

Pastor Shaun Arndt
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Sermon Text – Matthew 9:9-13
Pentecost 3

WHAT KIND OF SINNER ARE YOU?

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are two kinds of people in this world. On one hand, there are those who are terribly and deeply flawed inside and out, unrighteous, awful sinners in desperate, constant need of God's mercy and rescue. And on the other hand, there are those who are terribly and deeply flawed inside and out, unrighteous, awful sinners in desperate, constant need of God's mercy and rescue. So, **which one are you?**

Yes, I said that all correctly. And yes, that means there is only one kind of people—all people are **sinners**. For this is exactly the point our Gospel lesson makes as it contrasts **Tax Collectors** and **Pharisees**, so that we may see the most beautiful answer to the question: **What kind of sinner are you?**

It had to be a shock to everyone, except Jesus, that He chose **Matthew**, a *tax collector*, to be one of His disciples!

People saw tax collectors as traitors to their own country, siding with the Roman conquerors. The Roman tax system allowed them to forcibly take extra money from their countrymen to fill their own pockets. That made them known as lying, legalized thieves. We have every reason to think that was true of **Matthew** before the Lord called him to forgiveness and a new life and the **tax collectors** who came to Matthew's house. After all, the Son of God plainly says they were **not righteous, but sinners**.

On the other hand, we have **the Pharisees**. The people considered the Pharisees the religious elite. They knew the Bible well, especially its laws and commands that they worked tirelessly to obey. They were regular in worship, generous in their offerings, patriotic, law abiding Israelites.

Oh the Pharisees looked great on the outside, nothing like the obviously corrupt **tax collectors** they despised. But despite all of this sacrifice, hard work and dedication all in the name of God, they didn't really know God at all. So Jesus takes them back to the Bible, quoting from the book of Hosea: **Go and learn what this means 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'**

Now it's true that the LORD commanded sacrifices in Old Testament worship, but the whole reason was to teach God's **mercy**.

Every animal sacrificed was a sermon to teach that people are sinners who deserve God's judgment of death and hell. But it was not the people who died, but an innocent victim who took their place to save them. So every sacrifice pointed ahead to the promised Savior, the **Lamb of God** who would die in the sinner's place to **take away the sins of the world**.

This forgiving, saving **mercy** of God was meant to lead forgiven sinners to gratefully bring their offerings to God with true joy and thanks for all His kindness and then to show that same kind of love and mercy to their fellow sinners.

Like what we see with **Matthew** when after experiencing Jesus' **mercy** that called him, he immediately threw a dinner party so that he could introduce his coworkers, his fellow **tax collectors and sinners** to Jesus and His **mercy**.

But the Pharisees wanted nothing to do with **mercy** for such **sinners**, since they failed to see themselves as sinners in need of God's **mercy**. For they had turned sacrifices into something they were never meant to be, into a way for them to do good things to show how much they deserved God's blessings, to earn their way to God.

So the **Pharisees** saw themselves as **righteous**—right with God by all the good things they did. But the Son of God disagreed: **I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**

Now Jesus is the Savior for all people. So if He has **not come** for the **righteous**, it means there is no one who is righteous before God by what they do, just as the Psalm says: **there is no one who is righteous, not even one** (Psalm 1:1-3/Romans 3:10). That means all people are **sinners**, regardless of what the Pharisees or anyone else thinks! To say otherwise, to say that human beings can be right with God by what they do is to call God a liar!

So the **Pharisees** thought they were spiritually healthy, but it turns out they were just as sick with sin as the **tax collectors**. And tragically that meant they didn't want anything to do with Jesus, the **Physician** for sin sick souls.

So, **What kind of sinner are you?** Let me answer for myself. **What kind of sinner am I?** The answer is "*Yes,*" "*Both,*" or "*All.*" I am sick unto death with **sin** and in desperate need of God's **mercy** every moment, every hour! **I need** Jesus! My sincere prayer is that you say the same thing.

After all, it's what God says is true in His Word: **All have sinned** (Romans 3:23).

Maybe we haven't used legal loopholes to rob our countrymen like **tax collectors**, but the same commandment of God that forbids stealing condemns us for every second of God's gift of time we've wasted like through laziness instead of only getting the rest we need and every way we have failed to be content, thinking if I just had this, or just had that, then I would truly be happy (never mind that it never worked in the past!)

The fact is we have a sinful rebellious nature that just loves to push back against what God says—not just in the wrong we do, but in the good we leave undone. Oh how that sinful nature leads us to do and think things we would be ashamed for others to know!

And yes, the heart of the self-justifying Pharisee also lives inside me as I know it does in you. If you want to say otherwise you actually prove the point!

Just consider, what's our first reaction when someone tells us we are wrong? Do we immediately say, 'you are right, I am a sinner in need of God's mercy', or don't we often first throw up our defenses and make our excuses: "I only ate too much because the food was so good... I only get so worked up about those political posts on social media because the "other side" always says such dumb things..."

Dear friends, it is the path of the Pharisee to excuse or defend our sin. It's another way of saying, you know I don't really need Jesus, not *that* much...

Maybe we've never shown the spiritual stink eye to a **tax collector**, but what about when we learn about people living in defiance to what God says. Do we shake our heads with contempt (to makes us feel better about ourselves)? Or do we take the path of **mercy** God **desires**, not excusing the wrong, but praying for that person, that God might change their heart and lead them to repentance and faith so that they would join us in heaven's joys!?

I don't need to go on, do I? You see it right? Even if we can't fully grasp it, let us take God's Word for it! **What kind of sinner are you?** "Yes."

If by God's grace you believe that by all you or I could bring to the table we are 'lost and condemned sinners', then rejoice and be glad! No, don't rejoice in your sin or treasure it, for it is evil and deadly. But rejoice that by God's grace, you know you need **mercy**, because that is what your God is all about, just as He said: **I desire mercy...** And He always practices what He preaches!

Rather than abandoning us to the hell our every sin deserves, He showed His **desire** for **mercy** by sending His Son to save us!

In mercy, Jesus gave himself to rescue us as we heard in the second lesson: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners** (1 Timothy 1:15).

Wait, who did we say we were? **Sinners**. And who did Jesus come to save? **Sinners**. That means you can be sure, 100% absolutely sure that Jesus came into the world to save you, to give you everlasting life with God. Listen to Him say it again: **I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners**.

As a **sinner**, rejoice to know that means Jesus came to live, die and rise for you, to give you His holiness, to pull you away from hell and give you everlasting life. Jesus paid the price for all sin—sins of **Tax collectors** and **sins of Pharisees**—your sins and my sins—the sins when we foolishly rebelled, the sins when we foolishly made excuses for ourselves and looked down on others—all paid for in full, washed away, drown in the depths of the sea—you are forgiven—take God's word on that too!

What kind of sinner are you? One for whom Jesus died. One whom Christ has declared forgiven and righteous in His sight, not because you did anything, but because He did everything!

Need further assurance? In your baptism Jesus called you to follow Him to His free gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, just as surely as He called Matthew. Remember, it was not Matthew who chose Jesus, but Jesus who chose Matthew, just as He chose you in baptism!

Jesus **ate and drank** with sinners in Matthew's house. In the Lord's Supper He does more than eat alongside of us, He actually feeds us with His own body and blood and the forgiveness of sins His body and blood won on the cross! And that blessed Meal is just a little foretaste of that never-ending heavenly banquet He has prepared for all who trust in Him!

What kind of sinner are you? One who needs Jesus! One who also has in Jesus everything you need now and forever.

And that's why we keep coming here to worship isn't it? And that's why we want others to know, to invite other fellow sinners into our community to join us here. For, it has been well said: *the church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners*. Here by God's grace we come as we are, as He shows us to be: empty and undeserving, broken and distressed with sin. But here Jesus our great **Physician** comes in His Word to forgive and heal us and make us whole with His **mercy**.

What kind of sinner are you? One loved and saved by Christ. Amen.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. Amen.