

BLESS – E – EAT
Matthew 9:9-13

Good morning church. So good to be with you today, and glad we could meet in this alternate setting today. We had originally planned with the school to have church at the beach today, but decided to make a change to this facility. It's a little easier for us to get to (traffic), and definitely easier for us to have food together after worship. I hope you will stay for lunch after worship.

Today we are continuing in our BLESS series. And, I think I've said this every week so far – BLESS is simply a language – a tool of sorts – to help us put language around what it means to live our lives on mission. We are all called to the mission of God, not as a program or event at church, but as a lifestyle – a lifestyle of sharing the Gospel freely and showing the Gospel compassionately.

And this word BLESS – this tool – is a help to give us a language that matches the lifestyle. Kids in the room – any of you remember what the letter B stands for? Right – Begin with prayer. Until and unless we are praying for people, praying for opportunities to BLESS people, praying that God would save people – unless we are praying it's like trying to drive a car without gasoline. You're not going to get too far.

Kids – Any of you remember what the L stands for? Right. Listen. Listening as an act of compassion toward people we are seeking to bless.

What about the E? Right – Eat. Maybe my favorite of all. Eat. And the 2 S's are serve and story. Which is where we are going the next few weeks.

But, for today, the word is EAT. My favorite of all of the BLESS acronym – I really like to eat. Turn with me, if you have a Bible or device, go ahead and turn with me to Matthew 9. And I'm going to read verses 9-13.

READ Matthew 9:9-13

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him.

¹⁰ While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples.¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice.^[e] For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."^[f]

PRAY

I love this story. And I love that the version we're reading this story from – it's autobiographical. Matthew's telling us, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew's telling us how he met Jesus. And he tells us about this party that he throws for Jesus.

BACKGROUND:

Now, this is super early in Jesus' ministry, but he's already started to be known. His miracles and teachings are undeniable. I mean – he had already healed a leper, and healed a paralyzed guy. Everyone knew who he was.

And the religious establishment – the Pharisees – had already started taking notice of him. Culturally, the religious leaders of the day – they brokered in power and control. They looked down on the people of Israel, used the law to control them, used fear to control them – all with the goal of staying in power. And now, the religious customs of the day placed a HUGE premium on ceremonial cleanliness. Not like, I gotta wash my hands or carry around one of these sanitizer bottles all the time. But like, eating the wrong things, interacting with the wrong people, not following every single rule – these were the things they were fearful of doing because they'd be considered unclean.

Even who they would talk with. Enter Matthew. Matthew was sitting at the tax office. Matthew would have been very wealthy – and not like really good businessman, or strong investor wealthy – more like I'm going to steal from you and there's nothing you can do about it wealthy. Like the kid who stole your lunch money, but worse. See Matthew was a Jewish guy, employed by the Romans, to collect taxes. Now, let's say Rome wanted \$1,000 per month from Matthew. Matt would go around and collect taxes, and collect as much as he could. He could collect \$2,000 – give \$1,000 to Rome and pocket the difference. He was running a shakedown and there was nothing the people could do about it. Didn't matter how much he collected, so long as he met his quota to send back to Rome.

Illustration – traffic shakedowns in Tanzania

Now, the people of Israel – they would've viewed him as a traitor. They despised the tax collectors. They were crooked, and they got lumped in with "sinners and prostitutes". In fact, in the CSB, with just a few exceptions, almost every time the word tax collectors is thrown out they're lumped in with sinners or prostitutes. The tax collectors were hated. And they were removed from the religious celebrations and rituals of the day – they couldn't go to the synagogue and couldn't have any social interactions with other Jews. In essence, they'd sold their birthright as a child of Abraham to the Romans, in exchange for the role of tax collector to get rich by stealing from their countryman.

But Jesus – He's not concerned with the religious establishment – he's concerned with people that know they need a savior. Lost and broken people. In fact, if you read through the Gospels, you'll see Jesus' strongest and harshest words were directed at the religious leaders of the day. And Jesus walks by Matthew, and says to him 2 simple words – "Follow Me". And Matthew, probably surprised – gets up and follows him. Luke's account of this story says that Matthew left everything behind and followed Jesus. Matthew – this wealthy dude with a license to steal

– leaves it all behind to follow Jesus. One Jewish scholar says this of Matthew **“He said not a word, for his soul was in speechless surprise of unexpected grace”**.

No reluctance – instead a complete surrender to Jesus. Really, when anyone comes to Jesus, it’s about surrender. We surrender everything to Him, and we trust His ways are good, right, and pure. We believe that he is who he says he is. That he lived a perfect life, the life that you and I couldn’t live. That he died the death that we deserved to die, and on the 3rd day God raised him from the dead – crushing the enemy that we are powerless to defeat. And that he offers meaningful life to all who turn from sin and trust in Him.

And we follow him wherever he leads. No matter the cost. For Matthew, the cost was financial. This brother had a license to steal – he got a franchise – and the brother had a big house probably filled with lots of stuff. For some of us, the cost may also be financial. Yet for others it’s relational, and even for others it may be familial.

And it says he threw a “grand banquet”. Matthew threw a party for Jesus. And Jesus gladly went with him to eat. And Jesus wasn’t concerned about his own reputation, he wasn’t concerned with going to eat with “those people”. He wasn’t sitting back thinking “Oh man, I wonder what the Pharisees will think of me when I go to this guy’s house for a party.”

In a time when the religious leaders of the day probably wouldn’t have wanted to even make eye contact with Matthew – Jesus talks to him, goes into his home, and eats with him.

Culturally – we lose a little bit of the significance of simply eating with someone in the 1st century. **Mealtime was about more than just the food.** It wasn’t just about the meal. Mealtime was an event. No fast food and microwaves. No mobile ordering from an app and eating in the car. Mealtime was an event. And to stop and eat with someone was to tell them they mattered, they had value, and you cared for them. Friendship.

Illustration – going to the cafeteria everyday freshman year trying to find a group to fit in with. Or back in HS, when the freshmen had to sit in their own area...

Well Jesus got this reputation for eating with people that no one else cared about. Tax collectors and sinners. They mattered to him, they had value to him. And he went seeking them. The Pharisees – in a condescending tone and self exalting tone – you know the question you ask that you don’t really want an answer to but the question you’re asking which is really just a passive aggressive form of disapproval – That type of question – why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus valued people from all walks of life – and one way he showed it was eating with them. Later in Luke’s Gospel, well after this calling of Matthew, they throw the same indictment at Jesus as if he should be embarrassed – they say he eats with sinners and tax collectors. I say THANK GOD he eats with sinners and tax collectors!

Jesus hears them and gives 3 illustrations in his answer:

- Healthy people don’t need a doctor. Sick people do.

- To be clear, the Pharisees weren't healthy at all. They thought they were. They had no clue as to their own sinfulness, their own brokenness. They didn't see that maybe they were the sickest of them all. Like that illness that goes undetected until it's too late and then all of a sudden it takes you down.
- At least the tax collectors and sinners knew they were sick.
- The first point of finding life in Jesus is acknowledging our need for him
- Then quoting from Hosea – I desire mercy and not sacrifice
 - As if Jesus were saying to them: Your empty religious rituals are worthless. I'm looking at the posture of your heart before me, and how it is lived out among others.
 - God has never been interested in empty religious activity. God has always been interested in a people, completely committed to His purposes and His work in the world.
- For I didn't come to call the righteous
 - These dudes totally missed it. They were blinded by their own self-righteousness.
 - Jesus though, he didn't come to call the self-righteous religious people. He calls sinners to repentance.
 - Irreligious tax collectors, prostitutes, robbers, sinners
 - Religious people
 - Soccer moms. Basketball dads. School teachers, business men. Retirees, and school kids. Broke people and wealthy people. Single people and married people.

Jesus calls all types of people, with all types of baggage and brokenness, and sinful pasts and sinful presents, to repentance. **And his call is always to turn from sin and to turn to him alone.** To find life in His name. That starts in a moment and continues for a lifetime

But here's the kicker – he loves people too much to leave them in their sin. He called Matthew out of the tax office to follow Him. He wouldn't leave Matthew as he found him. Let me make this even more personal – Jesus loves you too much to leave you in your sin.

CONCLUSION – BACK TO BLESS

Who are you praying for?

Who are you willing to listen to?

Who do you need to eat with?