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Who Needs a Doctor?

993-A

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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It was quite a party! The place was so crowded, there was scarcely room to move. And it was no small room they were gathered in...it was more the size of a small convention hall. It was like a covered courtyard. The floor was fashioned of fine sand covered over with carpets. The walls were rough-hewn clay, with a series of indentations in the wall for lamps and vases. A hundred or more could gather there at one time, and it was filled to capacity and then some.

The owner of the home was named Levi, or Matthew Levi, as some called him. He was a publican by trade. The word “publican” came from a root word meaning “public servant”; but in the case of these men, that meaning was being stretched to its limits. For publicans were tax-collectors, noted throughout the land for their greed and their extortion. They would typically extract more than was due from the people and generally became quite wealthy themselves in the process. It would be much like having IRS agents on commission, letting them keep whatever they got over a certain amount. So these guys were not winning any popularity contests.

As I said, this was quite a party. Matthew had invited a number of his tax-collector friends. (I’m not sure who else would be seen at a party with him.) So this might well be likened to a social gathering for the Mafia. And if that weren’t enough, the rest of the crowd was made up of an assortment of religious fanatics (or so they would be described). The most notable and seemingly out-of-place personality was this somewhat difficult-to-describe man they called Jesus. When He spoke, He spoke with an authority no man had ever heard before. Yet that authority was wrapped in a blanket of love, a quality of love no man had ever seen before.

In addition to this one they called “the Master”, there was a variety of other “religious types” as well. There were no less than a quartet of Jesus’ inner circle, plus a sea of others who had been following Him about for days, watching him heal the sick and cast

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out demons and the like. Most of them felt a bit uncomfortable, to say the least, but not nearly as uncomfortable and as out of place as the next group on the guest list. For lo and behold, there they were in the corner, looking like they had spent the day eating lemons...the Scribes. These were seminary students learning to be Pharisees. The “Scribes of the Pharisees” is literally who they were. And to say that this was all beneath them was an understatement, to be sure. And, oh, yes, there was one more group. Talk about sourpusses! Look at those guys. These were disciples of John the Baptist. John is now in prison. His team is fasting; and make no mistake about it, everyone knows it. They came to see how this one John came to make the way for could be partying at a time like this.

Now if that isn't a motley crew for an evening of fun and festivities, I've never seen one, from one end of the religious spectrum to the other, from one end of the social spectrum to the other. And right in the middle of it all was Jesus. What an unusual place for God to socialize. What an unusual place, indeed.

It is into that setting that we move as we continue our study of the life of God on earth. We are trying to watch His every move, and listen to His every Word, for now He lives in us! And if He is going to be *Himself in us* then we'd best understand what to expect when we set Him free to do so. Jesus, you recall, has been ministering by the seaside, teaching in parables. When last we looked in on Him, He and His followers were crossing the lake in a fishing boat. It turned out to be a most eventful journey, to be sure; but then every day with Jesus was an adventure.

You remember what happened. From out of nowhere there came a weatherman's nightmare: a totally unexpected storm... high winds, high waves, near disaster. There should have been a small craft warning out, but there wasn't anything on the six o'clock news about this. The disciples were petrified with fear. Their fear turned to sarcasm when they found God apparently sound asleep on a cushion below. I mean, what a time to sleep! So they not only awakened Him and *informed* Him of their plight, they then turned and *accused Him of indifference*. They said, “Lord, don't you care that we are perishing?”

Of course He cared. No one has ever cared more. Had He not cared, He never would have taken them through the storm and listened to their petty accusations. At any rate, the storm was not

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a problem for Jesus. As you no doubt recall, He simply told the storm to hush! He said, “Sit still, storm”, and the wind and the waves obeyed. Immediately, they obeyed. Then the Master spoke to the disciples. And He didn’t commend them for waking Him in such a furor, either. He said, “*Where is your faith?*” The disciples, as usual, didn’t get the picture. They were enamored that they were following a man who could *alter their circumstances*. It never dawned on them that their God was trying to *alter them through their circumstances*.

So they sailed on into the country of the Gadarenes. It was there that the Master encountered the man called “Legion”, so named because he was the victim of a legion of demons. Jesus, you recall, cast the demons into a herd of swine feeding on the mountainside, and the whole herd of about 2,000 fled into the waters and drowned. The man was made whole, and the folks in the town were infuriated and afraid, and they begged Jesus to leave them alone. Jesus told the man to “go home and tell the things the Lord has done for you.” It is at that point that we take up reading for today’s lesson, and it leads us into that unusual social situation we described just moments ago. It reads like this:

³And it came to pass that when Jesus ¹crossed over and ³returned ¹to his own city, ³the people welcomed him gladly, for they were all looking hopefully for him.

³And Levi held a great banquet for Him in his home. ¹And it came about that as he was reclining at table, behold, ³quite a multitude of publicans and other ¹persons of ill repute, who had come, were reclining at the table with Jesus and His disciples; ²for there were many such and they were following him. ³So the Pharisees and their scribes, ²when they saw him eating with these publicans and other outcasts, ³began to criticize his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And ¹why does your teacher?”

But Jesus on hearing it ³answered them and said, “They who are well do not need a physician, but they who are sick. ¹And go you and learn what this means: ‘Mercy is what I desire, and not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the ‘righteous’ but sinners, to repentance.”

(Matthew 9:1,10-17; Mark 5:21a;2:15-22; Luke 8:40,5:29-39
TLOCIS)¹

That is the text for today’s study.

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony;
by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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The outline:

- I- A Happy Welcome
- II- A Great Banquet
- III- A Critical Question
- IV- A Penetrating Answer
- V- A Divine Assignment

I- A HAPPY WELCOME

The Master had departed the country of the Gadarenes quite hurriedly, not having won any popularity polls there. In fact, a blue-ribbon committee from the City Council escorted Him to the outskirts of town and suggested that He might enjoy the climate across the lake a bit more. They offered Him free passage on the Midnight Express back home. You see, even God isn't welcome when He upsets the status quo. And God doesn't usually force Himself on those who don't want Him. Lovingly, quietly, He departs, and often only years later do those who scorned Him and refused Him realize what they have done. These people were more concerned about the cost of bacon than they were the cost of eternity. So they sent the Savior of the World on His way, lest He cause the local business community still further grief.

Ah, but on the other side of the shore, what a difference!

³And it came to pass that when Jesus ¹crossed over and ³returned ¹to his own city, ³the people welcomed him gladly, for they were all looking hopefully for him. (TLOCIS)

On the other side of the shore, what a difference! You and I, like our Master, will not always be greeted with open arms on this side of the river. Jesus said, "They hated me. Is the servant better than His Master?" On occasion, if the light in your life is steady enough, it will irritate the darkness. And the darkness will flail at the light. On occasion, you may even suffer persecution. Jesus, said, "What a blessing if you do! Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven!" Ah, but on the other side of the shore, what a difference! There, the Saviour, with outstretched arms and nail-scarred hands will greet you. Those who have gone before you will be waiting...and they will receive you gladly. For they will all have been looking excitedly for your homecoming. Jesus went from extreme animosity to loving enthusiasm simply by making that journey to the other side.

II- A GREAT BANQUET

It was there on the “other side” that our Lord found a dinner invitation awaiting. Of course, you and I have an invitation to a banquet awaiting us on the other side, as well. Now this was no ordinary banquet. It was being held at the home of Levi, or Matthew, as we have come to know him. In the Mark passage, this incident is immediately preceded by this event:

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples:...

(Mark 2:14,15)

Matthew was a publican all right, but something had happened to Matthew. Something very recently. Something very powerfully...had happened to Matthew. *He had met Jesus*. Look at the first two things he wanted to do. 1) He wanted to have fellowship with Jesus. 2) He wanted his friends to meet Jesus. It never dawned on Matthew that Jesus might reject his friends. It never dawned on Matthew because Jesus had accepted him. And so it is that so often those whose lives have passed through the mire and mud of this world, and tasted of their own unworthiness, have no problem accepting others into the family of God. If they were accepted with all their scars, who could be refused? So Matthew, a brand-new convert into the Kingdom opens his house to all of his old friends and invites this One who had changed his life to have fellowship with them. Now here is where you and I often part company with Jesus. This simply is not the kind of thing we like to do.

I mean, what if somebody sees us with them and doesn't understand? What if they start behaving in a way that I don't approve of? I mean, after all, I have my reputation to think of! Oh, really? *Whose reputation?*

Jesus accepted the invitation gladly. Because He enjoyed having fellowship with liars and thieves and extortioners? God forbid. The Holiness of God resident in Jesus Christ was repulsed by the sinfulness in that room. Ah, *but the Mercy of God* resident in Jesus Christ was overwhelmed at the opportunity present in that room. This is why He had come! To seek and to save those who were lost! He was, at this moment, in the most logical

place for God to be in a sinful, dying world...where dying sinners were. Now interestingly enough, Jesus wasn't off in the corner passing out tracts wearing His "Holier than thou" lapel pin. He was "reclining at the table while a number of publicans and other persons of ill repute were reclining at the table with Jesus and His disciples."

"...Publicans and others of ill-repute." That ought to settle the question of how everyone felt about the "Infernal" Revenue Service of Israel, and it ought to erase any doubts about the character of some of the people on the honored guest list. These were castoffs, losers, questionable characters to say the least. Meanwhile, all of these potential religious giants had followed Jesus to the feast, expecting to have a Wednesday night prayer meeting, and they find themselves smack in the middle of an evening at Joe's Bar and Grill. They didn't know how to act. Neither do we. Jesus was at ease. He was about His Father's business. He was seeking to save that which was lost.

III- A CRITICAL QUESTION

I believe it must have been a neat evening. I don't think at this point that Jesus was doing much active evangelism. I'll tell you why. If He had been, I don't think the next question would have been asked. Jesus was building relationships and demonstrating Godliness to men who had never known before that the Living God was available to them personally. He was tilling the soil and planting the seed. The harvest would come later. But the "Scribes of the Pharisees" (that's the literal meaning of the phrase), the seminary students who had so much information but no transformation, began to criticize the disciples. They were afraid to criticize Jesus. So they began to question the disciples, instead. "Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And why does your teacher?" they asked. Good question.

I hope you can visualize this whole thing. Here they are, in a hall which, according to Vincent and others, must have been some fifty feet long, filled with the weirdest assortment of humans ever gathered for one feast. There will, incidentally, be another feast coming that will top this one. And it, too, will be filled with people that some of us didn't think would be invited. We're going to wonder why Jesus is fellowshiping with the likes of them. Anyway, huddled to one side, protecting their reputations, were these theological geniuses who knew everything about God

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but didn't know God. And on the other side of the room was a conglomeration of crooks and fast-buck artists; and there in their midst was God.

You can just see "Ronny Righteous" call Peter or James aside and ask them, "What gives here? If you guys are so spiritual, why are you sitting down for a meal with the scum of the earth? Naughty, naughty."

IV- A PENETRATING ANSWER

They addressed the disciples. But they had to deal with the Master.

¹But Jesus on hearing it ³answered them and said,

(Matthew 9:13, Luke 5:31 TLOCIS)

Jesus had an answer. He always does. Don't let the world frighten you with their accusations. Let God in you quietly respond, and wisdom will pour from your lips you never knew you had. Jesus, in Luke 12, said these words:

"And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."
(Luke 12:11,12)

God, in you, is adequate to answer the world. Jesus looked these theological hypocrites straight in the eye and uttered these words:

"They who are well do not need a physician, but they who are sick."
(Luke 5:31b TLOCIS)

In other words, Jesus answered, "Who needs a doctor, anyway? The guy who knows he is sick and maybe dying, or the guy who is overwhelmed at his own good health? Who's going to listen to a doctor, anyway? The guy who is on his way to the hospital, or the guy who is on his way to accept the "athlete of the year" award? "Who needs a doctor?" Jesus asks? "I'll tell you who"... He answers. "*The one who knows he's sick, that's who!*"

Jesus said "I'm not going to waste my time fraternizing with self-righteous fools who think God needs them. I'm heading for the homes and the offices and the football fields and even the parties where there are people who are wandering about in their sins, wondering if there's anything more to life than this! I'm not looking for men and women who think God needs them. I'm

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looking for men and women who think they need God!" *Who needs a Doctor?* The prisoner. The confused teenager. The alcoholic. The addict. The successful businessman who sees no reason to live. You say, "But if they need Jesus so badly, why don't they come to our churches?" I'll tell you why. You and I are the reasons they don't come to our churches. Our self-righteous patronizing brand of Christianity that flaunts itself at a lost world, as it cheapens itself by advertising itself like a bargain-basement sale to get visitors into its doors...we're the reason they don't come. They're not looking for more sick people who are pretending to be well. They're looking for the Doctor.

We need to stop trying to impress them with how pretty the hospital is or how neat the visiting hours are or the efficiency of the hired help. They're not moved by all that. They're sick, and they're dying, and they want somebody who loves them to give them life. Only Jesus can do that. He can do it on a hillside in Africa, where a gentle, loving missionary shares His Lord with men and women who are hungry for both kinds of food. He can do it in an office building where men and women have reached the pinnacle of success and found failure. He can do it in a one-room frame church on the edge of town, where the preacher has to hold down two jobs so he can have the privilege of preaching to the handful that come on Sunday. He doesn't need a fancy hospital to heal folks. Oh, He'll use it if He has it. But it isn't where He is that changes lives. It's *who He is* that changes lives. Jesus, in one sentence, silenced forever the self-righteous taunts of a pharasaical church that fancies itself too good to mingle with the world, lest it become contaminated. He said, "Gang, you're a bunch of doctors who are afraid to make house calls. You'd rather sit around the hospital and treat each other than go out into the highways and byways where people are hurting and crying and suffering and dying in order to give to them a prescription for peace and joy and hope and love." You've missed it. You set God free to be Himself in you, and He will do just what He did when He walked this dirty earth 2,000 years ago. He'll gravitate to where the needy are. He'll quietly respond to the invitations of the world, when He knows those invitations will be invitations to demonstrate the difference between light and darkness. He'll accept that invitation to that unbelieving neighbor's dinner party, and He'll relax while He's there, knowing that someone in that room needs Him. There are more likely to be people there who know they need Him than there are in some of the more religiously

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acceptable gatherings in town. So Jesus in you will go there. And people there will be changed, because you and He went.

You're an intern, Beloved. The Master physician is giving you your instructions for practicing effective medicine. Go where the people are. Go where the hurting people are. Go where the hungry people are. Go where the lost are. That's why God saved you... to seek and to save those who are lost. Don't run an ad in the paper that says, "Lost, come and be found!" God didn't do that for Adam and Eve. He went to them. God didn't do that for you, either. He left Heaven and came to where you were, so you could eventually be where He is.

V- A DIVINE ASSIGNMENT

Now Jesus turns to His stunned audience of theologically righteous, spiritually lost accusers and gives them a divine assignment. He loves to do that. He looks them straight in the eye and says this:

"¹And go you and learn what this means: 'Mercy is what I desire, and not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the 'righteous,' but sinners, to repentance." (TLOCIS)

Jesus said, "Interns, back to the textbooks. What were you called to do? Describe the diseases and condemn the sick? Or were you called to love the sick and heal the sick and help the sick? Why build churches, these hospitals for the soul? So you can teach each other how much you know about medicine? No! The hospital's for sick people, and if they won't come to you, go get 'em." Then He quotes Hosea 6:6. He quotes it again in Matthew 12:7. If we had the time to really dig into what God was saying in that passage, what power it adds to this verse. That's your assignment. Study that passage, and see what God was after.

I'll give you a hint. He was defining the nature of God. And it was His demonstration of that divine nature that this Pharaasaical, self-righteous bunch of hypocrites didn't understand. The God who lives in you and lives in me isn't interested in condemning the world. The world does that on its own. The God who dwells in us has as His cardinal desire the salvation of souls. His desire is to *demonstrate mercy*. That's what pleases His heart. He isn't impressed with the self-sacrificing religiosity that quarantines itself to protect itself against the very people it was sent to save. God is perfect mercy. He forgives. That's the message a lost, guilty, paranoid world needs to hear. They don't need to hear how

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holy we are. They know better. They need to know how merciful God is, and we know better than to keep it from them.

Who needs a doctor? The world does. Where is the Doctor? He's locked up in a prisonhouse of legalistic saints who are so afraid of being contaminated, they've stopped doing what they were sent to do. God help us to set Him free to be Himself.

You and I have not been commissioned to strut in this world of ours, sporting our "holier than thou" bumper stickers, passing out our condescending tracts, broadcasting our commercialized hype, and pointing an accusing finger at every man, woman, and child whose doctrine varies slightly from ours. *We have not been called to out-strut each other, but to out-serve each other.*

To wash one another's feet
To meet one another's needs
To heal one another's hurts
And in so doing, to demonstrate the Life of Christ.

To do that, we've got to go where the people are. We've got to accept Matthew's invitation to have supper with the top dogs on the city's ten most-hated list. And we've got to go, bathed in the love of Christ. Not to enjoy their sin. Not to be attracted by their greed. But neither to condemn them by ignoring them or condescending to them. They need Jesus. We have Jesus. They are sick. We know the Doctor.

In closing, look at the contrast between the scribes and the publicans. The scribes were afraid to rub shoulders with sinners, for fear their goodness would be lost. The publicans were coming to rub shoulders with the Savior, because they sensed they were lost. The scribes were so healthy, they never knew they needed a doctor. The publicans were so sick, they were simply waiting for the Doctor to arrive. Now if you were Jesus, to whom would you have gone? To those too worthy to get dirty? Or to those too dirty to become clean without being bathed in the cleansing blood of Christ? To whom would you have given your life? *To those who knew they needed a Doctor, that's who.* To those who, because of their sins, knew they needed a Savior. That's who you would have given your life to reach.

Go home today and answer the phone. It may be Matthew calling, inviting you to a banquet. Go. It may ring tomorrow, too. It may be a scribe taunting you for going. Let him. Jesus Christ in you has a job to do. He has come to seek and to save that which

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is lost. Let Him. He would go wherever they are. Let Him. And He would, once He is there, never forget His mission. All He wants is for you to turn loose and allow Him to reach the world through you. Let Him.

An Additional Assignment

1- Try to imagine in your mind how you would have behaved at that party. Would you have gone? Would you have had the mentality of the Scribes? Or the Mind of Christ?

2- Make a list of your contacts with those who are unbelievers. Where do you meet them? How often do you reach out to them? What are some of the key incidents in an unbeliever's life when he or she becomes sensitive to a need for Christ? How can you use those incidents to touch their hearts with the Gospel?

3- Make a list of those you know who need Christ that you aren't praying for. Begin to pray regularly for them. Ask God to give you an opportunity to demonstrate His Heart to them.

4- How can the time we spend on holidays with non-Christian relatives help us develop a ministry? What must our attitude towards them be? What mindset is most likely to drive them further from the Gospel?

5- How can we go about determining which of those we meet are "aware they need a Doctor"? Can you think of some questions you can ask that will help you know if they are aware of their need?

6- Study Hosea, chapter 6. Meditate on verse 6.

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