there's an interplay where both God and Pharaoh harden his heart.

In 1 Samuel 16:14, after repeated disobedience, "*a harmful spirit from the LORD*" torments Saul. Saul proceeded to attempt to kill David.

- 4) In Mark 5:1-20, there's a demon-possessed man doing bizarre things and inflicting himself with stones.

After Jesus removes the demons, the man is sane and the region is shocked.

- 5) There's sinful internal attitudes that arise from a sick heart like selfishness, jealousy, lust, greed, hatred, unforgiveness, anger, etc.

Murder can stem from something as simple as estate/will disputes between siblings. Why was Matthew cheating his countrymen out of money by charging more than required? Maybe greed for money? Maybe lust for possessions? A sick heart leads to unjust behavior.

- 6) Sinful response to being sinned against.

A lust for revenge darkens the heart.

- 7) Trauma from an abusive home or the battlefield can darken a person.
- 8) Drug and alcohol use can send a person into a dark place.

Whatever the case, because of the fall, each of us is born into the world with a disordered heart. Our disordered hearts manifest themselves in various ways, but the external behaviors and internal attitudes are proof of the sickness. Jesus lumps murder with sexual immorality and lying and slander. Each are an expression of an infected heart. The root of every sin struggle we have is our diseased heart! Why did Jesus come? One reason is to heal our inner being.

Jesus follows his analysis of the human heart with this statement:

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'

Pharisees, your attitude towards sinners is off. The Pharisees emphasize external duty (sacrifice) to the neglect of internal health (mercy). They go about their religious duties (Bible reading, church attendance, giving) blind to God's mercy. The Pharisees search and teach the Scriptures, but they have no heart for sinners.

If we have no mercy towards sinners, we don't get God's mercy. And we don't get ourselves. If what Jesus says about the heart is true, it's true of people who've believed. I was a person with an infected heart with disordered desires in need of God's mercy.

I was in the sinner category. I was sick. I needed to be fixed. I needed to be forgiven. I needed to understand the cross. I needed to acquire wisdom. I needed God to give me a new heart with new desires. I needed God's mercy.

Having experienced God's mercy, how could I not be merciful to those in the same exact condition I found myself in? How could I not have pity on people enslaved to disordered passions? How could I not imitate God's mercy to me?

Truth

Our inner being is sick from birth. Sickness is manifested in society in diverse ways. Sexual immorality. Theft. False witness. Slander. Narcissism. Racism. Greed. Selfishness. Hatred. People angry with God's truth. And murder. We need God's mercy!

For the believer, remnants of the sickness remain. We're no longer slaves to sin, but we have to fight our own hearts for unity, humility, generosity, patience with each other, etc.

If we understand the gospel and our own hearts at all, we can't help but sympathize with the plight of sinners. Jesus feasting with sinners models God's mercy for us. Can we blend hatred for sin and grief over active shooters with mercy for the sick? I think we can.

It's not that hard to empathize with sinners when we know our Bibles and our own hearts.

Point 3: Imitate Jesus by inviting sinners to repent (9:13)

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Luke's account adds:

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." – **Luke 5:32**

Jesus is being ironic. The Pharisees are "*Those who are well [and] have no need of a physician.*" The Pharisees are "*the righteous.*" Or so they think. As long as a person sees themselves as well, they will never see their need for Jesus. As long as a person sees themselves as righteous, they will never see their need for Jesus. The Pharisees are sick and they don't even know it.

But if a person sees themselves as sick and sinful, well, Jesus came for that person.

Invite repentance

Call here means invite. Specifically calling people to repent.

The Hebrew word for repent means a change of direction. To go in the opposite direction. An about face. A 180. To turn from autonomy (independence, self-government) and sinful pursuits to follow Jesus.

The Greek word for repent means a change of mind. To think about life in a whole new way. To have a different attitude towards God's authority and God's word. To think about sin differently.

Jesus allows people to come to him as they are. But he doesn't allow people to stay as they are. Jesus came to invite people to repent!

Jesus says you're sick. I want to heal your disordered heart. I want to set you free from broken patterns. I want to make you new.

Application

How can we invite sinners to repent if we avoid them like the plague?

Here Jesus links inviting repentance with feasting with sinners and having a merciful heart. We need all three. Evangelism involves dining with sinners, a merciful attitude towards sinners, and a courage to invite them to turn from their sin by trusting and following Jesus.

One way Jesus pursued sinners was by sharing meals with them. As meals were shared, questions were asked and truth was shared. What can we do?

Spend time with our unbelieving family. If we still have friendships with non-Christians, spend time with them. The sad reality is that new Christians often have way more non-Christian contact than people who've been saved for decades. We tend to isolate after salvation.

- 1) Be where people are.
- 2) Make room in your life for non-Christians.
- 3) Pray for relationships and meals and conversations.
- 4) Be a good acquaintance taking interest in people's lives.
- 5) Be a good neighbor for the long haul.
- 6) Take part in town functions.
- 7) Care about people for the sake of caring about them.

Conclusion

If you're thinking about following Jesus, we're patient with you and happy you're here. We'll give you time to feast with us. We'll give you time to understand the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. We'll give you time to process your questions.

The good news is Jesus died on the cross so that whoever believes can be saved from their sins and have eternal life. God is merciful. He understands your condition. Jesus came to invite you to repent. And to cure sick human hearts.