

The long Arm of the Lord

When reading through the gospels, have you ever noticed how sinners were drawn to Jesus, especially at mealtimes? In sharp contrast to the religious who were offended by the company he kept.

The Pharisees and experts in the Law questioned why Jesus would engage with such outcasts of society. They always tried to find fault with his motives, his mission, and his ministry.

Jesus defended his actions by quoting Old Testament scripture to them (just as he did when tested by Satan in the desert).

The living Word, Jesus, used the written word to fend off their attacks. He also demonstrated divine authority with great power. Power to love, to heal and forgive – “*dunamis*” power to save all who called upon His name.

Let’s read from Matthew chapter 9 about Matthew and see how the long arm of the Lord reaches the lost.

Matthew 9:9-13 (NKJ)

9 *As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “**Follow Me.**” So he arose and followed Him.*

10 *Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.*

11 *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “**Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**”*

12 *When Jesus heard that, He said to them, “**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.**”*

13 *But go and learn what this means: ‘**I desire mercy and not sacrifice.**’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to **repentance.**”*

Two important aspects to give context:

- Tax collectors were despised by the Jews, as they assisted Roman rule. Jews would bid for the contract to collect taxes on behalf of the Romans and were allowed to charge as much as they liked, keeping the excess for themselves. Tax collectors were hated because they were greedy and corrupt.
- Also, eating a meal with someone in that culture meant you became one with them. The communion meal is a perfect example.

The religious of the day were horrified that a man of God, a Rabbi, a teacher of the Law would associate with social outcasts, let alone eat with them. They were more concerned with good social standing in the community and a godly appearance toward men rather than express their faith to the lost.

What their religion failed to teach them is that God desires mercy more than sacrifice, knowledge of Him rather than burnt offerings - we'll discuss that a little later.

Their hardened hearts blinded them from understanding and accepting they were just as lost as those they judged and looked down upon!

Sacrifice had become a ritual, not true worship, as a response to God's mercy and was offered out of duty not love. They missed the whole purpose of the law and prophets.

This was how Jesus answered an expert in the law when asked about the greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:37-39 *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’*

I would like to bring 3 characteristics of how the long arm of the Lord reaches the lost:

Jesus led sinners to repentance through:

Acceptance, Relationship, and Mercy.

1) **Acceptance** – Jesus accepted sinners for who they were, not for what they had done.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Jesus not only accepted Matthew but called him to be a disciple.

The religious heart will always judge and condemn; it is more concerned with behaviour than belief – more engaged in works than a living faith.

Jesus accepted sinners (not their sin) and his acceptance of them opened their eyes to God's mercy. Acceptance promoted trust and as Jesus disciplined his followers, they grew in the knowledge of the Father and their need to confess and agree with God that:

Isaiah 53:6 *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* and knowing by experience that God's

Romans 2:4 *... kindness, forbearance and patience,... is intended to lead us to repentance*

If we disagree with God, how can we turn from something we don't believe we have need to turn from?

1 John 1:8-9 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Therefore, the self-righteous (not believing they need salvation) are perhaps the most difficult to reach – but the long arm of the Lord reaches all.

Jesus led sinners to repentance through:

2) **Relationship** – Jesus was sent on a mission to seek the lost and offer salvation to a fallen world.

I'm always amazed that Jesus didn't call his disciples from among the religious elite but rather people just like you and me! He called those who knew they were without God, not the self-righteous who thought they were saved by ritual, tradition, and observance of the law. Although Saul was an exception to that rule.

Luke 19:10 *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'*

John 3:17 *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

I'm in communication with a ministry (Walk2Jesus) about writing letters to disciples in prison.

I trust the Lord's arm is long enough to reach anywhere

Psalms 139:7 *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*

No one is too far from the long arm of the Lord.

Jesus led sinners to repentance through:

3) **Mercy** – Interesting how the Pharisees went to the disciples to question why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus again quoted Old Testament scripture:

Hosea 6:6 *For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

In Hosea's day, the Israelites were committed to offer sacrifice to God but had forsaken mercy. They neglected mercy because they gave up the knowledge of God and truth – they were caught in the snare of religion at the expense of freedom to relate personally with God.

Hosea 4:1 *Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites... 'There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

Hosea is a fascinating book which teaches many aspects of who we are and who God is. We tend to be unfaithful like Gomer, but God remains faithful to his covenant promises.

Jesus led sinners to repentance through:

Acceptance, Relationship, and Mercy

Matthew is a great example of a new heart. Following his calling, he brought friends to Jesus, with every confidence that he would accept them, form a relationship, extending mercy to them, just as he had done with Matthew - and with us.

We too can be confident to bring our friends to Jesus, so let us pray for opportunities this week to share the love of God with those who ask, seek and knock.

The invitation to dine with the Master remains open to all who call upon his name!

Revelation 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

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