

Mercy Extended

JESUS SHOWS MERCY TO ALL WHO COME TO HIM IN FAITH.

Five days before Christmas in 1943, Second Lieutenant Charles Brown and his co-pilot Spencer “Pinky” Luke were returning from a bombing run over Germany. Their B-17 bomber had been shot up; the tail gunner was dead and half the crew was wounded. The twenty-one-year-old pilot was on his first combat mission and things had not gone well. The B-17 had been shot to pieces by German fighters and was barely flying above the tree tops. They were the only U.S. plane left in the sky over Germany that night, so there was no air support for them.

Second Lieutenant Franz Stigler, a German pilot, was standing by his plane when he heard the sound of the B-17 flying close to the ground. Stigler was one kill away from earning the Knight’s Cross, Germany’s highest award for valor. His older brother had been killed earlier in the war. The B-17s were bombing his country’s cities. Stigler saluted the ground crew and prepared to hunt down the unlucky B-17.

Stigler decided to approach from the rear of the bomber. To his surprise, no one on the B-17 fired at him. As he came closer, he saw the tail gunner’s white fleece collar covered in blood. The guns on the plane had been knocked out, and inside the plane he could see crewmen working over their wounded colleagues.

As the fighter eased up beside the B-17, Brown got his first look at the gray German Messerschmitt fighter that was just feet off the bomber’s wingtip. Brown said to his co-pilot, “He’s going to destroy us.” Stigler had his hand on the trigger, but he couldn’t pull it. Shooting such a helpless aircraft didn’t seem right. Nodding at the American pilot, Stigler moved his fighter into formation with the crippled B-17, shielding it from German anti-aircraft gunners. Stigler escorted the American plane all the way to the North Sea, then he turned back to his base.

Stigler never mentioned the incident because if he had been reported he would have face a firing squad. Stigler left Germany at the end of the war and moved to Canada. Stigler and Brown eventually were reunited and became close friends. During a reunion, a video was played showing all the faces of the people that now lived—children, grandchildren,

relatives—because Stigler extended an act of mercy. The two men died within a few months of each other in 2008. Stigler was ninety-two and Brown was eighty-seven. Mercy was extended and mercy was received.



Matthew 9:9-38

After a brief description of Jesus’s call to Matthew to be His disciple (v. 9), Matthew recorded two questions directed toward Jesus. The first was asked by the Pharisees and dealt with Jesus’s table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners (v. 11). Since Jesus came to call sinners to repentance, Jesus’s table fellowship with sinners made sense (vv. 12-13). Jesus’s concept of discipleship was radically different from that of the Pharisees.

The second question was asked by disciples of John the Baptist and dealt with the reason Jesus and His disciples did not fast, especially given the practice of the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus answered their question with a question of His own. The question challenged the appropriateness of fasting at a wedding. The issue was not the practice of fasting in and of itself. The issue was one of timing (vv. 14-17).

Matthew recorded Jesus performing four miracles—the raising of the daughter of a leader of a synagogue (vv. 18-19,23-25), the curing of a woman with a bleeding issue (vv. 20-22), the curing of two blind men (vv. 27-31), and driving a demon out of a possessed man (vv. 32-33).

The crowds were amazed by this last miracle (v. 33). Perhaps motivated by jealousy, the Pharisees struck back at Jesus’s popularity. The Pharisees could not deny that Jesus had driven the demon from the man, so they attacked the source of Jesus’s power. They said, “He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons” (v. 34). This hostility directed towards Jesus would increase as time passed.

Today’s background passage ends with a summary of Jesus’s ministry: “Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness” (v. 35). Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them (v. 36). Jesus’s conclusion was that the harvest was abundant; the problem was with number of workers in the fields (v. 37). Jesus challenged the disciples to “pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest” (v. 38).

Jesus's Mission (Matt. 9:10-13)

While Jesus was eating a meal, tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees saw this and questioned the disciples, wondering why Jesus would eat with such people. Jesus, hearing the question, taught that those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick. He came to call sinners to righteousness.

VERSE 10

While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples.

Sometime after Matthew chose to follow Jesus a dinner was held in Jesus's honor. The location of the dinner is not clear; Matthew simply said **in the house**, with no indication as to whom the house belonged. Both Luke and Mark make explicit that the house belonged to Matthew/Levi (Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29).

Also, the type of meal involved is unclear. The Greek phrase translated **reclining at the table** ("having dinner," NIV) could mean simply that they shared a meal together. Again, Luke provided additional information; he described the meal as "a grand banquet" held in Jesus's honor (Luke 5:29). The large number of **tax collectors** and **sinners** were probably attending at Matthew's invitation. Matthew wanted his colleagues and friends to know Jesus as he knew Him. What better way for that to happen than for Matthew to invite both Jesus and Matthew's colleagues to his house.

As one of the *tax collectors*, Matthew was involved in collecting duty on goods being transported. Tax collectors were not unclean in the sense that a leper was unclean; however, the tax collectors spent time with Gentiles, including Roman officials. The tax collectors were often viewed as traitors to their nation. They were also viewed as dishonest because they frequently collected more money than they were entitled to.

The second category of people who attended the banquet was *sinners*. This category would have included those whose occupations did not allow them to maintain purity to the level that the Pharisees insisted on. Also included would have been those who simply chose not to comply with all the Pharisees' rules. Generally, sinners were grouped with tax collectors, as is the case in this passage. However, tax collectors also were grouped with Gentiles (Matt. 18:17) and with prostitutes (21:31-32),

suggesting more than a refusal to follow purity rituals. This group probably was not worried about righteousness. The attendees were surely not the sort of people one would expect at a dinner held in honor of the new rabbi.

VERSE 11

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

The Pharisees questioned Jesus’s disciples as to why He ate with **tax collectors** and **sinners**. It is not completely clear how the Pharisees were aware of Jesus’s actions. They probably were not invited to the banquet, and if they were, it is unlikely they would have attended. It is possible that Matthew would have opened windows and doors in his house so as to create a breeze to make the guests more comfortable. If that were the case, the Pharisees would have been able to see at a distance what was going on. It is also possible that someone who attended the banquet told them about Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners.

In either case, the Pharisees were aware of Jesus’s actions at the banquet and questioned **His disciples** about those actions. Sharing a meal was considered a way of accepting a person into fellowship. To share a meal with sinners like these men was something that the Pharisees could not understand.

VERSE 12

Now when he heard this, he said, “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”

Jesus became aware of the Pharisees’ question and answered with a well-known proverb: **“It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”** The two categories could be expressed as “respectable” and “outcasts” of society. The tax collectors and sinners belonged to the outcasts, and as such stood in need of the doctor’s healing care. The respectable were the Pharisees; because they were not aware of their need, they could not be helped. If they really had been respectable they would have helped the outcasts rather than ignoring them.

VERSE 13

“Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus’s command, **“Go and learn,”** challenged the Pharisees at what they deemed to be their strong point, knowledge of Scriptures. The Pharisees were probably stung at Jesus’s suggestion that they needed to study Scripture. Jesus quoted the first half of Hosea 6:6 as a starting point for the Pharisees’ learning assignment. The Greek word for **mercy** translates a Hebrew word in Hosea 6:6 that is sometimes rendered “steadfast love” (ESV) or “faithful love” (CSB). The Pharisees, like Hosea’s audience, needed to understand God’s heart for mercy. Hosea 6 begins with a call for repentance and a return to God.

Earlier the two categories had been those who are “sick” and those who are “well” (Matt. 9:12). It is the sick who need a doctor. Here the two categories are **sinners** and **the righteous**. Jesus’s mission was one proclaiming repentance and salvation. Therefore, Jesus’s call was to the sinners who were aware of their sin and ready to repent. Luke explicitly tied the call to sinners with a call to repent: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Those who think they are *righteous* (the Pharisees) are not able to see their need for healing. The Pharisees’ conviction that they could see demonstrated that they were really blind. They were convinced of their own righteousness, so they were unable to experience the true righteousness Jesus was offering.

The Pharisees who engaged Jesus’s disciples with a question about table fellowship could not imagine that they were no different from the tax collectors and sinners who came to Jesus. On the other hand, those who were sick and understood their need for healing were graciously given mercy and forgiveness.



Explore Further

Read the article “Publican” on pages 1319–1320 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did a person become a tax collector for the Romans? Why were they viewed so negatively? Who were they compared to socially?

Jesus’s Work (Matt. 9:14-17)

John’s disciples approached Jesus, asking why His disciples did not fast. Jesus used a metaphor to explain that they could not be downcast while

He was with them, though someday He would be taken from them. Then Jesus offered the imagery of a shrinking patch that tears the garment it was meant to repair and brittle wineskins being ruined when new wine is poured into them. What Jesus came to do was a new work, unlike anything in the traditional Jewish teaching.

VERSE 14

Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

Unlike the **Pharisees**, who approached Jesus indirectly through His disciples, the **disciples** of John the Baptist approached Jesus directly. Their question related to the practice of fasting. In the Old Testament law, the only required fast was on the Day of Atonement (“practice self-denial,” Lev. 16:29-30; 23:27-31; Num. 29:7). However, by the time of Jesus pious Jews often fasted twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays. Fasting also was seen as a way to find favor with God when people needed to approach God in deep humility. The disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees fasted often, and Jesus’s disciples didn’t fast at all. Jesus did, in fact, teach His disciples to practice fasting in secret (6:16-18).

VERSE 15

Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Jesus answered their question with a question of His own: **“Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them?”** The Greek words that are translated *wedding guests* can be translated more literally as “the sons of the bridal hall.” These men stood closest to the groom and worked hard to see that nothing went wrong. The sadness associated with fasting is not appropriate for the joy of a wedding. The wedding celebration often lasted a week, with the whole village participating in the festivities. The obvious answer to Jesus’s question is “No they can’t.” The wedding was a time of joy, not of sorrow. The atmosphere of sadness appropriate for fasting was not appropriate for a wedding.

Jesus told of a time when fasting would be appropriate for His disciples. Jesus identified Himself as the **groom** and alluded to the fact that there would be a time when He would be **taken away**. Jesus would be taken from His disciples, and then fasting would be appropriate. John the Baptist had identified himself as Jesus’s best man, while Jesus was

the groom (John 3:28-30). John rejoiced greatly in the presence of the bridegroom. Jesus did not command His disciples to fast but predicted that they would. And they did (Acts 9:9; 13:3; 14:23).

VERSE 16

“No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse.”

Jesus used two illustrations from everyday life which point out “the essential discontinuity between old forms of worship in Judaism and the new spirit of the messianic age.”¹ The first illustration would have been familiar to most of Jesus’s audience. For those who worked outdoors, finding holes in garments was a common occurrence. In poor households buying new clothes was out of the question, so clothes were mended.

An **old garment** would have shrunk long ago. If the **patch** that was chosen to mend the garment had not been shrunk, it would shrink the first time it came in contact with water. As the new patch began to shrink, it would pull away from the old garment, and the **tear** in the old garment would be made **worse**. Using an unshrunk patch to repair a garment that had already been shrunk was foolish. Jesus did not come “to patch up a worn-out Judaism.”²

VERSE 17

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

The second illustration parallels the first and makes the same point. The **skins** of goats were tanned and toughened and used to transport **wine**. The feet and the neck of the goat skin were tied off to prevent spillage. The hides of larger animals, like an ox or a camel, were used for larger amounts of wine. As the skins got older, they lost their elasticity and were subject to breaking or cracking.

New wine probably referred to wine that was just beginning the fermentation process. Since the wine was still fermenting, care had to be exercised in storing the new wine. As the new wine fermented, it put more pressure on the **old wineskins** than they were able to bear. Eventually, the old wineskins would **burst** and both the wine and the skins

would be lost. Only **fresh wineskins** could preserve both the skins and the wine.

The burst wineskins were not a reference to rejecting the Old Testament; Jesus had already made clear that He had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not to abolish them (5:17). However, Jesus was not bringing a revised or updated Judaism. Nor was He founding a new sect within Judaism. The teaching and actions of Jesus would not fit in the old Jewish system. His disciples could not be confined in the old system; they needed new skins to hold the new wine of the gospel.³



Explore Further

Read the article “Fasting” on page 558 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some purposes of fasting?

Jesus’s Compassion (Matt. 9:18-19)

A leader in the synagogue knelt before Jesus and asked Him to come and lay His hand on his daughter so she would live. Jesus and His disciples got up and followed the man.

VERSE 18

As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”

Matthew tied this story with Jesus’s teaching on fasting: **As he was telling them these things**. Matthew identified the man who approached Jesus simply as **one of the leaders**. Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41 identify the man as a leader of the synagogue, which seems to be what Matthew was suggesting. Mark and Luke also provide a name for the leader: Jairus. The leader of the synagogue was an important person in the Jewish community. It is unlikely that someone in Jairus’s position would have sought out Jesus unless he had tried every other possibility. Jesus had just recently been criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. In spite of that, Jairus sought out Jesus.

The leader approached Jesus as He was teaching and **knelt down before him**. Both Mark and Luke used a different Greek word that is normally translated “fall down” (“he fell at his feet,” Mark 5:22; see Luke 8:41). The word Matthew used often suggests worship, though that is probably not the case here. Even so, Jairus approached Jesus with a certain humility. For such a person of Jairus’s position to kneel before someone who was beginning to be regarded as a heretic would have put Jairus in a precarious position in the synagogue.

Jairus’s urgency is evident in the way he addressed Jesus: **“My daughter just died.”** Both Mark and Luke report that when the leader arrived the child was still alive: “My little daughter is dying” (Mark 5:23; see also Luke 8:42). The Greek word that is translated *died* is used in Hebrews to describe Joseph as “nearing the end of his life” (Heb. 11:22). Matthew may have used the word in a similar way. The child may have been barely hanging on, only to receive confirmation that the child had died. The Greek word that is translated *just* indicates that the action took place in either in the immediate present or the immediate past.

The leader was convinced that Jesus was able to help his daughter even if she had already died. His confidence is similar to that of the leper (Matt. 8:2) and the centurion (vv. 8-9). The leader said that if Jesus would come and lay His hand on her, she would **live**. The ruler’s confidence may have come from his background in the Old Testament. Both Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37) had raised people from the dead. Perhaps he concluded from those stories that someone like Jesus would be able to help. Perhaps he had heard stories of Jesus’s power and was convinced that Jesus was able to restore his daughter. Whatever the case, his faith in Jesus’s power to restore was obvious.

VERSE 19

So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

Jesus and His disciples got up and followed Jairus. The disciples are not mentioned again until the end of this chapter when Jesus challenged them to pray to the Lord of the harvest (vv. 37-38). The focus of what follows is on Jesus and His power.

As Jesus went toward the leader’s house, He and His entourage were approached by a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (v. 20). She was probably bleeding in between her normal menstrual flows. Mark and Luke relate that the woman had spent all of her money in the hopes of being healed, but nothing had helped (Mark 5:25-26; Luke 8:43). Her situation meant that she was constantly in an unpure state.

The woman approached Jesus from behind and touched the edge of His robe. She was convinced that if she could touch the hem of His robe, she would be healed (Matt. 9:20-21). And she was. The woman was healed, and immediately her flow of blood stopped (Mark 5:29). Jesus found her in the crowd and said to her, “Have courage, daughter. Your faith has saved you” (Matt. 9:22). The Greek word translated here as “saved” means to rescue someone from some danger. The context usually determines what the danger is and what English word should be used in translation. When the disciples were on the boat in a storm, they called out for Jesus to rescue (“save”) them from the storm (8:25). The angel of the Lord told Joseph that Jesus would save His people from their sins (1:21.) In the first context the danger was physical (a storm); in the second, it was spiritual (sins). In this context, the woman’s physical situation was the first thing mentioned and a word that indicates physical recovery would be appropriate (“made you well,” ESV; “healed,” NIV). If Jesus had intended to refer to the woman’s spiritual state, then the English word “saved” would be appropriate (“has saved you,” CSB). Matthew likely intended a focus on both the physical and spiritual.



Explore Further

Read the article “Kneel” on page 977 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. According to the article, what were the various contexts in which kneeling was appropriate?

Jesus’s Power (Matt. 9:23-26)

When Jesus arrived at the home of the synagogue leader, He sent the crowd outside the home. He took the girl by the hand and she stood up, healed. Word of Jesus’s miracles spread throughout the region.

VERSE 23

When Jesus came to the leader’s house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly.

Once the woman who had suffered from bleeding was healed, Jesus continued His journey to **the leader’s house** uninterrupted. When He

arrived at the leader's house, Jesus was greeted by a chaotic scene. But this was not unusual. Professional mourners were part of the grieving process. They were used in the Old Testament as well (Jer. 9:17-18). Even the poorest families in the land were expected to hire at least two **flute players** and one wailing woman. For someone of the status of the leader of the synagogue, many more professional mourners would have been expected. Family members would mourn as well. Apparently, the mourning began before the father returned from finding Jesus. Their goal was to produce as much sound as possible. The Greek word that is translated as **lamenting loudly** literally means "to throw into disorder" and can be translated as "to agitate" ("making a commotion," ESV).

The burial process moved quickly. Because Jews did not practice embalming, the corpse had to be buried quickly, usually within twenty-four hours. This was done before bodily decomposition set in.

VERSE 24

**"Leave," he said, "because the girl is not dead but asleep."
And they laughed at him.**

Jesus told the mourners to **leave** ("go away," ESV, NIV). Their services were no longer needed. Although the daughter was indeed dead at the moment, shortly she would be alive again, and mourning would no longer be appropriate. It would be replaced by joy.

Jesus said that the girl was **not dead but asleep**. The word *asleep* is often used as a euphemism for death. When Jesus received word that Lazarus had died, He told the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on my way to wake him up" (John 11:11). His disciples misunderstood, and Jesus had stated clearly, "Lazarus has died" (v. 14).

When the crowd heard Jesus's statement, **they laughed at him**. The Greek word translated *laughed* can mean "to ridicule." Luke indicated that their laughter was based on the fact that they knew that the child was dead (Luke 8:53). Obviously, they had been there long enough to verify her death. The Greek word that is translated **girl** could refer to a young girl approaching puberty. Mark and Luke both reported that the girl was twelve years old (Mark 5:42; Luke 8:42). The woman with the issue of blood had suffered for twelve years; the young girl who died was twelve years old. The woman had suffered the entire life of the young girl.

VERSE 25

After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

Matthew does not record how the noisy **crowd** was removed from the house. Even though the crowd laughed at Jesus's statement about the child's being asleep, they probably obeyed Him by exiting the house, even if reluctantly. Jairus may also have helped to encourage people to leave, since it was his home and his child. When the crowd had been put out of the house, Jesus entered the room where the child was. Matthew, as he frequently did, wasted no details in telling the story. He mentioned no one entering the room except Jesus. Mark mentioned Peter, James, and John plus the girl's parents accompanying Jesus into the room (Mark 5:37,40). Jesus **took the girl by the hand**, and she was raised. Mark and Luke record that Jesus spoke to the girl and that she **got up** and began to walk (Mark 5:41-42; Luke 8:54-55). Matthew leaves out these other details, allowing the reader to focus on the miracle itself. This miracle was the first of three times that Jesus raised someone from the dead in the Gospels. In addition to this miracle, Jesus raised the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and He also raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

VERSE 26

Then news of this spread throughout that whole area.

Matthew brings to an end his record of the two miracles with a brief description of the powerful effect this miracle had on the surrounding region. The phrase **whole area** may be a reference to the area around Capernaum. However, it may have been a reference to the whole of Galilee.

Explore Further

Read the article "Miracles, Signs, Wonders" on pages 1110-1111 of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*.

How does one's perspective on God affect one's view in relation to miracles? How can God's working through everyday events still

● be miraculous?

1. Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 85.
2. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 226.
3. *Ibid.*, 226-227.