

6. Jesus Invited Matthew to Follow Him

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Jesus told a man that his sins were forgiven when Jesus saw the faith of the four friends. We also saw why Jesus first told the man that his sins were forgiven instead of telling him to rise up and walk. In our topic today, we are going to see what happened when Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him.

In Mark 2:13-14, we read, “Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him.” Jesus had just healed the paralyzed man. Here, we see that Jesus left the house and went to the Sea of Galilee. Jesus then taught the people by the sea. When He finished teaching, He passed the place where Levi (Matthew) was sitting at the tax office to collect taxes. Tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people because they paid the Roman government to buy the right to collect taxes in a certain area. As a result, the people considered them traitors. In addition, they would then charge the people more than Rome required and would keep the extra money for themselves. This caused the people to also consider them crooks who were stealing from their own people.

Jesus knew how the people felt about tax collectors. However, Jesus loved the tax collectors just as much as He loved the rest of the people. Jesus immediately gave Matthew an invitation. Jesus just said, “Follow Me.” Luke 5:28 says, “So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.” This verse makes it clear that Matthew made a life-changing decision that day. Matthew made the choice to leave everything including his tax collecting business and follow Jesus. This shows that the invitation caused a change of heart that also resulted in a change of actions.

What happened next tells us that Matthew had an immediate concern for his friends and co-workers. Mark 2:15-17 says, “Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi’s* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, ‘How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” Matthew knew how to introduce the other tax collectors and sinners to Jesus.

Luke 5:29 says, “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.” Here, we see that Matthew gave a great feast in honor of Jesus and invited all of his co-workers and all of his friends that were called sinners by the Pharisees over to his home for dinner. The Pharisees called people sinners if they were tax collectors or committed certain sins that the Pharisees thought were bad sins. We see that many tax collectors and sinners came to that dinner. They sat down to eat with Jesus and His disciples because they felt accepted by Jesus. That was in direct contrast to the way they felt around scribes and Pharisees. As a result, we see that many tax collectors and sinners accepted the invitation of Matthew to eat with Jesus and have the opportunity to get acquainted with Him.

In fact, we read that many of these tax collectors and sinners followed Jesus as a result.

The scribes and Pharisees were very upset when they saw that Jesus was eating with the tax collectors and sinners. Toward the end of the ministry of Jesus, we see that same attitude by the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 15:1-2, where we read, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” In that chapter, we see that Jesus gave three parables because of the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees: the parable of the lost sheep; the parable of the lost coin; and the parable of the lost sons.

In the parable of the lost sons, we see that the father was rejoicing and celebrating because the son known as the prodigal son had repented and returned home. However, the older son was just as lost but he did not know that he was lost. Luke 15:28-30 says, “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’” We never read that this older son went into the celebration. In fact, he was very angry because the father was celebrating. This older son showed the same attitudes that the scribes and Pharisees showed in their rejection of tax collectors and sinners. We also see that most of them never repented, and as a result, they did not receive eternal life.

The scribes and Pharisees were so upset to see Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners that they asked the disciples of Jesus, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus heard their question and He answered instead of forcing the disciples to try and figure out a way to answer the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples had not yet learned how to answer the questions of the scribes and Pharisees when they tried to trap Jesus or the disciples with their questions. As a result, Jesus chose to answer this question. Just a short time later, the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus again. Mark 2:24 says, “And the Pharisees said to Him, ‘Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’” In this verse, we see that the Pharisees made the traditions of the Rabbis equal with the Old Testament, so they were the ones that were guilty of sin.

Jesus explained the purpose of His coming in the answer that He gave to the scribes and Pharisees. These two groups thought that they were righteous because they kept the traditions of the Rabbis. Jesus later described the inner character of the scribes and Pharisees when He said, in Matthew 23:28, “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” Jesus used an illustration to show His purpose when He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” The tax collectors and sinners knew that they were sinners because the Pharisees continually reminded them of that fact. They were ready to listen to Jesus and repent because they wanted to have their sins forgiven. By His answer to this question, Jesus made it clear that those who were sinners could have their sins forgiven when they came to Him in true repentance for their sin. That offered great hope to the tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus was soon asked another question. Mark 2:18-20 says, “The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, ‘Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.’” John had made it clear that he was not the bridegroom when he answered a question with the words given in John 3:27-29, “John answered and said, ‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 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.”” John’s own answer earlier had made his ministry clear.

Jesus made it clear to both the disciples of John and to the Pharisees that He is the One who fulfilled the words spoken by John. Jesus made it very clear that His disciples would not fast as long as Jesus was with them. They had the great privilege of being the friends of the bridegroom and the bridegroom was with them. The disciples of John may have understood what Jesus meant because of what John had said during the time that he was introducing Jesus. However, the Pharisees could not understand because they were totally lacking in spiritual insight. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” The Pharisees had a complete lack of spiritual understanding.

Jesus went on to explain that the day would come when His disciples would fast. However, they would not fast for the same reason as the Pharisees. Matthew 6:5 says, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” Then, Matthew 23:2-5 adds, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.” They did what they did to be seen by men. In contrast, the disciples of Jesus made it their goal to faithfully serve the Lord. In Acts 6:4, they said, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” They fasted as they prayed so that they could be led by the Lord. In the same way, we want to give an example to our physical and spiritual children of doing whatever we do, including fasting, to please and serve the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to do what they do to be faithful as they serve the Lord.