

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(March 19, 2017)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

**Sermon Series:** Jesus - for the Other

### **For Those on the Way, and Messy**

(selected passages from Matthew)

Study #3

#### **Introduction: Us...them...**

Today we'll continue what we have been about in recent weeks, looking into the Gospel of Matthew to learn what we can about the heart of Jesus.

We know that He is for us. We revel in the fact that God loves us - He love ME! He loves YOU! And we are finding, week by week, that He is also for "them." He is for "the other."

Matthew assured his original Jewish audience that Jesus was for the Jews AND He assured them that Jesus was for the non-Jews, too.

Last week's look at Jesus' twelve apostles told us that He was not just for the "together" person. He chose, as His apostles, men who were deeply flawed - and then both changed and used them. (and THAT is encouraging to all of us "not-yet-together" types...)

In the next few minutes, we are going to see, again from Matthew, another "other" Jesus desperately loves. And this glimpse into His heart comes with a beautiful challenge to us all.

In the society of first century Israel there were three glaringly obvious societies with which each Jew - including Jesus - had to reckon.

First, there was Rome.

### **Jesus with Powerful People**

#### **The Roman Presence**

In Jesus' day, Rome and its influence was everywhere. Israel was a province of Imperial Rome. Rome simply told the Jews what to do. You couldn't miss the occupying Roman military's presence. Rome taxed Israel mercilessly.

And, while Rome made some allowance for Jewish traditions, Rome made the laws and backed those laws with the sword.

However, the only places in Matthew we find reference to Rome are in the second and in the second-to-last chapters.

#### **Jesus and Rome**

##### *Rome's presence at the start (Matthew 2)*

There at the beginning, Herod the Great - the power-hungry, paranoid king - was threatened by the toddler, Jesus. Herod was so threatened that he had all the male children in and around Bethlehem killed in an attempt to do away with the [born] king.

##### *Rome's presence near the end (Matthew 27)*

And then, near the end, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine, is both insecure in his position and fearful of a Jewish mob. Pilate made an unjust ruling to have Jesus crucified to keep the peace.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, God kept the two-year old Jesus safe from the murderous Herod. And the adult Jesus kept His head about Him, staying calm while the storm broke all around Him and Pilate panicked.

---

<sup>1</sup> Starting with a lame attempt to get Jesus released - whom Pilate knew to be innocent - he ended up getting the actually guilty Barabbas released, instead.

But, when Matthew describes Jesus' three-year ministry - in chapters 3-26! - there is no mention of Him having any interaction with the secular political forces of His day. Jesus treated Rome with what we might call "benign neglect."

### *Jesus' benign neglect of Rome*

As you read through Matthew's gospel, Imperial Rome appears beside the point.

Of course, Jesus lived lawfully, but He ignored the political structure of the day. He battled injustice, but He never railed against Rome's Emperor cult or its immorality, its violence or its taxes.

Matthew paints a picture of Jesus' life in which Rome - Rome! - was, essentially, irrelevant.

### Summary of "Jesus and Rome":

Now Rome certainly was not irrelevant. It was the world-ruling empire of the day. But Jesus remained mostly aloof from its leaders.

If we wonder why, I think it is because those who are powerful (i.e. - Rome) find "**poor in spirit**" to be a challenging posture to assume. The powerful have a difficulty with the idea of dependence on God. They tend to think of themselves as autonomous.

But "**poor in spirit**" was what Jesus was looking for, so He was content to let Rome be Rome.

The religious scene was also a prominent sector of society in first century Israel and Jesus had much more to do with those who drove the religious culture than He did with Rome.

The early encounters between Jesus and the religious crowd were relatively friendly.

## Jesus with the "Religious" Crowd

### **Friendly Early Encounters**

When a Jewish scribe (lawyer) told Jesus that he would follow Him wherever He went, Jesus kindly warned the man that following Him would mean a lack of material security and creature comforts. (Matthew 8:18-19)

When Jesus said, "**Your sins are forgiven**" to a paralyzed man who was brought to Him, the scribes who were there on that day were confused. They thought to themselves, "**This man blasphemes!**"

Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking and went on to heal the man of his paralysis to show them that He also had the authority to forgive sins (the easier thing to say, but the harder thing to do). (Matthew 9:1-8)<sup>2</sup>

But, as time passed, tension grew between Jesus and those in positions of religious authority.

### **Tension Grows**

#### *Pharisaic accusations*

When He cast a demon out of a man the crowds watching went wild with rejoicing. The Pharisees said Jesus cast out demons by using demonic powers. (9:32-34; also 12:22-25<sup>3</sup>)

The Pharisees reproved Jesus and His disciples for picking the heads of grain as they walked through a field - something that was expressly allowed in the Mosaic Law. (12:1-7)<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jesus also agreed to help a synagogue official whose daughter was at the point of death. He then gave time and attention to an older woman whom he healed from a several years long sickness. Arriving late at the synagogue official's home, He then raised the official's daughter from the dead. (9:18-31)

<sup>3</sup> Here, Jesus accused them of committing the unpardonable sin of attributing to Satan Jesus' miracles, which were actually done by the power of the Spirit of God.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, (15:1-20), when Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why His disciples transgressed the *traditions* of the Elders by not washing hands before eating, Jesus

When Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, but did so on a Sabbath day, the leaders of the synagogue questioned Him for violating Sabbath traditions. (12:1-8)

Quickly, the religious leaders' approach to Jesus escalated from accusation to attempts at entrapment.

#### *Attempts at entrapment*

- Pharisees tried to trip Him up with a question about divorce and remarriage (19:3-9).<sup>5</sup>
- The chief priests demanded that He tell them by what authority He cleansed the temple (21:23-27).<sup>6</sup>
- Pharisees tried a trick question about paying taxes to Caesar (22:15-22).<sup>7</sup>
- Sadducees made fun of Him for teaching that there is a life after death (22:2-33).<sup>8</sup>

While His enemies were getting more and more antagonistic, Jesus warned His followers of the opposition's twisted priorities and evil motives.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the gloves came off.

#### **The Gloves Come Off (Matthew 23)**

Jesus had responded courageously each time He was reproved by these religious rulers. But in the final week of His life, the time came to speak in a painfully blunt way. It's clear when reading Matthew 23 that Jesus was angry.

---

turned the tables on them and accused them of not obeying God's *commands* by ignoring the needs of their parents.

<sup>5</sup> He set them straight by going back to the original teaching as found in Genesis 2.

<sup>6</sup> He answered their question with a question they weren't willing to answer.

<sup>7</sup> He told them to give to Caesar what has his image and likeness on it (money) and to give to God what has His image and likeness (PEOPLE!)

<sup>8</sup> They proposed the farcical scenario of a woman who married seven brothers, in turn, as they died, oldest to youngest. Jesus' answer involved accusing these Sadducees of understanding neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

<sup>9</sup> See 10:17 - they (those in the synagogues) will persecute you. See also 16:1-4, where Jesus promised the religious rulers the sign of Jonah and warned His followers of the Pharisees' and Sadducees' "leaven" (i.e. - teaching).

But He wasn't angry with them for opposing Him.

He was angry with them because they, who knew so much about God and His mercy, withheld that mercy from others. He was angry because they used their positions of leadership to "lord it over" others, rather than to serve. He was angry because they required more of those they led than they were willing to give, and because they neglected mercy and compassion and justice.

So, He blasted them in a public speech given in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, just days before His death. The language is rough, but He didn't so much call them names, as He named them.

***[Matthew 23:2]... "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;***

***[3] therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.***

***[4] "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.***

***[5] "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men...***

***[6] "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,***

***[7] and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men...***

***[13] "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in...***

***[15] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves...***

***[23] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.***

***[24] "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!***

***[25] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.***

**[26] “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.**

**[27] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.**

**[28] “So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

**Summary:** Those who have received mercy from God should show mercy to others. Those in positions of religious authority should use that authority to bless, not to “pile on” and to add burdens.

So, Jesus dealt forcefully with those who abused their roles in spiritual authority and called them on the carpet for a lack of love, mercy, and compassion.

Small wonder that Jesus was never called “*the friend of Pharisees.*” But Jesus did have friends. For one, He was a great Friend to the poor.

### **Jesus With the Least, the Last, the Lost**

#### **The Poor**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said “**WHEN you give to the poor**” (6:3), not “*if.*” He expected that His followers would give to help the poor.

He was raised in a poor family, and every time He interacted with people on the road, in the villages, in the wilderness, He was with the poor.

The poor are powerless in any society. But Jesus gave His time and attention to the poor. He gave good news to the poor of spiritual treasure with God and of riches in heaven. He was their Friend.

Jesus was also friendly with the afflicted. Some were afflicted with sickness and disease and He healed them.

#### **The Afflicted**

##### *Diseased*

The Gospels show Jesus healing those who suffered from epilepsy and paralysis and blindness and more.

He also cleansed lepers. No one in the ancient world would have anything to do with someone who suffered from leprosy. Jesus touched and cleansed the lepers.

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah they had been waiting for, Jesus told them to tell John, **[11:5] the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.**

From the very beginning it was clear that He had a heart for those who were living in the darkness of extreme poverty, the darkness of disease - and in the darkness of oppression by evil spirits.<sup>10</sup>

##### *Possessed*

You can summarize Jesus’ mission by saying that He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). And in the end, the enemy will be totally and utterly defeated.

When He cast demons out of afflicted people, He was giving a preview of the universal end to evil that He will one day bring.

So, Jesus virtually ignored Rome. He rebuked the religious world and called them to more love, service, and mercy.

But He was delighted to spend time with the poor, to give help to the afflicted...and one more thing. This one more thing is what I have most wanted to say today.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Matthew 4:16.

To appreciate this one thing, we need to all appreciate the first century Roman system of taxation in Israel. Now, a few weeks ago, Jeff explained much of this. But I'll review some of it now, just to refresh memories.

## The Outsider

*Matthew (Matthew 9:9)*

### Taxation, 1<sup>st</sup> century style

The Roman tax system was extremely complex (I know, it's tough for us to imagine a complex taxation system). Rome levied lots of different kinds of taxes on the Jewish population in Palestine.

The men responsible for collecting all of these Roman taxes from Jews were Jews, themselves.

That fact would have been enough to spur hard feelings toward tax-collectors. But there was another factor that guaranteed universal hatred of these guys.

The Romans required that a certain amount of money be collected by the Jewish tax collectors. But the tax collectors' personal income consisted of how much money "above and beyond" that minimum they could extract from their fellow countrymen.

The more they gouged their fellow Jews, the more they made. And tax collectors were famous for over-gouging.

### Tax collectors

In Jesus' day, "tax collector" was a four-letter word.

They were lumped together with thieves and murderers. Your home was considered unclean if a tax collector came inside. Jewish courts allowed citizens to lie to a tax collector. Tax collectors worked for the enemy.

And there was a certain man named Matthew, who was a tax collector.

### Matthew, the tax man

***[9a] As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth...***

Everything that was true about tax collectors was true about Matthew. Everything true about the reputation of tax collectors was true of Matthew.

He was a selfish cheat. He was an anti-Semitic Jew. Matthew wasn't in good standing in Jewish society and Matthew wasn't welcome at the Jewish synagogues.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this, one day, when Jesus was in the village of Capernaum, He called out to Matthew.

***[9] As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!"***

When Jesus had called fishermen to follow, He invited them to "fish for men."

Matthew was a numbers guy. But Jesus doesn't holler, "Follow Me for a great return on investment." It's just a stark, "Follow Me!"

And it was not only a stark invitation. It was surprising and (as we saw last Sunday) remarkably un-strategic.

Was Matthew really the kind of follower you would expect the Messiah to want to join His team? And was Matthew the kind of man who would consider the invitation, anyway?

---

<sup>11</sup> For their part, tax collectors didn't observe the Mosaic Law and were, mostly, Jewish in name and ethnicity only.

As it turns out, the answer to both questions is a resounding, “Yes!” And if Jesus’ invitation to follow was abrupt, Matthew’s response was equally abrupt.

***[9] As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him.***

Without question or discussion, Matthew became a disciple of Jesus. Just like that.

And where did things move from there? They moved to a dinner party in a private home.

*Matthew’s friends (Matthew 9:10-13)*

In the house... (v. 10a)

***[10a] Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house...<sup>12</sup>***

Jesus followed His newest follower back to the follower’s home. They were eating a meal together at Matthew’s house.

At this meal home were some of Matthew’s closest friends. He evidently wanted his old friends to meet his new friends - Peter and Andrew, James and John - and his other new Friend, Jesus.

Party guests present... (v. 10b)

***[10b]...behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.***

---

<sup>12</sup> The words “*reclining at the table*” describe the way that friends positioned themselves when they were enjoying a meal together. They would lean back on one elbow with their heads facing the low serving table, while their feet extended outward from the table. Or they would lie on their stomachs on top of big pillows - again with their faces toward the table.

I’ve already mentioned that Matthew was despised in polite, proper Jewish society. But that doesn’t mean that Matthew didn’t have friends. He had lots of friends - tax collectors and others who also weren’t acceptable in polite, proper, Jewish society.<sup>13</sup>

Matthew calls those others, “sinners.” They were law-breakers, Sabbath-breakers, marriage-breakers, gamblers.<sup>14</sup>

They were outsiders to the Jewish faith. But Jesus, the Jewish Messiah (!), very naturally said “Yes” to Matthew’s invitation to go to the party at his house.<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly (but sadly), there were some who thought Jesus’ presence at Matthew’s house was scandalous.

THIS crowd for a Messiah?

***[11] When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”***

The Pharisees were looked to as the spiritual leaders in the community, and they didn’t like the company Jesus was keeping.

Everybody knew that rabbis shouldn’t hang with “those” people.

---

<sup>13</sup> Jesus had formerly been in the presence of unclean lepers. That would have been a problem of ceremonial uncleanness for the religious elite. Now (Matthew 9), He is in the presence of people with unclean habits. That would have been an even bigger problem because the uncleanness of “tax collectors and sinners” was a chosen uncleanness.

<sup>14</sup> Sometimes “sinners” was a term applied to those who were too busy, too poor, or too ignorant to pay much attention to the Law or to live up to the expectations of the religious elite.

<sup>15</sup> Mark’s recording of this event includes, [15c]...*for there were many of them, and they were following Him*. It is a provocative phrase. Is Mark saying that Jesus had many disciples? (So, John Grassmick, The Bible Knowledge Commentary) Or is he telling us that many tax-collectors and sinners were following Him? (R.T. France, in his commentary) The context argues for Mark wanting his readers to know that many of those from the ranks of the “*tax collectors and sinners*” category were following Jesus.

Everybody knew that if you want to be godly, you hang with godly people. Avoid people who don't love God, who have bad habits, or who could be a bad influence - and there is wisdom to that. Solomon wrote in Proverbs about the need to choose friends wisely.<sup>16</sup>

And Jesus wasn't following that script. He was eating with and enjoying close fellowship with these folks, risking pollution.

The Pharisees said, "*Bad move, Jesus!*" - from a distance. They would not have gone inside Matthew's house for fear of being contaminated. And they expressed their complaint, not to Jesus, but to His newbie disciples.

When Jesus got wind of their concerns, He went straight to the source, didn't stutter, and spoke.

#### A PERFECT crowd for a Messiah (v. 12)

***[12] But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."***

This is a famous, proverbial saying, as applicable in 2017 as it was in Jesus' day.

Look at the wonderful work done by the group, Doctors without Borders. These heroic men and women get involved in crises in countries where wars or epidemics, malnutrition or natural disasters have overwhelmed local health care systems.

It wouldn't make sense to have Doctors without Borders show up at The National Convention of Healthy People. No docs needed.<sup>17</sup>

In the same way, it only made sense for Jesus, the Great Physician of the soul, to go to those who were spiritually sick.

Jesus said one more thing. And that one more thing gives us the insight into His great heart we've been seeking.

#### Messiah goes where there is need (v. 13)

***[13] "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

There is some irony in His words here because EVERYONE has sinned against God. No one will stand before God and say, "*Well, I did it. I lived a perfect life. My efforts merit eternal life with You.*"

No, we have all failed. But Matthew and his friends at the party in his house KNEW that they were sinners in need of salvation.

The problem with the scribes of the Pharisees was that they thought they were doing just fine. They thought that they didn't need a "doctor" to make them well.

***"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"*** means that Jesus will help anyone who admits their need. Jesus rushes to the poor in spirit who know that they need a Savior. But, He will be of no help to the self-assured and the independent.

Notice, too, that when He walked in to Matthew's home, He walked in without demands or conditions.

#### He went without conditions

Here is the scandalous part of Jesus' way with the irreligious and the outsider.

He didn't demand that they change. He didn't make moral change a precondition of His love and acceptance.

Did He fellowship with them only after they cleaned up their acts? No. Did He fellowship with them on condition that they would clean up their acts? No.

<sup>16</sup> The Apostle Paul will later write, ***[1 Corinthians 15:33] bad company corrupts good morals.***

<sup>17</sup> The Greek philosopher, Diogenes (founder of the Cynic school of philosophy) wrote, "*As a doctor must go among the sick, so a wise man must mix with fools.*"

Jesus simply hangs with those who had “had it” with the religious scene. He went to the home of a man who had stopped trying to fit in with the “righteous” crowd because he knew he could never measure up.

A whole bunch of that man’s friends showed up and He lavished grace on them, too.

Jesus is the Good Physician of the Soul because He opts for the profligate, scandalous, extravagant love of God over a system of merit.

He loved unconditionally. But when He walked over to Matthew’s home, He came with a very clear agenda.

#### He went with an agenda

To say that He only wanted to hang with the tax collectors and sinners would be like saying that the physicians who work with “Doctors without Borders” just like being around sick people.

No! These brave doctors go to devastated people living in crisis to heal them of their diseases.

And Jesus went to Matthew’s house to redeem those who knew they needed redemption.

He wasn’t interested in reform. He was interested in the salvation of the eternal souls of these folks. He knew that reform comes as people follow Him. But He never put the cart before the horse.

He always dealt with the heart of the matter first. He moved from the core outward to the crust. With Jesus, it is re-birth first, and then change. Eternal life first, which lead to a transformed life.

So, Jesus moved from the comfort of Heaven to all of earth’s inconveniences to bring eternal life and relationship with God to us.

#### Conclusion:

Matthew records one of the accusations made about Jesus. I think you’ll love it.

Quoting His detractors, Jesus said, **[11:19] “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”**

To which we say, *“Yep. Jesus was the best Friend a sinner could ever have.”*

There is no question that Jesus loved the Romans and He loved the Pharisees. But He was the tax collector’s Friend and He was the Friend to sinners.<sup>18</sup>

So...

**...if we want His friendship**, we will accept that we bring nothing to God but our need. We desperately need what only He can provide. To accept that is to be **“poor in spirit”** and to be poor in spirit is to be Jesus’ friend.

**- if we would reflect the heart of Jesus**, we will invest in those Jesus befriended - the least, the last, and the lost.

Now, who - for you - is a tax collector? (and don’t say “a tax collector”) Who - for you - is “them”?

Can you see that person in your mind’s eye right now? Would you pray for her? For him? Transformation begins with prayer, so would you ask God to give you a vision of that person whole, changed, transformed, living for Jesus?

God wants you to reach out to the least, the last, the lost, just like Jesus did.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Yet as I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog.” (Philip Yancey)



That might start here, at church as you reach out to people you don't know, welcome the new attender, help the outsider feel right at home.

But it won't stop there.

Matthew began life as a Christ-follower by hosting a party for Jesus and his "us" - his friends. He ended life in Africa, giving His life to bring the Gospel to "them" - the people he formerly cheated.<sup>19</sup>

If you and I are to be, like Jesus, friends to the outsider, to the sinner, we will look at the people we know who don't know Him and see them as He saw them: Sheep without a shepherd.

And there are lots of shepherd-less sheep here in San Antonio, among them are:

- Muslims (as Duane and Sharon Miller reminded us last Sunday)
- Syrian refugees (as Rudy Rocamontes informed me on Friday)
- people from around the world who have come to America to study or to work (as our ESL classes are learning)
- children in the care of the state who need fostering or adopting into a loving home.
- those caught in the web of trafficking, or addictions.

What if there was a congregation of Christian disciples who met on Sundays on Guilbeau Road, who welcomed with open arms all who came to them with the unconditional love of God AND who also had an agenda to see each one who came their way transformed into a Christ-follower who will change the world?

And what if those who made up this congregation scattered throughout the week - to work and to schools and to neighborhoods and to gyms, golf courses and bowling alleys, pool halls and restaurants - to love shepherd-less sheep?

It wouldn't take money or glitz to pull off and it would change everything. And that is our mission because that is Jesus' Great Commission.

---

<sup>19</sup> Matthew became an evangelist to his fellow-Jews, the same ones he had formerly cheated out of tax money. He died a martyr's death in Ethiopia, having taken the gospel to the Jews living there.