



Matthew 9:1-13

NASTY OR NICE?

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32

RADICAL FAITH?

Let me start what I say with the following card from the game of Monopoly.

GET OUT OF JAIL FREE is one of the most valuable cards in Monopoly because if you find yourself in jail, you can get out for nothing! You don't have to wait until the throw of the dice or anything like that. For many Christians, their first experience of the gospel is as a get out of jail free card. They realise they are sinners, realise Jesus has died for them to deal with the issue of their sin and come to Him asking for forgiveness and eternal life, something that God gives freely.

But if that's all that faith means to anyone, then it would leave me to wonder where the foundation of that person's faith actually is, because if all our faith consists of is self-preservation, then we've missed the heart of the gospel. The scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal came up with the notion called Pascal's wager. The idea is that people might as well believe and follow Jesus because if Christianity is right, they will be saved (it's a *get out of jail free* card – an insurance policy), but if it's wrong then they've lost nothing anyway!

RELATIONSHIP

In the light of scripture, this is a fundamentally flawed view of the Christian faith. Jesus didn't die just to give us a free card into heaven, but He died to bring us into relationship with God. Relationship is just that. Faith in Jesus isn't believing that something is true or not and doing a few religious things. It's about coming into a real and living relationship with the living God. Here's a verse from Ephesians 1

VERSE

3 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.

We have a God who wants to pour out blessings on us. We don't have a faith that's an insurance policy, a get out of jail card, but a faith that is real and living. A faith that makes a difference. Here's a video you've seen before from J John.

VIDEO > RADICAL CHANGE?

We deal in the area of behavioural alteration. Because where Jesus is, things happen. Radical things, amazing things, outrageous things. *People change!* Christians are, or should be changed people, different people, radical people. Has that been our experience? Is it our experience now? If not, why?

That's what our reading is about this morning. Where Jesus was, things happened.

What do we learn from Jesus as a result?

1. JESUS HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH SIN'S CONSEQUENCES

In our first scene this morning, Jesus heals a paralysed man. The point of controversy wasn't that Jesus healed the man, but that he forgave the man's sin. For the Jews that was blasphemy. How could Jesus forgive a man's sin? Only God could do that. We can only speculate as to the cause of the man's paralysis, whether it was the result of his sin or whether it was just being part of a sinful world. What we do know is that Jesus is the antidote to both and we celebrated that in communion this morning. Jesus has the power to deal with sin and the consequences of sin and He did it in the case of this poor man. He got up and walked!

Here's what the people's response was: *Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for sending a man with such great authority.* Actually it can also be translated the Good News way - *And they praised God for giving such authority to human beings.* The idea behind the Greek is a bit ambiguous and it can realistically mean either. In Jesus was a man who has the authority to forgive sins and do miracles. But also, in Jesus, that same authority comes to the human race. Each person as we noted earlier has the opportunity of finding forgiveness and the presence and power of God in their life, should like the paralysed man, they choose to do so.

The Christian faith is radical, it's life changing. Jesus deals with sin and its consequences. The question goes out to us this morning; have we really dealt with all the issues of sin in our lives? Or is there an area of our lives still not dealt with – a pattern of behaviour we struggle with, an addiction, unforgiveness, bad thoughts and feelings towards others, gossip. Or maybe you are dealing with sin's consequences. Or perhaps you are just struggling. Jesus has the authority to change it all. The man in our story had a radical change. People down the ages have found the same. People today are also proving that to be true. If you are a Christian – that applies to you right now. Claim the authority and power of Jesus in your situation!

2. JESUS ACCEPTS EVERYONE

If you don't know Jesus yet, then that could be yours. His invitation extends to all. Find, forgiveness, life, hope. Following Jesus isn't a get out of jail card, but a real relationship with the living God.

Jesus wasn't too bothered with the religious folk or even decent folk. He gravitated towards the people who in that society were the low-life – outcasts, pariahs, disgusting. And he went into their homes. He sat at their tables, ate their food, spent time with them. And in this passage he meets people in the house of Matthew the Tax Collector.

Jesus really wants to reach everyone. He wants His church to do the same. I have been part of quite a few churches in my time, and one of the main struggles in almost all of them is that people find it hard to relate to people who start to come to church who have challenging lifestyles, particularly as they start to come to faith. People talk about how much of a problem they are. They point to their lifestyles. What will that do to our reputation?

VERSE

That's what Jesus found too. *Some Pharisees saw this and asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such people?"* He's a Rabbi. He shouldn't mix with riff-raff.

Do we want to see people follow Jesus? Then our risk should be the same as Jesus'. Even in a society as pluralistic and accepting as ours, there are still people who don't feel that Christians are positive towards them for whatever reason: gay people, Muslims, those with addictions, those who cohabit or are divorced.

Jesus didn't make preconditions before He started to speak to people or before he healed them. It didn't bother Him that other religious people gossiped about Him. The gossip was condemnation *"Why does your teacher eat with such people?"* However, reaching people for Jesus starts when we realise that Jesus offer of life and hope has no strings attached. It really is a free gift.

That being said, the Christian faith isn't easy-believism. There is a final point in this passage.

3. JESUS BRINGS CHANGE > SLIDE 2

Jesus welcomed Matthew freely. He followed Jesus, he became a disciple. That didn't mean that Jesus condoned what Matthew did. **JESUS DOES NOT CONDONE SIN.** He never condoned it. But if He was to reach people, He had to engage with them, identify with them, draw them around Him, teach them, challenge them. Now that was radical. How little the church does that in our land these days.

Many people have been impressed by the new Pope. He doesn't do token things for helping the poor. He genuinely has a passion for them. He does not live in ostentation – he does not wear the pomp of papal office. Whatever may be the weaknesses of the Roman church, we have to celebrate anyone who seriously engages with the weakest in society.

Just because we welcome everybody however challenging their behaviour, whatever their sin they may have committed, whatever their lifestyle, whatever their views, doesn't mean that we condone how they live or what they've done. So why do we do it? Here's the answer Jesus gave. *"People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. Why do we accept all – because Jesus needs to change their lives. For the Son did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.* John 3:17.

But there's more to acceptance than not condoning. Here it is.

JESUS EXPECTS CHANGE

Jesus accepted all who came to Him whoever they were. He spent time with them. But in the end all those who followed Him changed. Why? Because they understood that if they want to follow Jesus, they had to obey Him, however much that cost. Here is Jesus' initial challenge to everyone: *"The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* Luke 5:32 Following Jesus isn't just about believing. It's about repenting. What does repent mean? It means to turn around and go in another direction. We have to stop walking as we please and walk the way Jesus commands. Sometimes that's costly. For tax collectors like Matthew it was a change to their whole way of life. Stopping doing something you've always done but now realise it's wrong can be a struggle.

But Jesus has the authority to change all who come to Him through and through. He does it by His Spirit. He changes us from the inside out. We become different. I know many people who radically changed when they came to Christ. For most it's a process of

change and growth throughout life.

IS HE CHANGING YOU?

Maybe the Lord is challenging you this morning about an area in your life that you know should be confessed and dealt with. Maybe you have something in our life that you need a miracle to change it. Maybe there is a person you just can't forgive. Let the Holy Spirit work in you and through you to bring that change.

Change can and does really happen. It's time to affirm again we have a radical faith; a life-changing faith.

Prayer.

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MRBC Felixstowe 04/0813
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