

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING 06: *Jesus' Authority over Sinners* Matthew 9:9–17

**BIG IDEA: JESUS WILLINGLY FORGIVES SINNERS, BUT ONLY SINNERS THAT WILLINGLY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR NEED TO BE FORGIVEN.**

Now, implicit in this is that Jesus rejects the righteous. Let me say that again as it might be somewhat of a shock to you: Jesus rejects the righteous. Or maybe better put, Jesus rejects those that believe they are righteous and have no need of Him. You see, Jesus did not come to give high-fives to those that think everything is good in their life. He came to seek and save those that understand how sinful they are. Jesus is not afraid to associate and spend time with those people that the righteous people usually have no desire to pursue. Let me illustrate it from a story from my High School days . . .

### **Introduction: High School Youth Ministry**

- I had one of the best High School youth ministry experiences. When I was a freshman in HS, a guy named Todd moved to our area and started coming to our church. He began helping out with the students. In about a year, people were getting saved from our local high schools. God was moving in a big way.
- But one of the outcomes of this time was that the students pushed the traditions of the religious. Here's how. I remember one day when one of our very un-churched friends that came to our Wednesday night ministry, actually showed up to church on Sunday morning. He came to church in his ripped jeans, t-shirt, and a hat. I thought it was funny (as I had a bit of a rebellious streak in me that didn't want to do what people told me to do). And I vividly remember one of our older ushers approaching this young man and telling him that he couldn't stay without taking off his hat.
- I couldn't believe it. I guess there was some rule in the church that said you were not reverent to God if you wore a hat inside of some sacred room. My guess is that there is some of you are feeling a bit of angst grow up inside of yourself because you agree with that usher. *"That's the way it supposed to be."* Really?
- I distinctly remember at that time thinking, *"You have to be kidding me. You think that taking his hat off will make him more easily acceptable to listen to God."* But I do not think religious people think like that. I don't think this usher was concerned whether this young man would listen better. In reality, he probably thought the opposite; that taking the hat off made him more easily acceptable to God.

Years later, after I have been involved in church ministry for some time, I realize this happens all the time. Stories like this are very common and are

probably why many outside the church say those that go to church are very judgmental. Listen, many “Christians” have unknowingly picked the wrong battles because they have subtly and wrongly believed something very wrong about the gospel. There is a belief among some that God will accept them if they just simply clean up their life first! This is the anti-gospel. Yet, religious leaders consistently look at those that are less religious and say things like *“You can be part of our group if you simply if you stop sinning first. But unless you stop sinning, I won’t have a relationship with you.”*

This is why Jesus infuriated the religious leaders of His day. He came accepting all types of sinners & spending time with them. Although He did have an end game, for He consistently called them to be His followers. Why? Because they were the ones that acknowledged they needed to be forgiven. The religious people of that day didn’t think they needed to be forgiven. They were not willing to say that they were as sinful as the prostitute. And so forgiveness for them wasn’t needed.

Why do I say all that? As we continue our study of Matthew 8–10, we have dealt with several instances of the authority of Jesus. Last week, we noted that Matthew writes thematically, not chronologically, as we studied the account where Jesus flexes His authoritative muscles to prove He has the authority to forgive sins. And it is after that account that Matthew shares his calling to Jesus. It is no accident that Matthew records His calling to salvation right after he shares Jesus ability to forgive sins. It is like Matthew is saying, *“If Jesus can forgive sins, He certainly can forgive me, a great sinner!”*

**Vs. 9** → In Mark & Luke, we are told that Matthew’s other name is Levi. This should not trouble us, as it was very common in those days for someone to have several names (for instance, Peter & Cephas). We are told that Jesus was walking, we know in Capernaum, and He passed by the tax booth and saw Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector. For us to fully understand what is going on here, we need to understand the political, social, and spiritual implications of being a tax collector in that day.

*Politically, a tax collector was a cheat.* The tax collector was someone hired by the Roman government to collect money from the people of Israel. It was their job to use almost any force necessary to raise money for Rome. And they got really rich doing it. There were three types of taxes the Roman government took from the Jews: Land Tax (property), Head Tax (income), and Customs Tax (sales or import/export). Much of the cheating took place in these customs tax.

For instance, Capernaum was a place of high volume of traffic. People would come and go through this city because of the highways that went north and south. As they did, they would be taxed on their goods. These tax collectors would normally pay a flat rate to the Roman government and then have their backing to set up their stations at the main highways in order to collect.

Anything they could collect over and above what they have already paid would be theirs to keep. Imagine if every time you had to go from Burton to Middlefield, you had to go through a tax shop to pay a tax on what you were taking or bringing with you. That's what's going on here. This was a high paying job. It was probably one of the most lucrative jobs of that day. And people looked at them as thieves.

*Socially, a tax collector was an outcast.* Because they were considered cheaters and thieves, they were usually put out of any social circle. People hated them. Nobody wanted to be friends with them. They had no friends, except, for probably other tax collectors. When I say, "The Mafia", what do you think of? Probably something like this. Someone who is part of an organization that steals, abuses, even beats people up who do not pay them what they want. They are extortioners. They are not people that have many true friends. They are outcasts, unless you belong to their "family."

*Spiritually, a tax collector was unclean.* These were not Romans who were collecting taxes. They were fellow Jews. And the religious Jews felt as if these tax collectors had sold out to Rome. These tax collectors were forbidden from having any religious contact with other Jews. They were ranked alongside of the unclean animals, so much so that the average Jew wouldn't even touch them. They were like pigs to them. Because they were viewed as unclean, they were not allowed to go to into the temple or synagogue.

Based on their political, social, and spiritual ramifications, you might imagine what kind of life this was for them. They were powerful. They were feared. But they were lonely. And even though they were cheaters, outcasts, and unclean, Jesus passes by Matthew and calls out to him, "*Follow Me.*"

Certainly, at this point, we have to assume that Matthew had more information about Jesus than just these words. Matthew lived and worked in Capernaum, which was the hub of ministry for Jesus. The popularity of Jesus was such that it would have been impossible to live in this town and not know about His teaching; His healing; and His authority that we have been studying the past several weeks. Most certainly, Matthew would not have known everything about Jesus, but He would have had more information than these two words.

And now, Matthew is forced with a decision. This sinful outcast is at a crossroads. Will he continue to follow his own path in this world or will he follow Jesus? His response is remarkable and can be summarized with three points of action.

*First, Matthew Obeyed.* We are told that he rose and followed Him. He did what the paralyzed man had done when Jesus told him to get up and walk. Matthew gets up from his tax collector desk and follows Jesus. Don't miss this fact that faith is always followed by action. It was not enough for

Matthew to say, “*Yes, Jesus, I know who you are, but I’m going to continue doing what I’m doing.*” He willingly got up and followed Him. Certainly, Matthew would have known what that meant for his life when Jesus calls him to be His follower. That’s seen in the second point of action.

Second, Matthew Gave Up Everything. We don’t read it in the gospel of Matthew; maybe he was being modest or doesn’t want to think that his decision to follow Jesus cost him much. But it did. In the gospel of Luke, we are told that he “*left everything.*” He gave it all up. He gave up the riches. He gave up a great job (even though the job came with major social, political, and religious problems, many would have seen it as a great job).

And he gave up any chance of a future in that business. Think about it. When Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, & John from their fishing jobs; if things didn’t work out, they could have still gone back. In fact, they do. After Jesus’ death, they go back to their fishing careers (at least for a few days).

But Matthew? No chance. This was a cutthroat occupation. Do you really think the Roman government or some higher-ranking tax collector is going to give him his job back if things didn’t work out with Jesus? Nope. He abandoned his post. He quit. When he leaves this job, he is really leaving the job. He is cutting ties with his criminal past. Who does that? The only explanation is that Jesus had changed Him.

Don’t miss that. If Jesus can change Matthew, He can change anyone. He can take a tax collector and transform him into a disciple that writes a book about Jesus. He can take a murderer of Christians and turn him into one of the greatest missionaries for the name of Jesus our world has ever seen (Paul). He can transform you. No matter how bad of a sinner you think you are, Jesus stands here today to call you to Himself.

Listen, many people think they are too broken to come to Jesus. The truth of the matter is that you cannot come to Him unless you realize how broken you are. There is no sin that you have done that He cannot forgive. There is no relationship that cannot be mended by Him. He can take the broken marriage and transform it into a loving couple that counsels others who are struggling with their marriage. He can take the drunkard and addict and turn them into a Sunday school teacher. He can take the sexually perverse and change them into a faithful husband or wife.

He can change anyone at anytime. You are never outside the reach of Jesus Christ. But when Jesus does come in and change you, He wants to change all of you. Not just part of you. And that change has drastic results you’re your life, your family, and even the way you view your friendships. This is where we see a 3<sup>rd</sup> point of action by Matthew to Jesus’ call to follow Him.

*Third, Matthew Invites His Friends to Meet Jesus.* The response of the person who has experienced the forgiveness of their sins is to go tell others about that forgiveness. Like many converts, the first natural desire is to tell others what happened to them. And when Matthew invites Jesus to a dinner with other sinners, this is where we see a difference between a follower of Jesus and someone who is concerned with being religious.

**Vs. 10–13** → We are told that Jesus is having a relaxed dinner with some other tax collectors and other sinners. In Luke, we are told specifically that this is Matthew's house. This means that in response to being changed by Jesus, Matthew throws a party and invites all of his outcast friends.

I'm sure if we understood this one principle, it would change us: Jesus is not scared or ashamed to hang out with the lowest of the low in the social economy that that day. He is not scared to hang out with those that everyone else looked at as criminals and sinners. He is not scared to spend time with those that the religious people thought were not worth their time. He didn't wait for them to clean up their act before He would spend time with them.

He pursued them, and just so that we fully get it, we are told here that Jesus is sharing a meal with them. To be relaxing at a meal with them signified friendship. And this is what really upset the Pharisees of the day. They assumed that spending time with those sinners' meant that Jesus was approving of their sin. Or worse yet, that if they spend time with the sinners, they might catch their deadly disease of sin.

That's just funny. You see, what the Pharisees did not realize and we often forget is that spending time with a drunkard doesn't make us a sinner; Having a meal with a Muslim doesn't make us a terrorist; playing golf with guys who swear and smoke will not make you a sinner. Listen, we sin because of what comes up from inside of us. The greatest sinner you know of lives inside of you. We will press this home in a minute, so hang on.

In vs. 11, we are told that the Pharisees saw this. I picture them across the street watching people walk into Matthew's house. There certainly would have been a buzz around the city when a tax collector leaves his post to follow Jesus. And then they hear there is going to be a party in celebration. They are on a stakeout and are watching when they notice Ralph enter. Ralph? That dude is one of the worst cheats in town. He made so many promises as he ran for the mayor of Capernaum and lied about all of them in order to get power. Who in their right mind would want to be around that guy?

And then they notice that Suzy shows up. Come on, they can't believe it. Suzy is the town prostitute who has all the inside knowledge of all the powerful men in town & she funnels information to the tax collectors on when guys are leaving for business and how much money they have with them. It is scandalous to even talk to her; you might end up on her books.

And then Betsy shows up, the town gossip. Everyone knows she talks and talks. Nothing is secret with her. She swears like one of those pagan Gentile sailors. The way she uses her tongue is everything contrary to how God has called men to speak.

But nothing prepares them for seeing Frank enter the room. Everyone knows that Frank, one of the business leaders in town, is involved in a homosexual relationship. It is the worst of the worst. The Pharisees think that nobody should be spending time with this man. To be around him, he probably thinks you approve of his lifestyle.

When these Pharisees see this irreligious thing going on, they can't help themselves but to go to the house and protest. They most certainly would not have entered the home, but when Matthew or one of the other disciples came to the door, they make accusations against Jesus in the form of a question: "*Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?*" The implication from this question is that by spending time with them, He must be like them. How could a religious man associate with such irreligious people? They just could not get it. They didn't understand it. As a teacher of the Law, they might (on very strict occasions) have taught some sinners. But the most certainly would never have had a barbeque with them.

By the way, one nuance of the original language here is that the tense of their question is meant to signify a habit: "*Why does Jesus continually eat with sinners?*" And this was a continual accusation against Jesus. Later in His ministry, Luke records what his reputation was like . . .

📖 *Luke 15:1–2 → "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

While the Pharisees stood at the door with the disciples, Jesus must have overheard because He steps in to give the answer. His answer is that the reason He came to the earth was to spend time with sinners. He uses the medical profession as an illustration of the spiritual. The healthy person does not need to see a doctor (not much preventative medical check-ups in those days). Doctors visit sick people, not healthy people. And Jesus, being a doctor of the soul is here to visit those that are sick spiritually.

In many ways, this is a backhanded slap at the Pharisees. This subtle rebuke of the religious leaders is that they thought they were well (religious), which means they do not need the doctor, which means they have no need of salvation or forgiveness. What Jesus is saying is that He has no time or purpose to spend time with the religious elite since they, apparently, don't need help. They don't need God. And so Jesus has no reason to help them. He came to call those that are willing to acknowledge their sinfulness; not those that trumpet their righteousness.

Or, let's put it this way. Jesus did not leave the comfort of heaven to come and congratulate the religious people like the Pharisees who were so satisfied in themselves & who condemn all those that don't meet their self-appointed standards. He didn't come to help those that think they are "right" with God. Jesus came to help those that know and acknowledge they are sinners in need of forgiveness. Righteous people think they are okay. Sinners know they need forgiveness.

Now, before you dismiss this, I want you to realize that we are more like the Pharisees than we want to acknowledge. One way in which we are is that we tend to do religious things only because we want to be noticed by men. Just like the Pharisees. And this desire to be noticed by men is what Matthew focuses on next. (Hang with me, we will pull them together in a second.)

**Vs. 14–17** → At some point later, we have the disciples of John (certainly a reference to those followers of John the Baptist who did not follow Jesus) come to Jesus to ask him a question. They are sort of put off because, along with the Pharisees, they are fasting but the disciples of Jesus are not fasting.

Fasting was a normal Jewish religious practice. There is only one required fast in the OT, the Day of Atonement. But by NT times, the really religious would fast two days a week: Mondays and Thursdays. The point was that they would abstain from food in order to spend that time praying. This good practice of giving up the temporal things in order to spend time with their Creator had become nothing more than a religious ritual to impress other people.

Maybe this conversation took place on a Monday or Thursday, maybe even during the day of the big feast at Matthew's house. Maybe the religious leaders and the disciples of John watched Jesus and His disciples partying up with a feast with the sinners and tax collectors and they were infuriated or confused about what was going on.

Jesus answers by asking them a question and then teaching them a lesson about old and new things. He asks them "can a wedding guest mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Well, no. The wedding party is not mourning when the groom is present. The groom is there to sustain and create the party. He makes the party possible.

*"What the bridegroom is to the bride, the Lord Jesus is to the souls of all who believe in him. He loves them with a deep and everlasting love; he takes them into union with himself: they are 'one with Christ and Christ in them.'"*<sup>1</sup>

Jesus says that a time is coming when the bridegroom (clearly a reference to Him) will be taken away and then they will fast. If the point of fasting is to spend time with the Creator, then why would they fast when He is already with them?

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, J. C. *Matthew*. (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, 2012), 70–71.

But then Jesus gives these two object lessons for them. No one takes a new piece of cloth that has not been shrunk and uses it to sew a patch on an already worn, shrunk cloth that has a hole in it. If so, when the new piece shrinks, the new piece is not torn, but it tears the old garment. It makes the tear worse and the garment is even more ruined.

In the same way, nobody puts new wine into old wineskins. The way they stored their wine was often in the skins of animals they had killed. They would skin the animal and then sew up all the openings of the skin except the head. They would sterilize it so as to prevent a really bad wine taste. New wineskins were flexible and would take the fermenting process of the wines. But the older the skins would get, the more brittle they would become. And if you put new wine into old skins, the skins couldn't handle the fermenting process and it would break. Jesus' point is that they would lose the wine and the skins.

Now, here's the point of all of this. Jesus did come in order to reform their view of a worn-out Judaism. His calling of sinners is not trying to put a new spin on Judaism. His coming had nothing to do with the way they viewed religion and their view of religion had nothing to do with how He viewed a relationship with God. If they were going to live by their customs and standards, they would be in for a major disaster.

*"The pharisaical, legalistic, external, self-righteous system of traditional Judaism could neither connect with nor contain the ministry and message of Christ. Consequently, that system had only one option—to oppose and seek to eliminate Christ, which is what it did."*<sup>2</sup>

In both of these accounts, what we have is the religious people focused on themselves and Jesus focused on sinners. As we finish, let me point out that you have one of two options this morning. You can live and believe you are religious like the Pharisees, or you can live and believe you are a sinner like the tax collectors. Which one are you? Let me illustrate this in one more way.

**Illustration: Cleaning your house before company**

- What happens at your house as you prepare for company? My guess is that you clean your house before you have company over, right? You spend time cleaning up the toys and garbage. You vacuum. You organize. You dust. Why? There are probably many reasons, but one that I hope isn't true of you, but probably illustrates a faulty view of the gospel.
- My guess is that there are some of you that assume your company's opinion of you will be based on what your house looks like. That's why you clean. You believe that you will only be accepted by them or will be approved by them if your house is really clean and acceptable.

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John. *Matthew 8–15*. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1987), 70.



- Listen, friends. We often Jesus like this. We think that Jesus is only going to accept us when we clean up our life first. We think and project upon others around us, that if they just stop swearing, Jesus will accept them. No, Jesus is willing to come in and hang out; He wants to come in and He will do the clean up of your house.

Listen, Jesus does not love a future version of you. He is moving towards you when you are His enemy. But don't miss the fact that He ever wants us to stay where we are at. He wants us to change. I can't help but think that there are some people here that have been trying to clean up their acts so that Jesus will accept them. Stop running and trust in Jesus who did the running for you.

And I also can't help but to think that there are some people here that relate to others contrary to how Jesus operated. I understand there will be some that will say that just because Jesus spent time with sinners is not a command for me to hang out with them. I understand that there is wisdom literature that speaks about the influences you spend time with. I understand that there might be situations you cannot handle.

But listen very closely, there is no way for you to fulfill the Great Commission without being around sinful people. Some of you will not like me saying this, but let me say it anyway: If you have isolated yourself so far away from the things of the world that there is no one you can share Jesus with, my guess is that you are on your way to becoming like the Pharisees. You should repent and then invite your neighbor over for dinner. Be like Jesus, pursue those that know they are sinners.