

Research: Matt 9:10-13

Jesus Eats with Sinners

10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

Publican in Greek is *telones* which means “a tax-gatherer, collector of taxes or tolls; one employed by a farmer-general in collecting the taxes. The tax-collectors were, as a class, detested not only by the Jews but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception, with which they prosecuted it” (Thayer 5057, Accordance).

Sinner in Greek is *hamartolos* which means “one devoted to sin; specifically of men stained with certain definite vices or crimes, e.g. the tax-gatherers” (Thayer 268, Accordance).

“The Greek text does not mention ‘Matthew’s house, though v. 9 implies it is Matthew’s and both Mark and Luke specify it. Jesus himself had said that even a tax collector has his friends, and Matthew’s dinner substantiates this. ‘Sinners’ may include common folk who did not share all the scruples of the Pharisees; but it almost certainly groups together those who broke Pharisaic *Halakoth* (rules of conduct) – harlots, tax collectors, and other disreputable people. Though eating with them entailed dangers of ceremonial defilement, Jesus and his disciples did so” (EBC 8. 224).

“The tax collector was regarded by Jews of that time as a sinner not so much because he was the tool of the occupying power, or because he was regarded by the more rigorous as being a servant of the Herodian house, but more because he had to handle currency with pagan inscriptions and pagan iconography. And since many of these tax collectors were corrupt and regularly accepted bribes, the whole profession had come to have a bad reputation” (AYB Matthew 105).

“There being so great a multitude of guests, it is probable that the feast was held not in the upper-room, but in the great courtyard of the house” [the guests reclining on couches] (Dummelow 657).

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

Pharisees in Greek is *farisaios* which means “a member of the sect or party of the Pharisees; to separate. They sought for distinction and praise by the observance of external rites and by the outward forms of piety, such as ablutions, fasting, prayers, and alms-giving and negligent of genuine piety, they prided themselves on their fancied good works. They numbered about 6000. They were bitter enemies of Jesus and his cause; and were in turn severely rebuked by him for their avarice, ambition, hollow reliance on

outward works, and affectation of piety in order to gain notoriety” (Thayer 5330, Accordance).

“The Pharisees were not invited, but they walked in to see what was happening. In the East a banquet is a public affair, and any casual wayfarer may enter as a spectator” (Dummelow 657).

“*Why eateth and drinketh*, etc. To eat and drink with others denotes intimacy and familiarity. The Pharisees, by asking this question, accused him of seeking the society of such men, and of being the companion of the wicked. The inference which they would draw was, that he could not be himself righteous, since he delighted in the company of abandoned men” (Barnes 44).

“Publicans were social outcasts, and religiously half-excommunicate. It was said, ‘A religious man who becomes a publican, is to be driven out of the society of religion.’ ‘It is not lawful to use the riches of such men, of whom it is presumed that all their wealth was gotten by rapine, and that all their business was the business of extortioners, such as publicans and robbers are. Publicans were forbidden to be judges or to give evidence’ ” (Dummelow 657).

12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

“These verses again connect Jesus’ healing ministry with his ‘healing of sinners.’ The sick need a doctor, and Jesus healed them; likewise the sinful need mercy, forgiveness, restoration, and Jesus healed them. The Pharisees were not so healthy as they thought; more important they did not understand the purpose of Jesus’ mission. Expecting a Messiah who would crush the sinful and support the righteous, they had little place for one who accepted and transformed the sinner and dismissed the ‘righteous’ as hypocrites” (EBC 8. 225).

13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

“The quotation (v. 13) is from Hosea 6:6 and is introduced by the rabbinic formula ‘go and learn,’ used of those who needed to study the text further. Use of the formula may be slightly sardonic: those who prided themselves in their knowledge of and conformity to Scripture needed to ‘go and learn’ what it means. . . . The Hebrew word for ‘mercy’ (*hesed*) is close in meaning to ‘covenant love,’ which according to Hosea, is more important than ‘sacrifice.’ As applied to the Pharisees by Jesus, therefore, the Hosea quotation was not simply telling them that they should be more sympathetic to outcasts and less concerned about ceremonial purity, but that they were aligned with the apostates [one who has abandoned one’s religious faith, principles or cause] of ancient Israel in that they too preserved the shell while losing the heart of the matter, as exemplified by their attitude to tax collectors and sinners” (EBC 8. 225).

“The reply of Jesus is ironic: it is often those who think they have no need of a physician who really need him most” (AYB Matthew 106).

“Ritual without love is an abomination. Quoted from Hos. 6:6. . . . Ironically spoken. Of course Christ did come to call the Pharisees, but they refused to be called” (Dummelow 657).

“It is a Hebrew mode of speaking, and means, *I prefer mercy to sacrifice; or, I am more pleased with acts of benevolence and kindness than with a mere external compliance with the duties of religion.* Mercy, here, means benevolence or kindness towards others. Sacrifices were offerings made to God on account of sin, or as an expression of thanksgiving. . . . Sacrifices were the principal part of the external worship in general” (Barnes 44).

Mercy in Hebrew is *hesed* which means kindness, lovingkindness, steadfast and unfailing love (*TWOT* 2617, Accordance).

Sacrifice in Hebrew is *zebach* which means a slaughter, i.e. the flesh of an animal; an offering (*TWOT* 2077, Accordance).