

The Messiah Has Come
Week 36
Matthew 9:9-17
“Publicans, Parties, and Patchwork”

Introduction

...“**What man among you, who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance.**” **Luke 15:3b-7**

I recently watched a video online of a preacher (so-called), who was trying to make the case that ninety-nine percent of people who call themselves “Christian” will never make it into heaven. He went on to point out verse after verse of *Old Testament* laws that church people continuously break, such as keeping the Sabbath on Saturday, and eating pork etc. Apparently, he is a Seventh-Day Adventist, who thought that any who didn’t personally subscribe to his particular sect was a hell-bound sinner deserving of judgment.

I wanted so bad to comment on this man’s video and point him to the book of *Galatians* where Paul preached hard against Judaic legalism. For even in the earliest days of the church, many had tried to tell Gentiles that in order to be saved they would first have to convert to Judaism and obey its laws, and then they could come to Jesus for salvation, but not until. Paul didn’t pull any punches with these so-called Judaizers, who had infiltrated the church with their legalistic doctrines, thereby once more trying to return the people to a “works-based” salvation, as opposed to one that is obtained by grace, through faith. He admonished the church for allowing such nonsensical doctrine to invade their ranks, saying:

You were running well. Who prevented you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from the One Who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough. I myself am persuaded in The LORD you will not accept any other view. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty. **Galatians 5:7-10**

I wanted so bad to write that false teacher a dissertation online to rebuke him for his legalism. But after careful consideration, I determined it to be a waste of time. So, I restrained myself. Nevertheless, I am often so discouraged, when it seems that all around me there are those who would rather keep people out of the kingdom, rather than invite them in. We are not saved by works, my friends, for our works, even at their best, are filthy rags, when compared to God’s perfect standard. And while after receiving God’s grace, we certainly have not been given license to sin. We will never be able to live in perfection this side of glory. Our only hope for rescue is found in the righteousness of Christ.

Legalism has always been the enemy of grace, and as we see in this passage today from Matthew’s Gospel, those who considered themselves righteous in Jesus’ day were His greatest critics. Just imagine being so perfect in your own eyes that you would feel justified in critiquing God! But this is exactly what the Pharisees in Jesus’ day were doing. We have already seen these hypocrites slowly turning on Jesus and trying desperately to find some flaw in Him, even as He performs miracles the likes of which no one had ever witnessed.

When Christ healed the lame man and forgave his sin, the Pharisees began to watch Him ever so closely to have something that they could hold against Him in accordance with their law. Today, we will see that when He called a sinful tax collector (namely Mathew himself) to become His disciple, these self-righteous charlatans just knew they had something by which to accuse Him. But as usual, they were no match for The Son of God, Who came to seek and to save that which is lost.

So, let us look together at this wonderful passage that tells of Matthew's personal and private call to faith. He was the last person the religious leaders of the day would have chosen, but God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the so-called wise (**1 Corinthians 1:27**). And we will witness this truth for ourselves as we delve into this passage. So let us learn of the callings of our God in these verses as we see the *Publicans*, *Parties*, and *Patchwork*. Please allow me to explain.

Publicans (vs. 9)

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me," and he got up and followed Him. Matthew 9:9

We need to clear up a few things right away with this story. This was more than likely not Matthew's first encounter with Christ. Capernaum wasn't that large of a city, and I am fairly certain that Matthew had heard of Jesus before receiving this particular invitation to become His disciple. In fact, I believe that Matthew had personally eye witnessed the healing of the demon possessed men at Gadara, and that is why he tells us that there were actually two men in the story. The gospel of Mark actually placed Matthew's (whose name was actually Levi) calling a bit earlier in the narrative of Jesus' travels.

Mark's gospel is widely believed to have been more chronological than that of Matthew. Matthew was more focused on moving from one particular topic to the next in order to lay out his case for Jesus' Messiahship. Also it is quite possible that Matthew had multiple encounters with Jesus before the fateful day when he was called to leave everything behind and follow The Savior. And He did so without a moments hesitation. When God calls to us, we are expected to answer immediately and affirmatively without offering excuse, or we may well hear the Savior say to us, "*Let the dead bury their own dead.*"

Another important thing that we need to acknowledge is the tax collector's name change. He was known by many as Levi (which means to be "*joined*"). And after his surrender to the Lordship of Christ, he was subsequently called "Matthew" which means "*gift of God*". Why does this matter? Because an encounter with the Savior always changes our nature. Levi became a new creation once he heard his Master's call. **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17**

Levi went from being connected, *joined*, if you will, to this old world, to being called out and separated to receive the *gift of God* that is in Christ Jesus! It happens every time a sinner repents and calls upon the Name of The LORD.

Levi was a publican. The word in the Greek is *publicani*, which made him among the most despised in all of Israel. For you see, the publicans were considered to be traitors to their nation. In order to become a tax collector for Rome, one would take his own money and purchase a "franchise" of sorts, and the Roman government would allow them to collect taxes on behalf of the crown. There were three different types of these citizen tax collectors. There were those who collected taxes on income and property. Then there were those who would collect duties upon just about anything imaginable, from livestock, to boats and other methods of transportation (they could even tax someone traveling through for the donkey they were riding). The upper level of these franchisees would hire lower level tax agents to collect taxes on their behalf, so that the actual owner of the tax office could maintain somewhat of an anonymous status in the community.

After these two levels of tax men, there were those who were hired by the second tier tax collectors to work in the tax booths and actually collect the taxes from everyone who passed their way. Needless to say, because these particular individuals became the literal "face of the franchise" so to speak, they were by far the most despised of the three. It was in this category of collection agents that Matthew was gainfully employed. And as such, he would have been hated by everyone, but also very wealthy, for tax collectors were allowed to keep for themselves all the money that they collected over and above what was required by the Roman Government. And the people knew how much these men cheated them on a daily basis, and yet, there was nothing they could do about it.

I am always curious as to why The Spirit led the authors of Scripture to order their narratives the way that they did. For I am certain that no Scripture verse ever found its way into God's Word by accident. So why would Matthew choose to tell his story, albeit a very modest version as we will soon discover, in this particular place; especially since according to Mark's Gospel, it had happened before some of the events that Matthew has already discussed. I believe that Matthew wanted for us to see, that when Christ chose him to be forgiven, that he was just as much the outcast by society as the lame man in the story before it. For you see, there are many ways to find yourself in a position where no one thinks that you have any real value. But God sees what this world cannot. And He chose Matthew to be one of the Chroniclers in the story of The King of kings, and LORD of lords! Jesus always sees us not as who we are, but as who we will become.

Matthew would not only have been an outcast among the Jews, but even the other disciples of Jesus would have been shocked, when their Master chose *him*! Levi would have never in a million years been accepted into any form of normal Jewish life. In fact, he would not have even been allowed to worship at the temple or local synagogue, if those who were there recognized him for what he was. Have you ever felt unwelcome in a church because the people there *knew* of your many sins? Have you ever felt like you had been written off as hopeless, with nothing to offer those who are members of the so-called "polite society"? Then guess what? Jesus can see in you what no one else can, and He longs to call you to His side and to change your name!

Parties (vs. 10-13)

While He was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Now when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." **Matthew 9:10-13**

Matthew is pretty modest in regard to his details about the big banquet for the sinners and tax collectors. The other gospels tell the full story. The banquet was at Matthew's home (**Mark 2:15**). Matthew paid for it out of his pocket, and then he invited the only ones who would have ever considered him as a friend. He invited all the tax collectors and sinners that were just like he was! He wanted them to meet The One Who had changed his life forever. What an awesome testimony of the changed life! Those who have truly met Christ will long to introduce Him to their loved ones. It is the natural progression of being born again to see others reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. **Matthew 5:9**

The Pharisees, of course, were so offended that this Jewish Rabbi, this upstart named Jesus, would even consider being under the same roof with this rabble. After all, He of all people should have known better! Or so they thought. And in their self-righteous hearts, they began to despise Him all the more. I'd like to say that I have never seen such a godless attitude in a church. But I would be lying if I did. I've seen it many times. "We do not want *those kind* of people in our church!", they will say. What kind of people exactly is it that they are speaking of? The sinners who so desperately need to be called out of this world and into the kingdom, the very people that Christ came to save... that's who!

You see, the problem with a Pharisee is that they are not able to see how wicked they truly are. For if they did, they wouldn't have time to worry about "*those people*". If they did, they would first repent and then do everything that they could to reach out to "*those people*". Let me say this as plainly as I possibly can... Jesus loves *those people*! And when we love them, we are demonstrating our love for Him.

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me

something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer to Him, ‘LORD when did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit you?’ “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.’” **Matthew 25:34-40**

The Pharisees had a saying of sorts that in their own self-importance they would condescend to people with whom they felt less than educated in the ways of The Law. “Go and learn”, they would say. Jesus turned their own phrase against them here. He told the Pharisees who would dare question His compassion to “go and learn” the Scriptures, namely the one in Hosea which says:

For I desire faithful love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. **Hosea 6:6**

The words should have convicted them and cut them to the core, but sadly, most of them would miss His point. To know God is to love as God loves. And no matter how many ritualistic services we perform in His Name, if we do not love those He loves, then we are nothing like Him. God loves sinners, so much so, that He sent His One and Only Son to die on a cross to purchase them, to change their names as adopted sons and daughters of His kingdom. And to miss this is to miss out on the message of the gospel in its entirety. We must, *go and learn*, that The Great Physician longs to heal the sick. And when one of them is healed, there is a celebration, a party in heaven. Matthew threw a banquet at his own expense in order to seek and save the lost. He did this because he cared for them. Is it any wonder that Christ chose him to not only follow Him, but to record for posterity the very reason that He came?

Patchwork (vs. 14-17)

Then John’s disciples came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old garment with un-shrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins will burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” **Matthew 9:14-17**

Mark’s Gospel informs us that both the Pharisees and the disciples of John were fasting at the time of this question. We know from Scripture that the Pharisees fasted twice a week. Whether or not the question was legitimate, from those who wanted simply to understand, or whether it was just another attempt to catch Jesus in some contrived sin, we do not know for sure. Perhaps the Pharisees even put John’s disciples up to asking the question. But nonetheless, Jesus was asked the reason as to why His disciples were not partaking in the fast days with the rest of the followers of Judaism.

The answer was direct and simple. But before anything else, it is important to understand the spiritual application of fasting. To fast is to forsake all else, even ones own physical needs in order to draw closer to The LORD. So it would stand to reason that when The LORD is standing **in person** right beside you, and you are seeking His counsel face to face, then why exactly would it be necessary to fast? Answer, **It would not!** And that is what Jesus meant, when He said it was pointless for His Bride, the church, to fast when the very Bridegroom of the church is physically with them. The reason that we should fast and pray now, is because we long for His return! Remember the prayer of the saints:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **Matthew 6:10**

That being said, we can now move on to the next section of the passage that has been repeatedly misunderstood and misinterpreted. The portion I am referring to is the "Patchwork and Wineskin" verses. And to understand what is being said here is to understand who was asking the question in the first place. It was those Jews who thought they were being pleasing to God by diligently keeping every portion of The Law. They weren't, but they had convinced themselves that they were.

Jesus has already revealed that to them in His Sermon on The Mount. It isn't just about obedience. Rather, it is about obedience with the right heart motivation. And quite frankly, no one can live up to this standard. So Christ came to bring something new. He came to offer forgiveness to the unforgivable and to fill them with His Spirit, so that they could have a new heart, one that strives to please God from a place of love. In short, He would give them not only The Law to obey, but to supernaturally empower them to obey it.

So what exactly did He mean about the patches and the wineskins? It means that He did not come to patch up the old system. He came to bring something new and more wonderful. He came to deliver sinners from sin and to fill them with His Spirit. You cannot possibly think that by your works you are able to please God, and then be filled by His Spirit at the same time. You must first admit that your works are insufficient for your salvation. And you must then humble yourself before The LORD and ask to be forgiven. Sinners like Levi knew that they could never measure up. But one who had been transformed into a Matthew could! For you see, to surrender your life to Christ is to be clothed in His righteousness and not your own. And when we are clothed in Jesus, my friends, then we are made holy and acceptable to God! You can't just patch up your good works and be fixed. You have to become a new creation in Christ Jesus. These two things are diametrically opposed to one another. Either you try to save yourself by being good, and perish. Or come to Jesus to be saved, and *live*.

So, I have one question for you this morning. Have you been trying to patch yourself up? Striving harder to be good and failing miserably? Do you feel like you are an outcast among those who feel that they are somehow better than you will ever be? Then come and follow Jesus. He will give you a new name and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. You cannot fix yourself, but Christ can and will make you new. He did not die to simply put a patch on an old piece of clothing, but rather, to offer you a total makeover, remade in the image of Christ Himself!

For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.

Galatians 3:27

TRUTH!!!