

## Matthew's Call & Feast

### Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32

We clearly see the purpose and mission of Jesus in the call of Matthew. While the Rabbis believed publicans were spiritually hopeless and unable to repent, Jesus was the Savior of sinners! There is a wonderful connect between the forgiveness of sin and healing of the paralyzed man and the call of Matthew. Here in the book of Matthew, tucked among a series of miracles, is one that Matthew sees as another example of Christ's great power, the day Jesus said to him, "Follow me."

**"("And he went forth again by the seaside; and all the multitude resorted (gathered) unto him, and he taught them." Mark 2:13) And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew ("Levi the son of Alphaeus" Mark 2:14), ("a publican," Luke 5:27) sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. ("And he left all," Luke 5:28) And he arose, and followed him." Matthew 9:9**

All three Gospels have the call of Matthew after the healing of the Paralyzed man, this event of Christ seems to have been close to the same time and near Capernaum. We find Jesus continuing His open-air teaching ministry along the seashore. This would have been a very congested area. Multiple commentaries and books I read, told of a major trade route that went close to the shore of Galilee from Damascus heading to the Mediterranean and then on to Egypt. Along with that traffic were the many harbors busy with the fish industry and products coming across the Sea of Galilee from the cities of Decapolis.

#### I. Matthew's Call

- "Matthew"/"Levi the son of Alphaeus" – We are given two names for Matthew in the Gospels. Matthew will always call himself by this Aramaic name. Later when giving the list of disciples, he will tag himself as "Matthew the publican." In this event of Christ, Mark and Luke use his Jewish name, Levi. Matthew was from the tribe of Levi, the priestly line. There is no indication that his name was changed, but Matthew does mean "gift of God." There is thought that Matthew is a brother to James the Less another disciple.
- "publican"/"sitting at the receipt of custom" – **Publicans** were tax collectors, the word comes from the Latin meaning 'public worker.' There were many levels of publicans, and it seems Matthew was of the lowest rank and reputation. Tax collectors would have been hired by the Roman government to collect tariffs, tolls, and taxes from the movement of goods and products. Matthew would be at his **"receipt of custom,"** or booth all day long. There he would sit and calculated the tax owed and collected it on sight. Publicans were paid by extra money they collected with the taxes. There was no set percentage or commission, Matthew charged what Rome demanded in tax and then had the liberty to add what he wanted for his fee and livelihood. Matthew was hated by his countrymen:1) they hated the taxes he collected for Rome, a foreign, oppressive nation 2) they hated the usual overcharge that padded the tax collectors' pockets; they were counted as licensed thieves 3) they hated that a Jew would become a traitor and work for Rome taking money from fellow Jews. Matthew was hated! **Sidenote:** Though few publicans were known as honest men, we have no evidence that Matthew was dishonest compared with the testimony of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). Being a tax collector was not evil. John the Baptist instructed tax collectors to be honest but not quit their positions. (Luke 3:12-13)
- "Follow me" – Matthew didn't seek out Jesus, instead Jesus sought out Matthew! The sudden and immediate response of Matthew would cause one to think he had heard Jesus before. We don't know

how many times Matthew might have longingly listened to the seaside teaching of the Kingdom of God from the prophet of Nazareth. But remember, Jesus knows the hearts of man, and He certainly knew the heart of this publican. Speaking to his need and thoughts, Jesus said, “Follow Me.” And Matthew eagerly obeyed! Jesus chose Matthew and he followed! This is the first time we see a social outcast openly coming to Christ.

- “he left all, rose up, and followed him” – This statement implies an irreversible action! Matthew left a lucrative career that day. Rome would never have him back, Matthew’s job would have been given to another, and it would have been hard for him to find other employment having been a publican. Matthew burned all bridges when he got up and followed Christ, he left everything behind! It was a very big step! But it always is!

“And it came to pass, (“Levi made him a great feast in his own house:” Luke 5:29) as Jesus sat at meat (dining – Lit - reclining at the table) in the house, behold, many (“a great company of” Luke 5:29) publicans and sinners came and sat down (“together” Mark 2:15) with him and his disciples (“: for there were many, and they followed him.” Mark 2:15).” Matthew 9:10

## II. Matthew’s Feast

- “Levi made him a great feast in his own house:” – The book of Luke tells us Matthew made a big dinner/reception in his home specifically for Jesus! He was proud to be associated with Jesus. His first response was to celebrate and introduce Jesus to his friends. Interesting trivia, Matthew, in his Gospel, never mentions that he hosted the dinner.
- “Many publicans and sinners came” – “sinners” – this English word can hold two different types of people. 1) This can mean dark, deep, entrenched sinners – thieves, harlots, gamblers, drunkards, and the like who lived hard, lawless lives; but it can also suggest 2) common people who have walked away from Judaism and didn’t follow the Mosaic Law or the traditions of the Rabbis. Many times, when the Pharisees would use this term, these are the people they are referring to. (John 7:45-49) By the time of Christ, many were disillusioned with religion: the hypocrisy, the empty traditions, the feeling of the abandonment of God, many had walked away from what made them Jewish! Jesus was both comfortable and welcoming to all classes of people! He often will speak directly to both groups of sinners and the contrast from “Religion as usual” drew them to Christ in droves!
- “sat down with him and his disciples” – Why have this feast? Matthew seemed to be celebrating his new faith and sharing Jesus with his peers and friends. Of all people, Matthew understood their needs, and Jesus’ ability to meet them! So, they sat together! **To the Religious Leaders and pious Jews, this was extremely offensive!**
- “for there were many, and they followed him.” – When I looked at the different English translations, it was made clear that many publicans and sinners were among the regular followers of Jesus! Matthew’s friends would not have followed the law or have much interest in religious traditions. Jesus desired to reach these religious and social outcasts. Christ was known as a friend of sinners! His followers were a mixed crowd! **To the Religious Leaders and pious Jews, this was extremely offensive!**

### III. Religious Leaders Question Disciples

Rabbis had no hope of repentance for publicans. The temptations to steal and the price of restoration were too great. It was concluded that God would never forgive them for their disloyalty to His people. 1) They excluded them from all religious observances and fellowship 2) The money of publicans was tainted and would not be accepted for charity work 3) Publicans could not serve as a witness in law 4) It was taught that publicans were under God's judgment

**“And when the (“scribes and” Mark 2:16) Pharisees saw it (watching) (“murmured (Lit - complained/grumbled to ) against his disciples” Luke 5:30), they said unto his disciples, (“Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” Luke 5:30) (“How is it” Mark 2:16) Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” Matthew 9:11**

- “they said unto his disciples;” – Complaining and questioning the disciples will become a tactic of the Pharisees. They are seeking to shake the confidence concerning Jesus in the minds of His loyal base.
- “Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”/“Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” – In the minds of the Pharisees, it was bad enough that Jesus sat with the publicans and sinners but eating and drinking was a level of friendship! (Luke 7:34; 15:2; 19:7) **To the Religious Leaders and pious Jews, this was extremely offensive!** The Pharisees were inferring that if Jesus was who He claimed, the Messiah, He would have sought their company rather than the company of those with whom He was then eating!

### IV. Jesus Answers the Religious Leaders

**“But when Jesus heard that, he (“answering,” Luke 5:31) said unto them, They that be whole (Lit. - healthy/well ) need not a physician, but they that are sick. <sup>13</sup> But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Matthew 9:12-13**

- “But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them,” – Jesus knew exactly what was going on, though this was not addressed to Him. Jesus protected His disciples and answered instead of letting them try to address the intimidating Religious elitest.
- “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” – Jesus’ ministry was to sinners just as a doctor is to the sick! The Pharisees saw themselves as spiritually well, religiously pure, and completely whole, while the outcasts knew they were not well. J Vernon McGee said, “The Great Physician can do nothing for those who think they are not sick.” p. 270 (I Tim. 1:15)
- “go ye and learn” – Lit. - “go and start learning” - This was a common saying among Rabbis at the time of Christ. It was a challenge they would say to their students, almost an insult to work hard in study and stop being ignorant! The proud, learned Pharisees would feel the sting of this statement. They had learned incorrectly! These men knew this scripture passage but didn't understand it. Further thought and instruction were required.

- “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:” – This was a well-known Old Testament quote concerning the heart of God. (Deut. 6:4-5; Hosah 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; I Sam 15:22-23; Ps. 40:6-8; 51:16-19; Jer. 7:21-23; Amos 5:21-24) Matthew is the only Gospel writer who will tell of Jesus using this phrase. As Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jews, he loved to bring in Old Testament quotes and prophecies of Christ. Jesus will actually use this phrase another time found in Matthew. (Matt. 12:7) This was not a call for the abolishment of sacrifice and Mosaic Law but an emphasis on a relationship with God and the heart of man. In Jewish thinking, sacrifices were always held up as the greatest of services to God. But to God, the heart and relationship were more important. A merciful attitude toward the spiritual needy is far better than the mere formality of religious activities without a concern for others. Religion will tend to focus on outward duties and neglect an inward devotion that live out doing eternal work that glorifies God. Those who concentrate on outward service and conformity will tend to become harsh, judgmental, proud, and scornful of others.
- “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” – “I am not come” is a reference to Jesus coming from heaven! “to call” – is what Jesus does to those who are ready to hear His voice; Those Christ calls are those who have a repentant heart, agree with God concerning their sin, reject their sin, and go God’s way! “righteous” is used in an ironic sense, these men were “self-righteous.” (Rom. 3:10 "There is none righteous, no, not one.") Salvation cannot come to those who are self-righteous and fail to seek healing! Christ came to minister to those who acknowledged they were sinners. This is a message He will give several times in His ministry. The last time was on His way to Jerusalem just days before His crucifixion. Christ will interact with another Publican, this time a chief among the publicans, Zacchaeus. After he confessed his sin and promised restoration, Jesus said, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Jesus had no ministry to the self-righteous and He still doesn’t, only to repentant sinners!

### 3 Accomplishments of this Event of Christ:

1. A soul was saved – a new Follower of Christ
2. New disciples were added to the band
3. Jesus created an opportunity to explain His ministry to the Pharisees, disciples, and Matthew’s friends.

*Those who followed Christ in faith were made righteous,  
while the self-righteous who rejected Him remained sinners!*

### **Believers Application:**

America is full of people that have walked away from religion. Great church buildings that were full 50 years ago are nearly empty now. People are having their marriages in barns and not churches; having their funerals in funeral homes, if at all, but not in churches; attendance to church on Christmas and Easter is very sparse. The generation from 40 years old and younger have very little Bible knowledge of even the most basic Bible stories or principles. Our neighborhoods and area schools are full of hopelessness and chaos. Relationships are broken on every level. Confusion on the very basics of life is shaking the cores of society. These are the types of people Jesus came to save and when they are presented with the humble, loving, welcoming Savior, many eagerly come to Him! Are we actively reaching out to these peoples!?

1. Matthew used all his social and business connections to get people to hear the Gospel. As individuals, how can we do the same? Matthew responded as Christ would want all to respond – followed immediately and then call friends! What can we do to reach out to others? Be quick to speak to others, make a friendship, sit down and speak to them – coffee, meal, golf, walk, Bible study (*Take time to share ideas.*)

2. In the mind of the Religious Leaders, Jesus was wrong in eating with sinners---but not in God's mind! What can we learn from Christ's actions and attitude here? How can we display this attitude and action with our lives and churches? Jesus was in great contrast to the Pharisees. Jesus was a friend of all classes! Phil. 2:5-8

- “God is concerned for all people, including the sinful and hurting ones. The Christian life is not a popularity contest! Following Jesus' example, we should share the Gospel with the poor, immoral, lonely, and outcast, not just the rich, moral, popular, and powerful.” LAB p. 1576
- “Jesus' fraternizing with disreputable people remains a scandal in the predominantly middle-class, suburban, Western church. Many of us, like the Pharisees, at best ignore the outcasts of our society and at worst continue to discriminate against them. We do well to consider substantially increasing our spiritual, evangelistic, and social outreach to minorities, the homeless, prostitutes, addicts and pushers, gays and lesbians, AIDS victims, and the like, as well as to the more hidden outcasts such as divorcees, single parents, the elderly, white-collar alcoholics, and so on. We must get to know them as intimately as Jesus did—only close and trusted friends shared table fellowship over meals. We dare not join with sinners in their sinning, but we may well have to go places with them and encounter the world's wickedness in ways that the contemporary Pharisees in our churches will decry.” Blomberg p. 157

Befriend doesn't have to be a companion in sin, but a friend to bring one to Christ! Jesus never “yoked” with sinners (I Cor. 6:14) but loved them, spoke to them, and offered Himself to all! Who are you befriending? *(Take time to lead a discussion on how churches might reach out into their community.)*

You might end with 1 Cor. 1:23-31.