

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Receiving the Sinner, Refusing the Righteous

Text: Matthew 9:9-13

POINT 1 - THE CALLING OF MATTHEW (VS. 9A)

We find the calling of the four fisherman in Matthew 4:18-22. Matthew did the same thing. He simply arose and followed Him. All four disciples called earlier in Matthew were fisherman, common people so to speak, blue collar, uneducated. But Matthew was a tax collector, a publican as the AV says.

Some have eluded to the fact that Jesus forgave Matthew, the power to forgive sins by calling such a bad person who was a tax collector. Scholars believe this was the power to forgive sins by calling him. Let's look at what it was to be a tax collector. "They were a breed of people who served Rome. Now, when Rome moved in and took over Palestine, they wanted to exact taxes. And individuals living in the land of Palestine would buy franchises from the Roman government which gave them the right to operate the taxation system in a certain district or a certain town."¹ Furthermore, Matthew collected what was to be given to the Romans, and what he collected beyond that he could keep. And he had the backing of the Romans in this extortion.

"Tax collectors then took bribes from the rich. They extorted from the middle class and the poor. They became hated. They became despised for their lack of nationalism, for being traitors of the worst kind. They had entered into the service of their country's conqueror. They were amassing fortunes at the expense of their own oppressed countrymen."²

The Jews believed only God should get their money. You couldn't have any interaction with religious activity, in fact, you were "listed" in a list with unclean beasts and swine. You couldn't be a witness in a court trial, because you were considered untrustworthy. They were known as flagrant liars, they were classified with robbers and thieves. And to many, they were in the class as murderers. An expert in Jewish history says this, "were the general tax collectors, and their job was to take the regular taxes. And there were three of them. There was the land tax or the ground tax. That's like property tax. There was the income tax. And then there was the pole tax. Just a registration tax In other words, if you're alive, you got to pay tax for being alive. If you're dead, you don't have to pay. So, you had this pole tax; you had this income tax and land tax. Land tax, one-tenth of your grain, one-fifth of our fruit and wine. Income tax, one percent of your money earned. And the pole tax was a determined figure that varied."

There was a second group of collectors, they were called the *Mokebes*. They collected taxes on everything they could. There was a market tax, an axle tax on your cart, a mule tax, if you had a

¹ John MacArthur sermon; <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2263/receiving-the-sinnerrefusing-the-righteous-part-1>

² John MacArthur sermon; <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2263/receiving-the-sinnerrefusing-the-righteous-part-1>

The Gospel of Matthew

three legged mule it was cheaper. These men could invent any tax on anything they wanted. Sounds like America doesn't it? Road taxes, phone taxes, sales tax, excise tax, boat tax, car tax, and it goes on and on. These men were oppressive and unjust. They were ruthless. They were so despised and hated by the people. Matthew wasn't the first type of collector he was the second type. The most hated.

There was also in this second group small and big *Mokbes*. A big *Mokbes* hired someone to do the work and he kept behind the scenes, protected his reputation, etc.. However, the small would do all the collections himself, didn't care about anything. That's what Matthew was. The Jesus passed by while Matthew was doing his collecting and said "follow Me." Imagine the grasps.

POINT 2 - THE CONVERSION OF MATTHEW (VS. 9B)

It seems that Matthew may have known of the works of Jesus, all the miracles, all the healings that were going on. He must have been a man under conviction. Here's my thesis. When Jesus called the four who were fishing, they left and could have went back. But the cost of Matthew getting up and leaving his post, would have been filled by Roman authorities the next day. He literally left all. Listen how Luke describes the calling of Matthew, "After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, 'Follow Me.' And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him" (Luke 5:27-28). The literal leaving everything behind is all his goods, wealth and job. He literally forsook all.

Some of you may be under the conviction of God. For some time now, you've been miserable. You've been thinking about your life, who you are, and God is passing by to show mercy. Don't be like the man who needs to figure out if it's worth it, just get up and follow.

POINT 3 - THE GATHERING OF SINNERS (VS. 10)

If the religionist needed something to moan about this was it. Matthew doesn't give us these details, maybe because of his humility, but Luke describes what happens following Jesus calling him. Luke 5:29 "And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them." So Matthew invited Jesus over for a meal. And not only that, Matthew invited the most vile, wicked, low life of society people there. Jesus was know as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners! (Matthew 11:19). He wasn't a friend to their sin, but to them, to show them the way to God.

Those at the dinner were considered some of the most vile and wretched people around. They were shunned by the religious system. They were put on a list. In some places today, people are not allowed in church because of their social status. They don't have the right clothes or look a certain way. It may not be the norm, but it happens. For me, I'm grateful that God didn't look at the outside when He redeemed me.

The Gospel of Matthew

POINT 4 - THE PHARISEES PROBLEM (VS. 11)

Now, I want to ask a question for us to consider. Why were the Pharisees concerned that Jesus was eating with the tax collectors and sinners? Remember who these Pharisees were, they were self-righteous proud people because of their knowledge and faithfulness to the letter of the law. Maybe they thought Jesus should be dining with them, since He was who He said He was? The nerve of Jesus to dine with tax collectors and sinners and not with us.

POINT 5 - THE RESPONSE OF JESUS - (VS. 12-13)

John MacArthur notes about Jesus' response in three ways, first from human logic, second from Scripture and third from divine authority. Let's unpack these one by one.

First, well people don't need a physician. By their own words the Pharisees were indicted. If those eating with Jesus were the sickest, vilest of all, then they would be the ones that need to be treated. The analogy is simple, it would be expected that a physician would go among the sick people. The Pharisees saw them as "sick" and yet didn't want to "treat" them. Jesus indicted them on the self-righteousness. Jesus said this to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." You see what they missed? The Scribes and Pharisees made lousy doctors. By way of application let me say this, if you don't think you're sick you can never be whole.

Second, He says to go and learn. There may have been some sarcastic tone to this. This is a reference to Hosea 6:6, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (NKJV). The structure of the Greek words was used commonly for saying "You should know better." Jesus literally pins them to the wall with their own Scriptures. In other words, go and learn and get back with me. Go and look at the text and let's talk. I'm open to any discussion you may have or position you may hold, but if you have your opinion and not scripture, it's not valid. I would say, go and learn and let's talk.

What they can learn is "it's not sacrifice but mercy" that needs to be applied. They lacked mercy, forgiveness and love. They had the obedience, law abiding rituals down, but missed this. Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." But you lack mercy. Is this you? Is this where you are at? You should be less concerned about ceremonial purity, and more concerned about the sick, helpless and vile. They need a physician. The fact the quotation came from Hosea made it all the more pointed. The story of Gomer's unfaithfulness is an illustration of Israel. But Hosea continued to love and forgive as God does.

The Gospel of Matthew

Third, and the most piercing statement of all. It's because it was a statement of **divine authority**. In other gospel accounts (Luke 5:32) the words "to repentance" are listed. It's not in the original, most reliable, but it fits. **The one who thinks he is righteous can't be called, because he doesn't see himself as a sinner. The one who thinks himself as righteous shuts himself out from God's mercy, because he refuses to acknowledge his need of it. He rejects the call because he rejects the idea of his lostness.**

The word *call* is often used of **inviting guests to one's home for food and lodging**. This may be something hard to swallow, but it can be said **"because you consider yourself righteous, I haven't come to call you, because you are satisfied with yourself, I will leave you to yourself."** This is never more clearly illustrated than in Luke 18:11-13, **"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get."** Notice the problem here, it's with the "I" that he uses. While teaching in the temple, Jesus told many of the self-righteous folks in John 8:21, **"I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."** **Why? Because they refused to believe.** Furthermore, in Luke 19:10, Jesus tells us those who can be saved, **"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."** **Only the lost can be saved, and if you don't realize you're lost, you won't be saved.**

Remember the Pharisee and the tax collector, the response of the tax collector was **"God, be merciful to me, the sinner."** In one of Jesus' last parables he illustrated the His kingdom as a great royal wedding. Many were invited, but didn't come (**Matthew 22:1-10**). He then sent them out to the most remote, far out, places to invite anyone who would be willing to come. As the invited guests stood outside and refused to come in, **so do the Pharisees refuse to sit around the table with sinners and tax collectors. They were just too good to do so.**

I close with this from John MacArthur, "The kingdom of God is for the spiritually sick who want to be healed, the spiritually corrupt who want to be cleansed, the spiritually poor who want to be rich, the spiritually hungry who want to be fed, the spiritually dead who want to be made alive."