

Grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Who needs Jesus?

Matthew 9:11 to 13 <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.** <sup>13</sup> **Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'** For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:11–13 (ESV)

Who needs Jesus? We are going to approach this question from three perspectives; first we're going to ask in our Bible texts who needs Jesus? Second, we're going to ask do we need Jesus? And third we're going to ask who is sick in this world and needs Jesus?

Who needs Jesus?

In the context of today's gospel reading Jesus is eating with sinners and tax collectors. We must understand who these tax collectors and sinners are. The tax collectors are easier to identify, as 'sinners' is just the catchall term for those who are unsavoury, probably breaking the Old Testament law, and are therefore ceremonially unclean. The tax collectors are Jewish people who are employed by the Roman state to collect the tax. If the Roman state said the tax was 10% the tax collectors are probably collecting 15 or 20% from their own people. They are putting the profits in their pockets, they are traitors to the Jewish people, they are ripping off not just their fellow citizen, but they are ripping off the children of Abraham. This is why the tax collectors are always excluded in the gospel stories because they were pariahs of society, they were shills for the Roman state, they were making a profit on the side of their questionable profession. We learn this better in the story of Zacchaeus who promises after his repentance and conversion to give back twice what he has taken. He knows he has taken it illegally and immorally and so he says he will give back twice what he swindled. Everyone knows there is something wrong with their lifestyle it is why they get the title sinners.

How should these people be dealt with? The Pharisees exclude them for they are ceremonially unclean, they are a shame on the Jewish nation, they make the whole Jewish people look bad. Therefore, they are not brought into the household for meals, they do not host others for meals, they are outside of the worshipping community.

This is not Jesus' solution. For he desires mercy, that is he wants to be merciful. Jesus' solution is to call them to repentance. He says to Matthew who is sitting at his booth right in his very sin 'come and follow me'. That is 'leave everything behind, leave your livelihood, your criminality, your immoral action, the shame of your nation, leave that behind and come and follow me'. The command of Christ is strong, the Word of God is so strong that Matthew immediately drops everything, rises to his feet and follows Christ. Further to this when Matthew has followed Jesus, when he has repented of his sin and received forgiveness (although the words are implicit and not explicit in this text), Matthew hosts the Messiah at his house for a meal. All his friends and acquaintances come over, his mates who are sinners and tax collectors. It's like the national accountancy gathering at Matthew's house and Jesus is there eating with him. This upset the Pharisees for they think these people should be shunned. Yet here is Jesus eating in a most intimate setting, lying, reclining at a table, resting. In a later text (John's Gospel) we hear that when they are reclining at the table, when they're laying at the table, some are even resting their head on the chest of another. This is the closeness attained in

these meals. Here is Jesus in the midst of all these sinners, people who shouldn't be in the temple, who shouldn't receive God's favour and He is eating with them. Jesus' solution, because he is the doctor, is to bring the healing these people need, to show his mercy. Where their uncleanness should pollute Jesus, his holiness makes them all clean.

In our Romans reading, we see that the lawbreakers also need the doctor. They need the doctor to come and make them right, they need Jesus to justify, that is correct and apply his righteousness to them.

In the gospel stories surrounding the calling of Matthew and Jesus eating with him we see all sorts of physical and spiritual healings. The paralytic man, the bleeding woman, the dead child, blind man, mute man, all healed because the physician has come to visit. The doctor is in the house, and he is doing his acts of healing and mercy. These people need Jesus because Jesus brings physical and spiritual healing as we notice when he heals the paralytic, he tells him his sins are forgiven. All these contacts with death and blood should have also made Jesus unclean but again, his purity makes everything clean!

In the psalm and in Hosea we see the people who need Jesus are people in trouble. People who don't seem to have any troubles don't need Jesus, those who are well don't need the doctor and they certainly don't go looking for the doctor. This is the Israelite problem, and a problem we still have today, when things are going well, we think we don't need Jesus. In Hosea a punished people, punished for unfaithfulness, need God to come to them. They need to be reminded not to just go through religious motions but to understand their great need for help and to call out to the helper.

All these people need Jesus.

Who needs Jesus?

We Need Jesus!

We need Jesus because of physical and spiritual illness. Yes! He is still healing. Yes! He still comes to us and calls us to repentance. We need to see we are the sinners, we are the sick people who need a doctor, for we daily sin much and we need much grace. That is why he calls us to daily pray 'forgive us our sins'. That is why Luther tells us to be constantly picking up the catechism and looking at those 10 commandments so that we see how great our sin is, how great our need is for Jesus, how sick we really are and how badly we need that doctor, so that we go running to him to receive his forgiveness, healing and mercy.

In context of today's reading the sin we most readily commit is the same sin as the Pharisees, and so to help us see how we behave like the Pharisees I want to move on to our world and ask the question, 'who needs Jesus?'

Who needs Jesus? The world needs Jesus!

Lest we do become like the Pharisees we must understand who needs Jesus. The world is likely to ask it like this 'who needs Jesus?' (flippantly) because they do not know what he offers or what they're missing.

When we look at the world, we are inclined to condemn them on account of their moral deterioration. We see the unrighteousness of the world, measure it against our perceived

righteousness and then assume the world is beyond help. We observe and lament the moral decay of our society. We turn up our noses at the LGBTI agenda (sexual agenda), the abortionist, euthanasia, the mental health problems of young people, the spiritual and religious apathy and hatred, the drug and drinking problems, the homeless and the destitute, the socially deprived and screen addicted, those lacking in work ethic and financially struggling, and we say they deserved it, and they caused these problems themselves.

This makes us just like the Pharisees, proclaiming ourselves as righteous and others as unrighteous, excluding them from the great healer that they need so badly.

Instead, we should see these people all need Jesus! Not to affirm their behaviours or approve of their lifestyle as our so-called 'tolerant' brothers and sisters suggest.

These people need Jesus to call them to follow. He uses us to do this. These people need Jesus to call them to step out of their sinful lifestyles and behaviour into his righteousness. To receive his forgiveness! These people need Jesus' healing presence, his healing peace, his healing body and blood, to heal them from the demons and lies of our society, to soothe their ailments, to give them life both physical and spiritual. They need our prayer, our comfort and stability because they need Jesus that we have in abundance as he promised us, 'I will be with you always to the very end of the age'.

Jesus proclaimed that only the sick need a physician. Our society is full of people who are sick in their bodies, in their minds, and in their spirits, who badly need Jesus the great physician. Not only do we need him every day, to heal our ailments of mind, body, and soul, but our world needs Jesus to heal them also. We are tasked with taking Jesus out of this place, taking Jesus from where he has abundantly promised to be with us, in His Word and Sacraments, and daily in a life of sacrifice taking him to this hurting world.

Who needs Jesus?

We need Jesus! This world needs Jesus! For he desires to bring mercy to the hurting.

**"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."**

Amen