

Jesus Called Matthew to Be His Disciple

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of sharing the Word of God, and not just their own opinions. with others. In this topic, we will see that after Jesus called Matthew (also called Levi) to follow Him, Jesus quoted the Old Testament as He explained that His purpose was to call sinners to repentance. That will be the focus of this topic.

Jesus had left the place where He healed the paralyzed man. Matthew 9:9-11 says, “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. 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. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” Here, we see that Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him and become one of his disciples.

Tax collectors were hated by most of the Jews. First, tax collectors were Jews who worked for the hated Roman government. Jesus later talked about two sons to the chief priests and rulers of the people. In Matthew 21:31, we read, “‘Which of the two did the will of *his* father?’ They said to Him, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.’” Jesus told the chief priests that the tax collectors and the harlots would enter the kingdom of God before they did. The chief priests were so angry after hearing the parables in that chapter that they wanted to kill Jesus. Second, tax collectors were often thieves who took extra money for themselves. In Luke 19:8, Zacchaeus said, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’” Zacchaeus said that he would pay back four times as much to all those from whom he had stolen by charging extra taxes.

Matthew knew that he was accepted by Jesus. He was a hated tax collector at the time Jesus invited him to become a disciple. Matthew also wanted all of his friends to meet Jesus. Luke 5:28-29 says, “So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then, Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.” As a result, Matthew invited all of his tax collector and sinner friends to a great feast so that they could all meet Jesus and know that Jesus accepted them as well. The Pharisees were upset to see Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. That was why they wanted to know why He ate with tax collectors.

The Pharisees thought that they were better than both the tax collectors and others that they called sinners. That is why Jesus later gave the parable, in Luke 18:10-14, where we read, “‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’” The scribes and Pharisees exalted themselves and condemned others.

In Matthew 9:12-13, we read, “When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a

physician, but those who are sick. 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.” Jesus said that it is the sick people who need a doctor and not those who are well. In that day, people did not go to see a doctor when they were healthy. Instead, they only went to a doctor when they were very sick. Their purpose for going to a doctor was so that he could help them get healed from their sickness or disease. They knew that they needed help and that is why they went to a doctor. In the same way, the tax collectors and sinners knew that they needed their sins forgiven.

Jesus then used a phrase that was common in that day, “Go and learn what this means.” That phrase was actually a rebuke. It was a phrase to remind the people that the thing that was going to be said next was something that they should have known for many years already. Then, we see that Jesus quoted from the book of Hosea to explain why He did what He did. Hosea 6:6 says, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” The Pharisees claimed to follow God, but they did not obey Him. They offered sacrifices but they failed to show mercy. God had warned Saul, the first king of Israel, that obedience was more important than sacrifice. In 1 Samuel 15:22-23, we read, “So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king.’” The Pharisees knew what God had said to Saul, but they failed to obey and show mercy to others. They did not realize that their own rebellion was like the sin of witchcraft and their stubbornness like idolatry.

Then, Jesus said, “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Matthew knew that He was a sinner and needed to come to God in repentance. All of his tax collector and sinner friends knew the same thing. Instead of going to them and telling them about the love of God, the Pharisees just condemned them. As a result, the tax collectors and sinners thought that they were so sinful that God would never accept them and so, they were afraid to come to God. Hosea offered a message of hope just a few verses earlier when He said in Hosea 6:1, “Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.” The Pharisees knew what God said, but they did not share this message that God would forgive because they did not know God themselves. Instead, they just condemned others and thought that God was pleased with them because of their works. Today, many religious people are just like the Pharisees. Instead of showing mercy to sinners and telling them how to receive forgiveness, they just condemn them. That was why Matthew invited them all over for a feast so they could meet Jesus and hear how to have forgiveness of sins. He knew that Jesus had forgiven him and he wanted his friends to know that same forgiveness.

Jesus also answered the question of some others that day. Matthew 9:14-15 says, “Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.’” Here, we see that some of those who had become disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a question. These men often fasted, and they knew that the Pharisees often fasted. However, they had noticed that the disciples of Jesus did not fast. In fact, we have just seen that Jesus and His disciples had enjoyed a great feast at the home of Matthew.

Jesus introduced a very important relationship as He answered the question of the disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus asked the question, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” In this verse, we see that Jesus compared Himself to the bridegroom. In John 3:28-30, John the Baptist had told some of his disciples, “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent

before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I *must* decrease.” In his statement recorded in the book of John, John the Baptist told his disciples that the bridegroom is the Christ. Here, in Matthew, we see that Jesus made it clear to those disciples that He is the Christ that John introduced.

Then, in Ephesians 5:25-27 we read, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Then, Ephesians 5:31-32 says, “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” In this passage, we see that the church is the bride of Christ and that is why Jesus is called the bridegroom.

We also see that Jesus said that His disciples would fast after He was taken back to heaven. Acts 13:2-3 says, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” Then, Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” In these two passages, we see that the early church fasted and prayed as they sought the guidance of the Lord for the churches.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show the same concern and acceptance of others that Jesus showed for tax collectors and sinners. That attitude is a key in helping our children learn to become effective witnesses for Christ, especially to those who are often rejected by society. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to reach out to all people with the love and acceptance that Christ showed.