

Matthew 9:9-13 How I Changed My Mind
June 11, 2023

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins in this way; Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

I have sometimes spoken of the rate of change in the modern world, and the fact of it; for us it is mostly technological, but it may also involve other things; issues relating to a “state of knowledge,” a general consensus about what is taken to be true, conventional wisdom; changes in the way countries are governed, the way the faithful worship.

These kinds of questions can be caught up in the fog of emotional debate, and I do not mention it to involve

us in such a conversation, but to raise another question altogether. Because inevitably we all change our minds about the world.

In the first half of the 20th century there was a great deal of optimism about the future of humanity and the coming of “God's kingdom,” to earth. The pace and nature of change had much to do with that confidence. Much of the optimism of the age was shattered by two world wars, a great depression, and the use of atomic weapons, which ushered in the nuclear age.

I believe it was The Christian Century magazine that ran a series of articles in the 1950s asking that generation of religious leaders how they had changed their minds over the course of their professional lives, which for them spanned the decades between the sinking of the Titanic and the Kennedy assassination.

Theologians were held in higher regard than they are now. Although I think a book was published 10 or 15 years ago by The Christian Century asking the same questions of those whose careers spanned the time from the Kennedy assassination to about the time of 9/11. One of the ways their minds had changed was that they became less naively optimistic, less convinced that the times had reached their fulfillment.

That is the question I want to raise today. In view of the rapid pace and nature of change in the modern era, how have I changed my mind about things? How have you changed your mind? For those of you who

are a bit younger, how do you anticipate how you might adjust the way you think about the world?

Gradually, I am getting about to the point in my life that many of the people who were asked this question in the 1950s were in theirs. After having had the experiences I have had and the time to reflect, how has my mind been changed?

Our text raises a question about the relationship between believers trying to be faithful in an unfaithful world, and the people around them, especially the ones they considered to be unfaithful. Jesus is in the early part of his career, the part in which he is recruiting disciples. He was dining at the home of a tax collector named Matthew, along with Matthew's tax collector friends.

The religious folks, who saw everything in terms of purity, questioned his presence there. Actually, they questioned his disciples, for who among them dared to confront Jesus directly. But he overheard, and chimed in with a couple of quickly delivered one liners;

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick?”

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Of course, there is some irony here, for I am sure that Jesus was aware of the self-righteous sinfulness of the righteous ones, those the text calls Pharisees (the good, devout, religious people). But just underneath

the surface here, lies a habit of Jesus regarding the way he viewed the people outside his religious community, that is, the ones who were not so good, devout, and religious. He seemed *to like them* and was *comfortable spending time with them*.

Most of my life I have viewed people in that same way, not the way of Jesus, but of the Pharisees. I was wary, I am still wary. People that I do not know, or can not place in a trusted category in my mind, are held in suspicion, I was suspicious and afraid enough that I *held myself back* from them. I still hold back. I wonder how much of the richness of friendship I have missed in my life because of this distrust. I made a habit of staying in my comfort zone, protecting myself. I still protect myself.

I was very much a Pharisee, albeit, a personable and good natured one. Now my *mind* has been changed. Where I used to see some people as dangerous, I now see struggling souls just trying to do the best they can. Where I used to see confidence, I now see insecurity, and I am not sure anyone knows what they are doing. I used to see adversaries. Now I see vulnerability, and fellow-strugglers, companions for life's journey.

I still retain my old habits, which cause me to shy away from those I do not know or with whom I do not share a context that enables community. My mind has been changed, but not so much my way of life.

Watching the French Open tennis championships, one of the stories involved the refusal of Ukrainian players to take part in the sportsmanship at the end of each match by shaking their opponents hand at the net, *if* their opponents came from Russia or Belarus.

Whatever the case, Jesus dined with Matthew's guests, and he seems to be in a conflict with the religious ones, because they too were "sick," and in need of a physician, even though they weren't likely to admit it. The whole world is vulnerable, and everyone in it. The whole world, though under grace, is sick and in need of a physician.

What a scene it is, the tax collectors and the pharisees, the liberals and the conservatives, the secular and the religious; and Jesus right there with them both, trying to help.

There are two lessons; the first is that we are all sick and in need of a physician. I am not speaking of physical health, no matter how true it may be that we contend with physical health challenges. Rather we are all spiritually sick and in need of grace. I wonder if we can stand this judgment.

To make this acknowledgment means friendship with Jesus. To fail to make this acknowledgment means conflict with Jesus. Jesus was being rhetorical with the religious people when he said, "those who are healthy have no need of a physician . . ." We all stand silent under that judgment. That leads to the second

lesson, and the second phrase. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

I have encouraged people to pursue a life of service and sacrifice in an attempt at better health, better lives, spiritual health. I still think that is good advice, but like other things, it has a context in which it makes sense.

Jesus here refers to religious devotion, the observance of religious rituals, the acceptance of religious doctrines, and they are less important than the love of neighbor.

I see us all more vulnerable than I did before, smaller, weaker, less self-sufficient. So let us be merciful; to ourselves, get off our own backs, and others too. Jesus came to call sinners, that means us; people like Matthew the tax collector, and also these Pharisees. May God have mercy on us all, in Christ, God has mercy upon us all, to the praise of his glorious grace.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)