

Matthew 9:9-13

He was in his fifties; a big strapping man who enjoyed eating. He was active and full of life, but lately he had been having pains—chest pains; not continuously, but every now and then. His wife had been telling him that he should go and see a doctor, but he wasn't about to take her advice. His entire life he could count on one hand the number of times he had been to the doctor's office. No, he would be just fine. But he wasn't fine. The next morning his wife woke up and saw him slumped over the edge of the bed. Her husband, Melvin, had died in his sleep from a heart attack.

“Those who are well,” Jesus says, “have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do.” Melvin had no need of a doctor...or at least, that's what he thought. He stayed away from the doctor's office even though, had he gone, his life could have been spared. What about you? It's not my purpose this morning to get you to set up a visit with your doctor tomorrow...unless, of course, you have a need; then you should go. With His words, Jesus is simply stating a fact of life—people who think that they are healthy will not be seen in a doctor's office. Rather, you'll see there those who are coughing, and feverish, and aching; those who want medicine so that they will get better.

Is that why you are here today? This is the “doctor's office.” This is no social club. It's no gymnasium in which to exercise your faith. This is a hospital for sinners, and the medicine is here because the Great Physician, Jesus, is here with His precious words of life. Are you here because you are sick with sin? If “Yes,” then what you need is here for you. If you're here for any other reason, then we have nothing for you here.

It was the same way when Jesus went to the house of Matthew. Matthew was sick and he knew it. He was sick with sin. When Jesus walked up to his tax booth and said, “Follow Me,” Matthew didn't say, “Who, me? Why should I follow you? What do I need that you could possibly give me?” There were no such objections from Matthew's lips. Rather, he got up and followed Jesus. He knew that Jesus had the medicine he needed.

And he then threw a banquet for Him. Matthew invited all of his other sick friends and acquaintances—fellow tax collectors and others who were looked down on—he invited them to come to his house and meet Jesus. The Doctor was in, and Matthew wanted his sick friends to get the medicine which Jesus had to give. Social outcasts they were, all of them. Many of them had been living nightmares. They were haunted by guilt. The sins of their past plagued them. And there was no one who would help. The church leaders wanted nothing to do with them. They were worthless in their eyes, suitable only for burning in hell. But when they came to Matthew's house Jesus did not shun them. He spoke to them words of welcome. He ate with them. He did not reject them. It was as Matthew had said it would be...Jesus had the medicine they needed. He had pardon for their sins. He took away their guilt and gave them forgiveness—God's forgiveness.

The Pharisees were there, too, at Matthew's house...not to eat with these outcasts, not to socialize with Jesus; they were there to criticize. “Nothing good,” they thought, “could come of this banquet—a Righteous Man eating with sinners!” They were not sinners. They were above the others. They were not thieves and harlots. They were not the scum of society. They were there in the doctor's office not because they were looking for medicine from Jesus; they were there to mock those who were sick with sin and to applaud

themselves for being so healthy. The Pharisees did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The Messiah, they thought, would have nothing to do with such sinners as tax collectors and harlots. Since God is righteous and holy, He would only associate with people who are like Him. No, they believed, Jesus could not be the Messiah.

But think of this...why does a doctor become a doctor? In order to associate with people like him? No, a doctor associates with people who are sick. Day after day, the people he sees and spends his time with are those with all sorts of diseases. A doctor is a doctor because of those who are sick, not because of those who are well.

Jesus is a doctor in every sense of the word. He came to heal our sin-sick souls. He came to give life to the dying. And as the Great Physician, He says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus did not come to associate with those who are like Him. No one is like Him. All are equally sinful. The same disease of sin lives in every human heart. Jesus came to live among the wicked. He came to rub shoulders with outcasts. He came to bear our sin in His body and be numbered among the transgressors. Did Jesus come to call the Pharisees? No, not because they had no sin; not because He didn't desire to save them from their sins; but because they saw no need for a "doctor." They believed they were good enough to associate with God—what need did they have of a Savior from sin?

Friend, Jesus is your Savior only if you are a poor, miserable sinner. If you think that you are good enough to associate with God on your own; if you have no wickedness that needs the medicine of forgiveness, then you have no need for Jesus. And if you have only a few sinful stains; stains which need the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood to wash them away not very often, but only once in a great while—then you're telling your family, and friends, and other church members: "I only need Jesus every once in a great while; most of the time I'm fine on my own."

But if this is true of you, then you should have known my friend, Melvin. He, too, was doing just fine. He could take care of himself. He had no need of a doctor. Friend, Melvin is dead because he believed the wrong thing. The Pharisees perished in hell because they believed the wrong thing. Unless you and I repent, we too will perish. Unless you and I see our desperate condition—that we are wretched sinners, that we cannot save ourselves, that we cannot associate with God on our own but we need One to make us clean—and that One is Christ Jesus and no one else...and His Word and Sacraments alone give us His pure medicine—unless we repent and turn to Jesus in faith, we will perish.

But if you are a poor sinner; if you see your desperate need for a Savior; if you believe that Jesus' words of life are for you, then welcome to Matthew's house. Here is the banquet spread out for you. We are all outcasts here—sinners, every one of us. We all have guilt over our past wrongs. We may even have a few nightmares. But take courage, the Doctor is in and He will see you now. You are not too wicked for Jesus. Your sins, as awful as they are, will not be a shock to Him. He loves you, friend. He already died for you. He knows your sins, for He carried them in His body on the cross. The medicine is here in His words, and this medicine is for you. You, dear sinner; you are forgiven of all your sins. There is no sin in your past that is too great for God's mercy. He pardons every wrong of yours.

Now this is no license to continue living in sin. Matthew left his former way of life as a tax collector. Following Jesus, forgiven by his Savior, he now had the desire to live for Christ. Let us also leave our sinful ways behind. You are forgiven. You follow Jesus now. His Word makes you clean of sin. He will help you to live now, for Him, for He lives within you. And friend, remember that the Doctor is in every single Sunday morning. And He is always here in His Word and Sacraments for you. We need Him. We need the medicine He gives. Let no one here be a “Melvin” among us. You are all too precious. Let each of us always remember our need for Jesus, and gladly and regularly come with joy here to Matthew’s house. Amen.