

And so, we convince ourselves that certain sins don't apply to us. Or we ignore our sin, we dismiss our sin, we deny our sin. When God reminds us, *"If [you] claim to be without sin, [you] deceive [yourself] and the truth is not in [you]" (1 Jn 1:8)*, then we talk ourselves into believing that the good in our lives more than compensates for the bad. After all, aren't we good Christians? And again God counters, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Ja 2:10)*. As David said to Nathan when confronted with his sins, so we need to buck it up and acknowledge, *"I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sm 12:13a)*. It's then that we so appreciate the gospel words: *"The LORD has taken away your sin" (2 Sm 12:13b)*.

You see, our greatest sickness is not that we commit sins but that our natural sinfulness separates us from God. God speaks to us through the Prophet Isaiah and says, *"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you" (Is 59:2)*. The harder we work to bridge the gap between us and God, the more we try to close the separation by our obedience to God's law and our moral behavior, the wider that gap, that separation, becomes. God speaks to us through Paul the Apostle and says, *"You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you are fallen away from grace" (Ga 5:4)*. You and I are sin-sick, and as such we need divine healing.

That's why Jesus is the Great Physician. That's why he's the Suffering Savior. It's Jesus who *"took up our pain and bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions and was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:4, 5)*. Jesus gave himself into the death of hell to pay for the sins of all. That's why his calling of Matthew and his subsequent eating with him and with other sinners was not a violation of God's righteousness but, rather, a reflection of God's mercy and compassion. This is what Jesus wanted the Pharisees to understand, and it's what he wants us to understand today, as well.

Fellow redeemed by the blood of the Great Physician, healed and made whole by him, may the Holy Spirit lead us more and more to recognize our natural sin-sickness, to repent of it, and to wrap our arms of faith around him as our only Savior from sin. In Jesus we are those whom God sees as healthy. By his love and through the faith he gives us, we have been made whole. He has invited and called us, like Matthew, to be his disciples. As such, let's now introduce others to Jesus and invite them to come along. Amen.

Matthew 9:9-13 – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI – 304, 525, 520
02/19/17- David Kuehl – #What Jesus Said (On Truth and Love)

Maybe it's better to be sick. That's a strange statement, wouldn't you agree? Most of us are quite desirous of good health and a healthy lifestyle. Jesus, however, makes the startling statement that the healthy can fail to recognize a malady which in reality affects us all. We have to understand what Jesus means, or we're going to be confused by him and perhaps even turned off to him, who claims to be the Great Physician and our Savior. And so, in this sermon on #What Jesus Said, we examine his statement, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick,"* and we note:

Maybe It's Better to Be Sick

- 1. A surprising choice**
- 2. Health and sickness**
- 3. The call to healing**

1. Our text focuses our attention on a man named Matthew, who collected taxes. To be a tax collector meant that you were willing to pit yourself against your own people. Tax collectors overcharged everyone. In fact, the more they collected, the more they could keep for themselves. As a result, they were neither respected by those for whom they worked (the Romans), nor were they trusted by those from whom they collected taxes (the Jews). Tax collectors were often grouped with sinners and prostitutes.

Jesus enters the scene shortly after healing a paralytic. Matthew writes, *"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax booth. 'Follow me,' he told the man."* Jesus' disciples must have wondered what he was doing. Matthew must have had his own doubts, as well. Doesn't Jesus know who I am and what I do? Doesn't he know that I abuse the traditions—and the rights—of the Jewish people? But he takes a deep breath, gets up, tosses caution to the wind, and follows Jesus.

Isn't it incredible how a simple meeting with Jesus can so change a person's life? This is a repeating pattern in the Gospels. There's the demon-possessed man living in the tombs. Evil spirits have driven him to mutilate himself, cutting himself with stones. One meeting with Jesus and the hurting stops. There's pint-size Zacchaeus straining to get a view of Jesus from a sycamore-fig tree. This IRS agent has swindled enough people to stockpile his retirement. Yet he's willing to trade it all for a clean conscience and a good friend. One lunch with Jesus and he finds both.

So it is with Matthew. Having been moved by the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus' invitation to be his disciple, he now invites Jesus to have dinner with him. He even invites his lowlife friends to come and meet the Master. All the maladies of sin-sickness—so evident in Matthew's life before he meets Jesus—ripping people off, an uncaring attitude, living only for himself—we now see give way to symptoms of spiritual health. He's concerned for the souls of others and wants them to have a real relationship with Jesus.

As usual, there are folks in the neighborhood who aren't happy that sinners, or even Jesus, for that matter, are also in the neighborhood. They're the Pharisees, men of strict obedience to God's law and the religious leaders of the Jews. They have the knack of showing up wherever Jesus is, looking for ways to trip him up and make him look bad. They were present at the healing of the paralytic, accusing Jesus of blasphemy, that is, claiming to be God, because he had the audacity to tell the healed man that his sins were forgiven. Here again we find them clashing with Jesus, looking down their proverbial noses at his fraternizing with riffraff like Matthew, even asking his disciples, *"Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?"*

As one who is omniscient, Jesus knows their thoughts. He tells them to go back to the Old Testament Scriptures that they so fervently defend to be reminded of what it means to be merciful. He quotes the Prophet Hosea and says, *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."* Jesus knows that, if they do this, they'll learn who the sick really are (the sinners) and who the healthy really are (the righteous), and they'll have a totally different attitude toward those who are less righteous at this point than they are.

2. It's in this way that Jesus is teaching us the meaning of "healthy" and "sick." He says, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."* Jesus is facing the reality before him. He's acknowledging that the Pharisees are healthy and the sinners are sick. Jesus never backs off from calling a sinner a sinner. So, in our text Matthew calls himself and all others like him sinners, and Jesus accepts this label without question.

The same is true of the righteous. They are correctly called righteous. In a strange twist, however, Jesus condemns the righteous and sides with the sinners. I say strange, because it seems to fly in the face of what we typically believe religion and worldly wisdom teach. Wouldn't it be more logical for Jesus to favor the good guys? Perhaps the reason he doesn't is because these guys aren't really good; they're not really righteous.

Look again at the Pharisees. We have to admit that they were pious leaders and moral men. It would be completely proper to compare them to those in the church today who are active in their membership, live exemplary Christian lives, and support the ministry and mission of the church. Such people, people like you and me, are by all normal criteria good; we're righteous. We're the ones who live as God wants us to live. So, where's the rub, and what's the wrong? That's where Jesus opens our eyes today.

It's so important that we note that it's not in their keeping of the law that Jesus condemns the Pharisees. My goodness, you couldn't get any better than they were! Earlier in this same Gospel Jesus says, *"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20).* No, it's not in their outward obedience to the law but, rather, in their lack of love, their lack of mercy, that Jesus condemns the Pharisees. In fact, Jesus once said to another Pharisee named Simon that sinners have more love than the righteous because more has been forgiven them (Lk 4).

Oh, how this leads us to repent, to fall on our knees and confess our sins and shortcomings before God! We sinners know all too well how often we've failed to show mercy. We recognize the lack of love and compassion that has characterized so many of our relationships with others. We are keenly aware that we lack the moral and spiritual wherewithal to change the ugly pattern of our lives. Have mercy on us and help us, O Lord! And he does.

3. Jesus says, *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* Over and again in the Gospels Jesus lays claims to being the Great Physician, the One who came down from heaven to restore spiritual health to sinners like us who are suffering from spiritual sickness and disease. In fact, in the Old Testament we're told: *"This is what the LORD your God says, 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you'" (2 Ki 20:5).*

And yet, all too often we feel so comfortable in our Pharisaical robes that we keep on playing the part of the righteous. We compare our sins to others, convincing ourselves that their sins are worse than ours. But as Andy Stanley once said, *"There's no win in comparison."* Dah! Compare-a-sin. Just because our sins may not be as open or outrageous as others, we're still sinners. By nature we all drink from the same spiritual trough of sin.