



Message: ***A Seat at the Table*** | June 7, 2026 | Speaker: **Pastor Eddie Eddy**

Matthew 9:9-13 ⁹As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Leader: *This is the Word of God for the people of God* **People:** *Thanks be to God*

A Seat at the Table

One of the things I've noticed about Jesus is that He had a way of making religious people uncomfortable. Not because He compromised the truth... but because He refused to give up on people. He saw value where others only saw failure. He saw possibility where others only saw baggage. And honestly, that's good news for every one of us, because if Jesus only came for people who had it all together, most of us would be in trouble.

Our scripture today opens with a very simple moment. Jesus is walking along and He sees a man named Matthew sitting at a tax collector's booth. Now to us, that might not sound like a big deal, but in that culture tax collectors were some of the most disliked people around. They worked for the Roman government. They collected taxes from their own people, and many of them became wealthy by overcharging people and pocketing the difference. Matthew likely had money. Stability. Influence. He probably had nicer things than many of the fishermen Jesus had already called.

But there was a cost to that lifestyle.

People may have done business with Matthew, but they didn't invite him over for dinner. Parents probably warned their children about becoming like him. Religious people would have viewed him as spiritually compromised. He had wealth... but very little respect. He had income... but probably very few genuine relationships.

And I wonder if somewhere deep down Matthew knew it.

Because sometimes you can have everything the world says should make you happy... and still feel empty.

We see that all the time today. People chase promotions, bigger homes, more followers online, nicer vehicles, more recognition... and then they finally get it and realize the achievement didn't fix what was broken inside. You can fill a garage and still feel lonely. You can build a career and still feel restless. You can smile in public while privately wondering, "Is this really all there is?"

So when Jesus walks up and says, "Follow me," maybe Matthew heard more than just two words.

Maybe for the first time in years somebody looked at him and saw more than a tax collector.

Maybe Jesus saw the man underneath the reputation.

Maybe Matthew had heard whispers about this rabbi who healed people, forgave sinners, touched lepers, and spoke about God with authority and compassion. Maybe Matthew had spent enough nights sitting alone counting money to realize money wasn't enough anymore.

And suddenly the security of the tax booth didn't feel as valuable as the possibility of a new life.

I can almost picture the moment.

The coins are stacked on the table.

People are walking past.

The disciples are standing there watching.

And Matthew has a choice to make.

Stay where it's safe...or follow the One who somehow sees beyond his failures.

And the amazing thing is... he gets up and walks away.

That's no small thing. Matthew wasn't leaving behind a side hustle. He was walking away from financial security. Walking away from comfort. Walking away from a system that benefited him.

Because when Jesus truly calls you, there comes a moment where you realize you can't keep holding onto your old life with one hand while trying to follow Him with the other.

That doesn't always mean you change jobs or move across the country. Sometimes following Jesus means He changes your heart before He ever changes your address. Sometimes He calls you to stay right where you are... but to live differently there.

I think about people today who encounter Jesus in ordinary places. It might be a guy sitting in a deer stand realizing that the silence around him is louder than the noise in his life. It might be a mom driving kids back and forth all week suddenly realizing she's exhausted because she's trying to carry burdens she was never meant to carry alone. It might be somebody lying awake at 2 a.m. scrolling through social media, seeing everybody else's "perfect" life while quietly wondering why they still feel empty inside.

Jesus still walks into ordinary places and says, "Follow me."

And here's where the story gets really interesting. Matthew doesn't just quietly disappear into the crowd after following Jesus. He throws a dinner party. And he invites all his friends. The problem is... his friends were the exact kind of people the religious crowd didn't want around. Tax collectors. Sinners. Outcasts. The people respectable church folks would probably avoid at the grocery store.

And there sits Jesus... right in the middle of them.

I think sometimes we forget how radical that was. Jesus wasn't sitting at a table full of polished church people pretending they had life figured out. He was sitting with messy people. Broken people. Imperfect people. People with baggage and bad reputations and complicated stories.

Which honestly sounds a lot like the church today.

But the Pharisees couldn't handle it. They look at the disciples and ask, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

In other words: "Why is Jesus associating with those people?"

And before the disciples can even answer, Jesus steps in. I love that about Jesus. He doesn't leave them hanging. He says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

Now think about that for a moment.

Jesus didn't deny people were broken. He didn't pretend sin wasn't real. But He also didn't avoid broken people. He moved toward them.

That's the difference.

Because sometimes religion teaches people to hide their wounds. Jesus invites people to bring them to Him.

I heard somebody say recently that social media has turned us all into our own public relations managers. Everybody posts the highlight reel. The vacation pictures. The smiling family photos. The filtered version of life. But behind the scenes people are struggling with anxiety, loneliness, addiction, fear, broken marriages, grief, guilt, and spiritual exhaustion.

And the danger is that after awhile we start believing everybody else is doing fine except us.

But Jesus says, "I came for the sick."

That means you don't have to fake it with Him.

You don't have to pretend you have it all together.

You don't have to clean yourself up before you come to Christ.

Because grace meets us before we're fixed.

That's the beauty of the Gospel.

And then Jesus says something powerful. He tells the Pharisees, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

In other words, God isn't impressed with religious performance that lacks compassion.

I remember hearing about a young waitress working the late shift at a diner. She was struggling financially, trying to care for her little boy while juggling two jobs. One night a church group came in after an event. They prayed before the meal. Talked loudly about faith and scripture. But when the bill came, several complained about the service, left a tiny tip, and walked out frustrated.

A little while later another customer quietly asked the waitress if she was okay. She broke down crying right there at the counter. The customer listened, encouraged her, and before leaving handed her enough money to cover groceries for the week.

Now let me ask you something... which one looked more like Jesus?

That's what Jesus was confronting in the Pharisees.

Because sacrifice without mercy becomes performance.

Religion without compassion becomes cold.

Truth without grace becomes a weapon instead of an invitation.

Jesus is saying, "Don't just go through religious motions while ignoring hurting people sitting right in front of you."

You can attend church every Sunday.

You can know the hymns.

You can quote scripture.

You can look spiritually polished on the outside.

But if your heart has no mercy, you've missed the heart of God.

Because mercy is what Jesus modeled over and over again.

He touched lepers nobody else would touch.

He defended women everybody else condemned.

He stopped for blind beggars others ignored.

He welcomed children the disciples tried to push away.

And here He is sitting at a table with people society rejected.

Jesus constantly moved toward people others moved away from.

And I think the church has to hear that today.

Because it's easy for churches to become country clubs for comfortable people instead of hospitals for hurting people. It's easy to get so focused on preserving traditions that we forget there are people outside these walls desperate for hope.

Listen... people don't need another lecture about how broken the world is. Most of them already know they're hurting. What they need is to encounter the mercy of Jesus Christ through His people.

That doesn't mean we abandon truth. Jesus never abandoned truth. But He always carried truth and grace together.

And if we're going to follow Jesus, we have to learn how to do the same.

The truth is, every one of us in this room is Matthew in some way. Every one of us has things we're ashamed of. Every one of us has moments we wish we could undo. Every one of us needs grace.

The difference is not that some people need Jesus and others don't.

The difference is whether we recognize it.

That's why the church should never become a place where people feel they have to hide their struggles. It should be the one place where people can come honestly and say, "I need Jesus."

And maybe today that's you.

Maybe you've been trying to stay in control of everything.

Maybe you've been carrying guilt for years.

Maybe you've wandered farther from God than you ever intended.

Maybe you feel unworthy or overlooked or spiritually exhausted.

Then hear this clearly today:

Jesus still calls people like Matthew.

Jesus still sits at tables with broken people.

Jesus still offers mercy over condemnation.

Jesus still says, "Follow me."

And the beautiful thing is this:

when Jesus calls you, He's not just calling you away from something...

He's calling you into life. He is offering you a seat at the table.

To God be the glory. Amen

Invitation to the Table

Today we come to a table that reminds us who Jesus is and who we are.

This is not a table for people who have everything figured out.

This is not a reward for the perfect or the polished.

This is the table of Jesus Christ, who sat with tax collectors and sinners, who welcomed the overlooked, who offered mercy to the broken, and who came not for the healthy, but for those who know they need grace.

So if you come today hungry for hope...if you come carrying burdens...if you come longing for forgiveness, peace, or renewal...then come.

Come not because you are worthy, but because Christ is merciful.

Come because Jesus still invites people like Matthew... and people like us.

Closing Prayer and Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God,

Thank you for meeting us again through your Word, your presence, and your mercy.

Thank you for reminding us that your grace reaches farther than our failures and your love runs deeper than our shame.

As we leave this place, help us to carry the compassion of Christ into a hurting world.

Teach us to see people the way Jesus saw Matthew — not simply for who they have been, but for who they can become through your grace.

Receive now these gifts, tithes, and offerings that we bring before you today.

Use them to strengthen your church, serve those in need, and proclaim the hope of the Gospel along every back road and beyond.

And Lord, continue calling us to follow you with faithful and willing hearts.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.