

Friday Evening - English

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Date: 23 August 2019

Preacher: Rev Dr Malcolm Maclean

[0 : 00] . . .

So we can turn back to Matthew chapter 9. And we can read the section from verse 9 to verse 13.

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, Follow me.

And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

[1 : 16] Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. I suppose we could call this passage Matthew's Tables.

Because in it, we are told what happened at two of his tables. The first table is in his tax booth, where he was sitting when Jesus came along.

And the second table is in Matthew's house. It doesn't exactly say that in this passage, but in the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, it tells us that the meal was in Matthew's house.

So here we have Matthew's two tables. And what happened at each of them is very important for all of us.

I'm sure most of us know that sometimes Matthew is called Levi.

[2 : 51] And we may wonder why that is the case. It was common at that time for individuals to have more than one name.

So it is possible that he possessed the names Levi and Matthew all his life. Although I do think it is interesting that Mark and Luke only refer to him as Levi before his conversion.

Every other reference they make to him in their Gospels, they call him Matthew. So it may be the case that he renamed himself.

Or maybe Jesus renamed him. Because as we know from other disciples, that often Jesus gave them another name.

Like Simon, whom he called Peter. And James and John, whom he called the Sons of Thunder. So it is possible that Matthew received this name after he became a follower of Jesus.

[4 : 24] Can't be proved, of course. But as I said, I think it is interesting that both Mark and Luke refer to him as Levi.

Before he becomes a disciple of Jesus. I am sure we all know it is very difficult to write about ourselves.

If we are sensitive to the issue, we will be concerned that writing about ourselves may give ourselves too prominent a place.

Saying something about ourselves may dim what should be said about someone who is greater than ourselves.

And in our self-description, we might say too much about ourselves. And not enough about others who are present.

[5 : 33] And yet we see that Matthew here writes about himself. But he does it in such a manner that he doesn't hide anything about the far more important person that was present.

And of course, that other important person was Jesus. So if we were to look at the passage and if somebody was to ask us, who is it about?

Is it about Matthew? Or is it about Jesus? What would you answer? Having read the verses. Hopefully, all of us would say it's about Jesus.

Matthew is quite an important person as far as Capernaum is concerned. But in comparison to Jesus, Matthew is not that important.

But it is important for us to see what he says. So I'd just like us to think of a few things.

[6 : 59] First point I would like us to focus on is that in this story, Matthew is discovered by Jesus. We cannot be precise as to where Matthew comes in the calling of the twelve.

We do know from comparing the various gospels that at least six other disciples have been called before him. But these other six, their stories are told in the first chapter of John.

And they happened a few months before this incident in Matthew chapter nine. So it could be that Matthew is number seven of the twelve.

Or it could be the others were called in between Nathaniel or Bartholomew and Matthew. But after the other six, Matthew's story is the last we hear about.

We can look at Matthew's experience and compare it with the others that are mentioned by John.

[8 : 44] And when we do we find that Jesus always has a special way of seeking each of his people.

The ones that are mentioned by John, well there's Andrew and John himself and Peter and by implication John's brother James and then Philip and then Nathaniel.

And if we've read John chapter one we'll know that all of them were brought in to the kingdom differently. Andrew and John they spent a night with Jesus and having spent that number of hours with them Andrew came and told Peter that they had found the Messiah.

Then he took Peter to Jesus and the few minutes that Jesus and Peter spoke to each other were enough to convince Peter that indeed Jesus was the Savior.

Philip well Jesus found him himself. he just seems to have gone and looking for him.

[10 : 31] And then Philip he went and told Nathaniel and it's generally assumed that Nathaniel is the same person as Bartholomew.

And Nathaniel he's convinced because Jesus tells him I saw what you were doing when you were sitting under your fig tree which may not be literal because sitting under a fig tree was a kind of metaphor for meditation and it may be that Nathaniel was meditating about the passage that Jesus goes on to speak to him about about Jacob's ladder but all these ways of Jesus finding them they're unique and then when he comes to Matthew well all he says to him is follow me it is possible of course that

Matthew since he had a seat on the public highway was familiar with all the buzz that was going on in the city and what the citizens would be speaking about was this rather unusual person who had come to live there that he could perform amazing miracles maybe it crossed Matthew's mind this is just a guess of course but maybe it crossed Matthew's mind that he would like to meet him but if he thought that he would have said to himself that's very unlikely because no Jew ever says anything nice to me but whether

Matthew thought that or not all Jesus said to him was two words follow me and that was enough and of course we can just say about it that Jesus spoke with power but what does that mean whatever it was it was very effective in Matthew's experience and he immediately gave up his lucrative daily task and started to follow Jesus it's good for us to know that every time Jesus approaches a sinner for the first time it's different we make a big mistake if we think our experience should have been experienced by anyone else there may be occasional items that are the same but every one of us is an individual and

Jesus knows that so when he comes to us he treats us special if we had asked anyone in Capernaum who do you think this new teacher would like from the city to be their follower where would Matthew have come on the list I suspect he would not be on it if anyone in the city was not going to be called by Jesus as far as public opinion was concerned that would be Matthew no one liked Matthew except maybe for his fellow tax collectors and yet

[15 : 34] Jesus did we can never estimate what Jesus is going to do by public opinion and if he wants to call the most unpopular person in the town then he's quite willing to do it and that's certainly what he did here with Matthew and as we can see when he drew near to Matthew he just spoke to him very simply and straightforward we know that later on some some people sent to arrest Jesus said never a man spoke like this man and

I'm sure they meant the clearness and the straightforwardness of what he said there's no unnecessary words he doesn't try to strengthen his arguments by saying something else he just says to Matthew follow me usually people said to Matthew go away from me other people said to Matthew the last thing we want is to know you in any way whatsoever what Jesus says to him is come and have a relationship with me

Jesus doesn't say to him follow my rules although he does want him to do that but that's not what he says to him instead he says to him follow me perhaps at this time Matthew didn't know if anybody else was following Jesus because none of his followers are with Jesus at that moment Jesus has come to Matthew's booth by himself and yet when Jesus says to him follow me Matthew just does that he's not asking how many others are following you he doesn't know of any are but such was the attractiveness of

Jesus Matthew immediately followed him in addition to the words that Jesus said to him Matthew mentioned something else that I think he remembered and what he remembered was the eyes of Jesus because he does sit there in verse nine Jesus saw a man called Matthew and Matthew couldn't forget that look I wonder what Jesus saw when he saw

Matthew well here are one or two suggestions he saw someone he had loved eternally humanly speaking he might not have seen Matthew before Jesus had just moved to Capernaum recently and there may not have been any reason for him to pay taxes this might have been might have been the first time that Jesus saw someone he knew he was going to die for and when we look at someone with the look of love we look differently don't we sometimes we can look at a crowd and see no one but

[21 : 16] Jesus looked at Matthew and we can say he saw someone someone who meant a great deal to him although they had never spoken before and we can see Jesus looking lovingly at Matthew again as Jesus looked at Matthew he knew Matthew's future Matthew had his plans you know maybe to get enough money to buy a villa somewhere he had to be out for himself because nobody else was out for him and

I suspect like all tax collectors of that time that day by day he made sure of his own future he had his plans and no doubt he had sought them out but Jesus had plans for Matthew if all that Matthew had was his own plans we wouldn't be speaking about him tonight he wouldn't even be a footnote in history but because Jesus had different plans from Matthew and he knew what Matthew would yet do for him Matthew had a wonderful life by the time he wrote this gospel

Matthew had been involved in lots of things that Jesus arranged for him at the time they met on this occasion Matthew knew nothing about that but Jesus did and that's the amazing thing about coming to know Jesus when a sinner trusts in Jesus we can say he enters into a new set of plans he has no idea of what they are going to be but the one thing about them is as we know Matthew discovered that the plans of Jesus took Matthew to heaven and Jesus saw that as he looked at him

I suspect also as he looked at Matthew he didn't just see the outside he saw straight into Matthew's empty heart what was Matthew doing sitting at the tax booth he was drinking at the broken cisterns and he was trying them every day cisterns that held no living water that didn't give him any satisfaction others might be jealous of Matthew but in reality they had no need to be because while

Matthew's hands might be full his heart was empty and what's the use of full hands with an empty heart but Jesus knew he would give him a new heart and a heart that would be full of living water from God and as Jesus looked at Matthew he saw that Matthew had an evil heart others assessed Matthew's wickedness by his outward behavior the scribes and the Pharisees they could assess Matthew no problem his outward behavior but

[26 : 36] Matthew's heart was far worse than his outward behavior and Jesus saw that and he still said to him follow me Jesus has never said follow me to someone with a good heart at least initially whatever their outward demeanor was whatever anyone thought of their outward behavior whenever Jesus says follow me to someone he says it knowing their heart and that gives us a real insight into his love doesn't it our hearts says

Jeremiah are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked Matthew he had never loved God with all his heart and all these individuals who day by day came to him to pay taxes he had never once loved any of them although they were his neighbors he had failed completely to love God and his neighbor and that's where we fall short we can't sit looking at Matthew instead we should sit beside

Matthew and just say to him you and I are the same so that's Matthew's first table then briefly his second table Paul tells us in Romans chapter 12 that we should become living sacrifices well it's fairly obvious from this passage that Matthew became that didn't he because immediately this happened the same day immediately his assets and his time are at the disposal of

Jesus he's basically said to Jesus hasn't he what I have and all of us only have two things that is our assets and our time and Matthew says to Jesus what I have is yours and he used his house to make this meal and at this meal the previously selfish Matthew now showed he loved people because to this meal he invited his old friends and his new friends it must have been an interesting meal because since

James and John and Simon and Andrew were businessmen they must have paid taxes to Matthew and if not to Matthew personally they must have paid them to the others in the room but in the presence of Jesus whatever happened between them before is now no longer an issue the friends of Jesus that's his disciples however many there were and the tax collectors well Matthew's heart now embraces them all before he'd have been competing with the other tax collectors to see who could get the most now he wants to give to them and he invites them all there and these disciples of

[32 : 16] Jesus well at the very least what he could say about them was they found the one who I have found and if he means as much to them as he means to me then they are welcome in my house so he loved them inevitably his actions drew criticism and I mean Matthew is discovering what's a basic feature of anyone who reveals they're a follower of Jesus and that is that merely religious people will start criticizing of course the person they were getting at was

Jesus what kind of teacher is he who mixes with such people but in a sense for Matthew it was good he was criticized because he heard what Jesus said in reply and the extraordinary thing about Jesus is that when unjust criticism is made he deals with it and he just said it here the impression is given that the Pharisees weren't really wanting Jesus to hear this but how do you stop Jesus hearing something he was aware of what they said and he spoke to them about it but what a marvelous meal isn't it when we think about it and all coming out of a chained sinner's heart and he's only been changed for a few hours he didn't have to go away for a week's dedication to discover how to do this he just looked at what he had and he said what

I have got I'll use for Jesus and of course that's very challenging isn't it one of the easiest things for me to do is to tell other people what they should do but the more important thing for me to do will be to find out what I can do at the moment Matthew took the moment and I wonder how many of his fellow tax collectors are now sitting with him at another table a table in heaven because he invited them to this table in his house his second table has lots of things to teach us but then briefly just a couple of things about what

Jesus said because Jesus never wastes words he didn't use any extra words when he spoke to Matthew and he didn't use any extra words when he spoke to the Pharisees and basically what he says to the Pharisees is my role is to cure people not merely to cure them of physical problems as is described in other passages around this but he's here to deal with the hearts of sinners he wants to remake them and he does that by giving them new life but how will they know that they have been remade when he gives the answer in his criticism of the

Pharisees when he says there in verse 13 I desire mercy he he's saying those that I change become merciful and of course Jesus speaks about people being merciful several times in his gospels even the Lord's prayer he speaks about the proof of a changed heart is a merciful heart the Pharisees didn't have that they should have been pleased that such opposites as tax collectors and sinners and Jesus his disciples were sitting together with

[38 : 38] Jesus because the disciples and the tax collectors were being merciful to one another but sadly the Pharisees they saw Jesus and they saw Matthew but how different was the way that they saw Matthew from the way that Jesus had seen it they saw someone whom Jesus shouldn't be near Jesus saw someone he wanted to be near so as we close just what lessons one is that we mentioned it earlier every conversion is unique and because it's unique no one's got a right to hide it

Matthew realized that right away what's happening to me he says is unique therefore I have to share it so therefore if you are converted and you're keeping quiet about it you're hiding something that's unique and it's not good to hide what is unique Matthew revealed his uniqueness and even on this day itself when he did so others were blessed a second lesson we can learn from the incident is this all we need is the commendation of

Jesus the opinions of the Pharisees are not worth anything but the commendation of Jesus it's worth everything what Matthew did please Jesus and that's the simple rule of the Christian life we do what pleases him and if we do what pleases him he'll commend us and the commendation might not be too visible in this life but it will certainly be visible in the day of judgment a third lesson from this incident is how different is it to follow

Jesus from being merely religious we could almost say that following Jesus is like being at a feast while being religious is just standing looking at it because that's the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees his life that he gives to his people is like a feast the Bible is full of that and it's all three but mere religion does nothing or does nothing in a spiritual sense and the last thing

I would say you can learn from this passage is this that confidence for the future comes from obedience in the present Matthew would be the man on the following day because Jesus because he had to obey Jesus on this day and that's always the case confidence for the future comes from obedience in the present and our communion season we got opportunity to be obedient and the outcome will be confidence for the future because the Lord's Supper is a means of grace so having looked at

[44 : 11] Matthew's two tables we can go to the Lord's table expecting his presence and may that happen shall we pray Lord we give you thanks for the way you work in the lives of individuals in your word you tell us about several of them and we just thought about one of them Matthew we thank you for the way your love was shown in this life for that amazing power of grace grace that changed him from being selfish to being loving right away he was a different man his former tax collector friends could see that they had never been seen us that kind of meal in his house before and what a difference it made help us

Lord to realize that your power can change the greatest sinner and do it very quickly so quick that we should be surprised at the new life they show we ask you Lord to be with us in the coming days keep the devil from us and we do ask that your presence would be very real as we prepare for the Lord's supper in a couple of days time so remember us we pray for your own name's sake amen we'll close by singing from Psalm 107 and sing Psalms on page 144 and we'll sing verses 10 to 16 16 some sat in darkness and in gloom and chains of iron held they scorned the ways of God most high against his words rebelled and so he made them labor hard in bitterness and shame they stumbled and they could not rise to help them no one came we can sing verses 10 to 16 70 in 97 17 17 and go back is His worthy hand.

And so He made that labor heart He made the rest of Him in the world of His good life.

To help His love again. And to the Lord they died for help.

He saved them from the tomb. He took away the good of chains that are rotten and found of blue.

[48 : 27] So let them thank Him for His love. The need for His love.

Because of the fellowship we won't go to the door this evening.

you'll have an opportunity to meet Dr. McLean in the hall or later on through the communion. And if there is anyone moved to come forward to the Lord's table for the first time it's normally in case that they would wait somewhere here at the front of the church and then we will meet them in the session room after that.

So we'll close the service with a benediction. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.