

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Receiving the Sinner/Refusing the Righteous, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 9:14-17

Code: 2264

I trust you'll turn with me at this time to Matthew chapter 9 with an open heart, an open mind, to hear the message of the Word of God to us...I really feel that these are some of the greatest days of our lives as we study Matthew. Ever since I hit the 40s, I realize how irretrievable the past is, how inevitable the future is. Last night I happened to turn on the television to look at the news and saw...brief program on gerontology. Got very depressed...Looked in the mirror and realized it was all happening to me...Then I thought, "I can't think of a better way to spend the years ahead than to study the Gospel of Matthew, to walk in the footsteps of Christ. I'm so blessed and refreshed. I believe it's gonna be one of the greatest times of our life.

We're looking at verses 9 through 17 of chapter 9. There are several different elements to this text. Several little vignettes, several different conversations and, yet, they all come together to give the same message. They are wonderfully put together by the genius of the Spirit of God to give to us one of the great statements in all of holy writ on the heart and soul of the Gospel. I've entitled this section "Receiving the Sinner, Refusing the Righteous." "Receiving the Sinner, Refusing the Righteous."

The key to the passage is verse 13, the end of the verse. "For I am not come...says our Lord...to call the righteous, but sinners."...In other words, the effectual call of the Gospel to salvation is extended only to sinners, not to the righteous...It is extended not to the religious, but to the irreligious. Not to those who think they're okay, but to those who know they're not...This the glorious purpose of Christ's coming into the world. The real message of Christmas is right there in that verse. "For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners." That's why He came. That's why there was a Bethlehem, a star, shepherds, wise men, an incarnation. He came to save sinners.

And Luke adds for us what some scribe picked up and put in some of the later manuscripts of Matthew. "He came to call sinners to repentance." That is said in Luke, for that is what He came to do, for there is no call into His Kingdom apart from repentance. This is the glorious message of the Gospel. It is a call to sinners to repent and be forgiven...

Matthew makes this abundantly clear. You can go all the way back, even to the genealogy at the very first chapter of Matthew, and you find that the heart and soul of the genealogy is that God saves sinners. You find a whole lotta sinners in that genealogy, don't you? In fact, everybody mentioned up until Christ is a sinner. There are only a few women mentioned there. There's Tamar, who was an incestuous woman. There's Rahab, who was a professional prostitute. There was Ruth, who was a

member of a cursed nation. There was the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba, who was an adulteress. But then we shouldn't be surprised to find sinners in the genealogy. After all, God came into the world to save sinners.

When the forerunner of our Lord appeared in the third chapter, John the Baptist, it says he came to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord; and he was preaching in the wilderness of Judea; and he was saying, "Repent...repent." And the people who heard his message in 3:6, "were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."...

You see, that's the heart of the Gospel. Whenever you hear a preacher who says, "I don't preach on sin. It's negative," you will also hear a preacher who has no Gospel in his message, who does not bring men to salvation; but affirms men in the self-condemning, self-righteousness of their own ego. When you come to chapter 4 and the Lord Himself arrives, His message is no different. Chapter 4 verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'Repent.'" And when you come to chapter 5 and His sermon, He says that the Kingdom is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; and the basic factor in that kind of a hunger and that kind of a thirst is the knowledge that you don't have it; and that's why you hunger for it. So they're aware of their lack of righteousness.

Coming to chapter 6 and verse 12, and the Lord says, "When you pray, you better pray like this: Forgive us our debts." In other words, the whole of what Matthew is saying to us is that men are sinful. They must repent, and that is first and foremost the message of the Gospel...The incarnation is that God may call sinners to repentance....

In Acts 20, as the church began to extend itself through the apostles' preaching, Paul says, "We testified to the Jews and the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." In the 26th chapter of Acts and the 20th verse, Paul says to Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." That is his call on the road to Damascus. He said, "I have gone from there to Damascus and Jerusalem and through all the borders of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, and what is your message? That they should repent and turn to God and do works fit for repentance. Then he adds this: For these reasons, the Jews caught me in the temple and set about to kill me." Why? Because ever and always, they rejected the message of repentance. Why? Because they thought they were righteous already...and that is essentially what is the whole theme of Matthew. It is the affirmation of the need to repent and the antagonistic response of those who felt they had no such need. That's the message that Matthew chronicles for us.

And the word repent embodies in it a total turnaround; metanias indicates more than just sorrow. It indicates a sorrow that leads to a change of purpose, a change of direction, a change of life, a change of opinion. In fact, Broadus, the commentator says, "Whenever this Greek word is employed in the New Testament, the reference is to changing the mind from sin to holiness. Every time it is

employed." That is the thrust that it has. It's really a word synonymous with conversion. A change accompanied by deep sorrow over sin and a turning toward holiness.

When the Apostle Paul was instructing Timothy in the manner of his ministry, he said, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, must be gentle to all men, able to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose him, if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will." In other words, he says, "You must preach with meekness and gentleness and patience; and your message is repentance, for it is repentance alone that is able to draw men out of the snare of the devil."...

In Acts 17, when Paul was on Mars Hill, he never changed his message. Even though he was speaking to the brain trust of the Athenian society, he said, "The message of God is repentance, and repent, because there comes a day when God will judge the world. Repent or else." Matthew chapter 3 again, as John the Baptist was there preaching, and people came and confessed their sins, the Pharisees and Sadducees came in verse 7, and he says, "O generation of snakes, let me see in your life the fruit of repentance, and don't say to yourselves, 'We are of Abraham.' Why, God is able to raise out of the stones sons of Abraham."

What he's saying is, "Lemme see some of the true repentance out of you, and don't think you're okay just because you're Jewish, just because you're in an inheritor of Abrahamic seed, just because you've kept the rabbinic tradition, don't bank on that." But they did; and that's why in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter the Kingdom." Theirs was a self-righteousness. You see, Jesus came to drive men to a recognition of their sin and then to repentance; and in the midst of that repentance, the free forgiveness, which He gives."

I can say it another way. The only people who ever get saved, the only people who ever enter God's Kingdom are people who acknowledge their sinfulness and repent of it. Since the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day were not convinced they were sinners, they had no desire for repentance. They had no desire for repentance, because they felt no need for it. They had no need for holiness. They were already holy, and they defined holiness as an external behavior. Therefore, Jesus gave them nothing but a greater condemnation.

Now, the passage in Matthew 9 focuses on this reality. In verse 13, when our Lord says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners." And as Luke adds, "to repentance." That is the heart and soul of the message. He can't do anything for people who think they're already okay. He can only help the sinner who, in desperation, knows of his need. Now this becomes abundantly clear and very specific in the 9th chapter, for here you have the first incident where an individual is specifically forgiven...

Verses 1 to 8, a man who was a paralytic, and you remember as we studied that how his friends brought him and lowered him through the roof, and what the Lord said to him was, "Your sins be forgiven you." The Lord knew that that was the cry of his heart. The physical was only a corollary. The thing he wanted most was the forgiveness of sin, and he had a broken and a contrite spirit. That's implied...and he was overburdened with guilt, and his heart was hungry for righteousness; and Jesus forgave him; and that, then, forced some questions. If He could forgive that man, who else could He forgive; and to what extent can He forgive; and what kind of sinners can He forgive? Can He forgive the worst of sinners?...

And that draws us into verse 9; and from verses 9 to 17, what the Holy Spirit tells us is, "Yes, He receives the sinners, the worst of sinners, all of the worst of sinners; and He rejects and refuses the righteous." Oh, this is a great message, people. It is a great message for us in this text. In order to show you the extent to which His forgiveness goes, verse 9, Matthew introduces himself as the worst sinner. He was the little mokkus of Capernaum we talked about last week. He was the tax collector, the worst of all kinds of tax collectors -- a traitor to his own people, made his living on extortion, working for a conquering power and, yet, it was to Matthew the Lord said, "Follow Me," and he rose and followed.

And then in verse 10, Matthew threw a banquet; and he invited all the riffraff of Capernaum; and Jesus was the guest; and he took all of his sinful friends and said, "I want you to meet the One who has forgiven me." That's the crowd Jesus feels at home with, by the way. He always hung around sinners, 'cause they were the only ones He could help. And, of course, in verse 11, "When the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, 'Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" They rebuked Him. They criticized Him. They said, "What's the deal, hanging around a Teacher who hobnobs with the riffraff? Why would you wanna be with a Man like this, who runs around with the scum?" And Jesus came to the defense of His disciples and overhearing the conversation, He gave them a threefold answer. First by analogy, He said, "They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick. By your own self-confessed diagnosis, you have affirmed that these are the worst of people. Don't you also affirm that they are the ones who most need a physician?"

The Pharisees were great at diagnosis. They were just indifferent to the cure. The second argument He uses is one from Scripture in Hosea. "Go and learn what the Scripture says," is really what He's saying. "I'll have mercy and not sacrifice. You better go back and find that what God wants is not your ritual, but your heart of compassion. That you could be uncaring and unsympathetic and uncompassionate to these people in sin betrays the fact that your religion is false."

And, thirdly, He says, "From My own authority, this is the direction of My ministry, for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners." So the Lord rejects the righteous and receives the sinner.

Now, beloved, this is the heart of the Gospel; and just to show you how much it covers and how repeated its emphasis is made, I want you to look at Luke for a couple of moments and just see several passages, the 15th chapter. I want you to really see that this is critical to our understanding of the Gospel...Luke 15 verse 1. Now this sets up the whole chapter. "Then drew near unto Him all the tax collectors and sinners to hear Him." We can be sure of one thing. They wouldn't go near a Pharisee, because they'd be rebuked and criticized unmercifully. But they drew near to Jesus...He had something to give them, and they knew it.

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured or grumbled, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'" Now, that sets up the whole chapter. You have Jesus, the compassionate, the merciful, the loving, the forgiving, and drawing to Himself the sinners; and you have standing far off and criticizing, the self-righteous Pharisees. They don't go near Him. They don't confess any need. They sit in judgment; and so Jesus speaks a parable.

Verse 4, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doesn't leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost till he find it? And when he's found it, lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, and says to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say unto you...here's the interpretation... likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

That last line is the key to interpretation. That is sarcasm. That is irony. That is saying, "You confess that you are righteous...I'll accept that confession." Jesus accepts their self-confessed righteousness and says, "Heaven is utterly indifferent to you. Heaven rejoices over the one who is lost, knows he's lost, and is found." That's the issue...Heaven has no interest in self-righteousness...They were righteous in their own estimation. The Lord says, "On that I stand. Your self-confessed, self-righteousness means Heaven is indifferent to you."

Look at verse 8, "Or what woman, has ten pieces of silver, loses one piece, doesn't light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently till she find it? When she's found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, and says, 'Rejoice with me. I found the piece which I lost.' And likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." You see, the message is repentance. The message is a forsaking of sin; and as long as you are the ninety-nine, or as long as you are the nine pieces, and you never get lost, you're never gonna get found, and you're never gonna have an angelic rejoicing. That's the issue.

He gives a third illustration. "Man had two sons. One of them forsook." You know this story. Go down to verse 18. He's over there in a foreign place eating pig slop, having wasted his substance in sin. He realizes he's a sinner. He realizes he's destitute. He says, 'I'll arise and go to my father and

say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.'" That's a beatitude attitude, by the way. That's humility. That's a begging spirit. That's brokenness over sin. That's a hunger and thirst. "And he arose and went to his father...verse 20...His father was still a great way off. He saw him and had compassion; ran, fell on his neck and kissed him." And that's how God receives a repentant sinner.

"And the son said unto him, 'I sinned against Heaven and in thy sight. No more am I worthy to be called thy son.' And the father said to his servants, 'Bring the best robe. Put it on him, and...and a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let's eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.' And they began to be merry."

You see, that's what happens in the heart of God and in His Heaven when one repentant sinner comes home. And it's talking about the salvation of that man. Look at verse 25. "Now his elder son was in the field." Who's this? Pharisees, scribes, self-righteous. "I never went anywhere, father, and you never put on any party for me. I've been hanging around the temple all my life. And he was angry...verse 28...and wouldn't go in."...

What is this? This is the self-righteous, the one who never really had anything wrong, he thought. Verse 29, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Oh, come on. This is the Pharisee who says, "I've never broken any law." Such ego. He's shut out. The Kingdom is for the repentant. The Kingdom is for the broken...

Look at chapter 18 of Luke, verse 9, and Jesus is constantly confronting this issue. "He spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and therefore despised others." That's...that's the Pharisees. That is a classic definition of them...Here's the story. "Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." The worse sinner. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." It's a good thing he could pray with himself, because God certainly wasn't listening. "I thank Thee that I am not as other men." See, immediately he puts himself up above. "I'm not an extortioner, unjust, adulterer, or like that tax collector in the corner. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." He had no need. He didn't come to seek God. He didn't come to seek anything. He came to make an announcement of how great he was.

"The tax collector, standing off in the corner, wouldn't even lift his eyes unto heaven, but he beat upon his chest and said, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" You know what happens when a man does that? "I tell you, this man went down to his house...what?...justified, made righteous, rather than the other; for every one that exalts himself is abased, and the one who humbles himself is exalted." That's the great message...The Pharisee was so piously self-righteous. Never saw his need at all...

Go over to chapter 19 verse 1. "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And on the way there was a man named Zacchaeus...means pure, he's a Jew...He was the chief tax collector, and he was filthy rich." Gained it by graft, "And he wanted to see Jesus." I kinda get the feeling that he had a real reason to see Jesus. I think he had a hungry heart. I think his sin had welled up in him so that it was just about to drown him. I think that's indicated by the way he responded. I think he was sick of his sinfulness, and I think Jesus knew it. But he was a little fellow, and he couldn't see over the crowd, so he climbed a tree. "And as Jesus came along, He looked up and saw him in the tree...verse 5, must have been a little embarrassing for the chief tax collector to be hanging out of a tree...He said, 'Zacchaeus...and He knew his name, and that must've been a shock...hurry up and come down. I'm coming to your house.'"

Now, you just didn't go to a house of a tax collector. You just didn't do that. "He made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully." I think he had a hungry heart. "And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." But don't you see, that's the whole point. Couldn't help the rest, and the conversion of Zacchaeus takes place between verse 7 and 8...We don't know the story in detail, but it happened in there, because the fruit of his conversion's in verse 8. "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord...'Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'" He fulfilled the law of Exodus 22. He was gonna give back full restitution. "And Jesus said, 'This day is salvation come to this house.'"

And then He made one of the greatest statements in the Bible. "For the Son of Man is come." Why? "To seek and to save...what?...that which is lost." That, people, is the heart and soul of the Gospel message. Jesus came to save sinners. The worst, the vilest who know it, who recognize it, who repent of it, who seek to be forgiven. That's what we've been seeing in Matthew 9.

Now, let's look back at it; and I wanna draw us through the final four verses, just quickly; and you'll see how it all unfolds. The message of Jesus was so different. It was so unlike traditional pharisaic, rabbinical Judaism. It just didn't mesh. It just didn't connect. It...it created confusion, because it was so inward and...and...and so personal...and so we find posed a question in verse 14. Now we don't know if this happened in actual sequence, but certainly it happens in logical sequence in the thought of the Holy Spirit, and may well have been on the very same occasion as the prior conversation.

"Then came to him the disciples of John." Now these are the disciples of John the Baptist. You remember when John came, many people followed him; and at a point in his life, he tried to transfer his followers over to Christ. In John 3:30, he said, "I must decrease and He must increase." In other words, "You've gotta leave me and go to the Messiah now. He's here." But it's apparent that not all did. In fact, even into the life of the Apostle Paul in Acts 19, we still have some disciples of John of Baptist running around loose who don't even know about Christ. So apparently these are connected somehow to John.

John, as you know, from chapter 4, is in prison now; and so they are very devout. Attached themselves to John the Baptist. No doubt deeply concerned about his imprisonment. No doubt still connected very tightly to the pharisaic, Judaistic tradition; and so they say to the disciples, or to the Lord, we're not sure which, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples fast not? Why do you and your disciples not fast like we do?" This indicates that, even in the fact that they followed John the Baptist and were close to getting to the truth, they were still stuck with their system; because the Pharisees believed you should fast twice a week; whereas, the Old Testament only listed one fast, the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur, and that was the only fast prescribed in the entire Old Testament. But they had built all this ritual and all this routine.

Now, watch this, you're gonna see a fascinating truth here. They said, "Why do we fast and you don't fast?" In other words, what they're really saying is, "How come your religion is so different than ours?" The three major expressions of the Judaistic traditions of that time were fasting, almsgiving, and prayers; and they had their little routine during the day when they said prayers at so many intervals; and they would stand on the corner in the middle of the street and do it; and they had their little almsgiving routines; and they also had their routine fasts; and they would look like they were fasting with a drawn face; and they would decorate themselves so everyone would know they were fasting.

Well, these external, outward rituals were the substance of their religion; and what they're really saying is, "How come you don't do what we do? How come your approach is so different?"... That's really a very important question. You see, they don't see religion as a matter of humility, sinfulness, repentance. They see religion as a matter of ceremony, as a matter of ritual; and there are many like that today. I think, for example, in the Roman Catholic church, there are many people who...who go for the routine of going. You go, and you kneel, and you stand up, and you take the mass, and you run through the beads, and that's about it; and you couldn't carry on a conversation with them about forgiveness and repentance and true conversion; because they wouldn't even know what you were speaking about. It's the routine of bowing down to a saint or lighting a candle or going through a ritual; and we have 'em in Protestantism, too. The people who pray a little prayer at the dinner table. They own a Bible. Now and then they open it. They go to a church service. They sing a song, and they go through the forms, the routines, the externals. They don't even understand the inside. They don't know what it means to be convicted of sin, to have a deep repentance in the heart. That's essentially what they're asking. "How come your system's so different? You don't do what we do."

Look at the Lord's answer. Tremendous answer. "Jesus said to them, 'Can the sons or the children of the bridechamber mourn?' Now, the ones He's referring to here are the attendants of the bridegroom. In those days a wedding would last seven days, and a man getting married would choose his best friends, and they were responsible to keep the party alive. That's right, promote the festivities, carry out the celebration, generate the fun, make sure everything goes well...and Jesus

says, "Look, this is a wedding. This is a celebration. This is a happy time. You don't expect the groom's attendants to mourn during the wedding feast, do you?" In other words, "Your ritual is out of sync with reality." See what He's saying? He's saying, "You crank out your routines irrespective of what God is doing in your midst." In other words, there's no connection between reality and your ritual.

Now, mark that. That's a very important thing. "Why, we fast twice a week." "Well, are you sad twice a week?" "No, we just fast twice a week." "Well, don't you know that fasting is connected with mourning?" "Oh?" "Don't you know that fasting is connected with praying?" "It is? No, we just fast twice a week...or that...We go to church every Sunday." "Oh, you do?" "Oh, yes, we've gone to church every Sunday for years." "Why?" "We've always gone to church." "Do you go there to worship God?" "What?" Say, "What is the reason? What is the attitude?"

He's saying, "You have a system that is utterly external, that functions with no connection to reality...I'm saying this. The bridegroom is here. I'm here with them. This is celebration." Back to verse 15. "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be hoped, snatched violently or violently taken away." Talking of His crucifixion. "And then they will fast." You know what the Lord is saying? Listen to this. "If you go through any religious exercise apart from an honest attitude in the heart, it is ritual and nothing more...If you fast just to fast, pray just to pray, go to church just to go to church, read the Bible just to read the Bible, sing a song just to sing a song, you've missed it."

He's saying, "Look, we're saying we have an internal, vital, real relationship with a living God, and what we do is a result of what's happening in that relationship. And right now...He says...the bridegroom is here, and the wedding is going on. You don't cry at a wedding. You cry at a funeral. You're happy at a wedding. I'm here with them. This is not a time for mourning."

By the way, our Lord is saying, as a footnote, "You shouldn't be fasting unless you're fasting out of a broken heart." That's why the Old Testament only gave one fast. That's why Isaiah and Zachariah 7 both tell us that God does not want our fasts. He wants our love. Fasting will come very normally. Fasting will come very naturally. Fasting will come very genuinely when you have a broken heart...in prayer, seeking God. But to use anything as a means, some ritual to gain the favor of God is to miss the point; and He really just shows the difference between what He taught and their entire system. They just function, function, function without any meaning. He says, "We don't fast unless there's something to fast about, and we get happy when there's something to be happy about."

So He really disallows all of the supposed benefit of their twice a week fasts. There'll come a day, and there did. When Jesus died on the cross, the disciples were utterly devastated and shattered. There are times for that, but the routine and the ritual is not the issue. The reality is. So here comes Jesus forgiving sin, and they're all happy, and the bridegroom is there, and the forgiveness is going on, and it's joyous, and they say, "How come you don't do the pharisaic thing?" And He says,

"Because it's unrelated to reality. It's an empty, meaningless form.

Now listen. There's a bigger question than that. Then their thinking is this. "Well, how...how...how do we relate to You then? What are You trying to say to us? How does our present religion relate to what You're teaching?" And, in effect, the Lord says, "It doesn't relate at all. I just gotta tell you, we can't connect at all. That's right, we can't connect." And Jesus gives them two illustrations in verse 16 and 17 that are so powerful.

Jesus is not teaching reformed phariseism. He's not teaching a reformed rabbinicalism. He's saying, "Look, I am not here to just kinda polish off your system. What I'm saying is so diametrically opposed to everything you are doing. There is no connection." Now, some people have taken this passage and made it mean that He's setting aside the law and bringing in grace. Nothing could be further from the context. That is not what He's saying. In fact, law and grace have always coexisted anyway. Now, watch what He's saying. Two very graphic illustrations that extend the thought of fasting to a full doctrinal comprehension. Watch verse 16.

"No man puts a piece of new cloth on an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up takes from the garment, and the tear is made worse." Now, in those days, the garments were cotton or wool, and both would shrink. If you had an old robe, and you got a big hole in it, right? And you take a piece of brand new cloth, stick it in that hole, and stitch it all around, then, as soon as you wash that garment, that new cloth shrinks, and the old fibers are gonna be ripped by the strength of the new cloth; and all you're gonna get is a bigger hole. You keep doing it, and it just gets bigger and bigger. You can't put a new one in an old robe. Anybody who knows, knows that if you're gonna patch an old robe, you gotta use an old piece of material.

What Jesus is saying is this. "There is no way that what I teach can fit into your system. No way. There is no way that the message that I am giving of an internal holiness, of a real repentance, of a heart attitude, can ever fit in the ritualistic system that you hold. No way. Not only won't it connect; but, secondly, your system can't contain it."

Verse 17, "Neither do men put new wine in old wineskins, else the wineskins break and the wine runs out and the wineskins perish. But they put new wine in new wineskins, and both are preserved." Now, what they used to do in storing wine was they took the skin of an animal, took the hair off it, and sometimes even turned it inside out; and they would use the neck part where the head was cut off as the spout; and then they would secure by stitching all they other openings; and they'd have this whole big animal hide; and they'd fill it up with wine.

Now, once it had been emptied and had hung around without anything in it, it would get very dry; because, in the filling, it would stretch; and in the drying, then, it would crack. If you refilled it again, the weight of it would just break the cracks open and you'd lose it all. So you had to put new wine in

new wineskins; and what the Lord is saying is, "Look, your system won't hold this truth. You just have to dump your system. There's no connection."...The pharisaical, Judaistic, traditional, legalistic, formal, self-righteous externalism was in no way able to either mesh with the ministry of Christ nor was that system able to contain the ministry of Christ.

You know what the result of it is? The system had only one option. The system had to eliminate Christ. That's all...that's the only option they had, and they did...It's useless...to try to put the two together. This is a very important point...that our Lord is making. He did not come to make a few additions to Judaism. The forms of Judaism couldn't contain the message He brought. Now, that is not to say, listen to me, that is not to say that the Old Testament is disconnected. Oh, no. He came to fulfill the Old Testament. Their religion was not the religion of the Old Testament. It was a rabbinic tradition that denied the very truth of the Old Testament as He made abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount...

So Jesus said, "Look, your system says you're righteous. Mine says you're vile and sinful. No way to match those two together. If you hang onto yours, that's it."...I really believe, people, that when someone comes to Christ, they have to say goodbye to a ritual system. Now, there are people in ritualistic systems. They'll confess Christ. I think if it's genuine, eventually, they're gonna come out of that ritualistic system...to the freedom of Christ, to the expression of an inward relationship.

Now, as we close this message, I want you to listen very carefully, 'cause I wanna pull it all together. I believe I see in this text three marks of a true believer. Three marks of a true believer. No. 1, he follows the Lord. He follows the Lord. Look back at verse 9. "Jesus said to Matthew, 'Follow Me.' And he arose and followed Him." It is characteristic, now mark this, of a true believer that he lives a life of unquestioning obedience. Does Matthew say anything? No, he just gets up. I think about Peter, who got up and, in John 21, the Lord says, "Follow thou Me," and he starts to follow a little way, and then he turns around and says, "Oh, what about him?" And the Lord says, "None of your business. You follow Me." And from then on, he didn't ask any more questions.

I believe that a true Christian lives a life of unquestioning obedience. I don't believe a true Christian's always kicking against the traces, always despising the life of obedience, always resisting the obedience. I believe a true Christian follows the Lord.

Secondly, I believe a true Christian feeds the lost. Matthew couldn't wait to call all the sinners together and give them Jesus. Look at your life. Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? If He does, the same compassion for the lost that exists in the heart of Christ will exist in you. Oh, it may get cluttered and covered up by your own selfishness from time to time; but it's gotta be there. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ...what?...constrains me." And so he goes on to say, "I find myself an ambassador for Christ, begging people to come to Christ and be reconciled to God."...He says, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

In other words, in that chapter, 2 Corinthians 5, he talks about how motivated he is to reach the lost because of the judgment of God and because of the love of Christ in his life. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, there has to be that compassion. You see, that's why Jesus condemned the Pharisees, because they had no compassion. He says, "You've got the sacrifice. You just don't have the mercy." A true believer follows the Lord and feeds the lost.

And, thirdly, a true believer forsakes legalism. Forsakes legalism. We see that in the remaining part of the passage. He says no to the...to trying to sew a new patch in an old robe, to try to fill up an old wineskin with new wine. He sees there's no connection. He knows you're not begun in the Spirit and perfected by the law or by some routine or some ritual. He knows you don't get entangled again with a yoke of bondage...

Now lemme draw it down to where you are. Do you follow the Lord? Do you follow the Lord with a life of unquestioning obedience? Is your highest privilege and greatest joy and deepest desire to obey Him? If not, there's a question about your salvation. Do you feed the lost? Do you have compassion, mercy, care? Do you sense the heart of God beating in your heart toward those that are outside Christ?...Thirdly, have you forsaken legalism? You know the difference between true worship and going to church? True comprehension of the knowledge of the Holy through His word and just reading the Bible? You know the difference between baring your heart before God and praying as a routine?...I hope you do. True believers follow the Lord, feed the lost, and forsake legalism.

I hope you have come to know Him, and that those are the desires of your heart. I think the great hymn of John Newton may put some words to your emotions as we close this morning. Listen to it. In it, he chronicles his transformation when he saw he was a sinner and he came to Christ. Listen to these words.

"In evil long I took delight, unawed by shame or fear, till a new object struck my sight, and stopped my wild career. I saw One hanging on a tree in agonies and blood, Who fixed His languid eyes on me as near His cross I stood. Sure never till my latest breath can I forget that look. It seemed to charge me with His death, though not a word He spoke: My conscience felt and owned the guilt. It plunged me in despair. I saw my sins His Blood had spilt, and helped to nail Him there. A second look He gave, which said, 'I freely all forgive; this blood is for thy ransom paid; I die that thou may live.' I do believe. I now believe that Jesus died for me, and through His blood, His precious blood, I shall from sin be free."

That is the message. I trust you received it. Let's pray.

Father, the words still echo in our minds. "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Thank You, Blessed Father...that You came for sinners; because all have sinned and

come short of the glory of God. Thank You that we are redeemable, because we're sinful. Help us to recognize it. May no one in this place live under the illusion that they're righteous, that they're all right...when they're not. And those of us that are Christians, or think we are, may we look closely to see if, indeed, we follow the Lord, feed the lost, forsake legalism, manifest that we belong to the new and the true, not the old, false forms of religion...Save us from the rituals... that fabricate a false relationship with You. Damn men's souls...and bring us to the truth for Your sake. And now, Father, thank You for the clarity with which Your Word speaks. Thank You for this time we've shared, for the joy of our salvation, again we say thanks. Bring us together again tonight in a time of refreshing study and worship and ministry; and may this whole day be holy unto You. Pray for Christ's sake. Amen.

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