

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

A dominant theme in Matthew 8 and 9 is the Lordship authority of Christ. In Matthew 9:1-8, we see Christ has the authority to forgive sins, which ultimately is the prerogative of God alone. Jesus claimed to forgive a paralytic and then proved it by immediately healing him. The people were in awe of this miracle, and verse 8 says they “**glorified God who had given such power to men.**”

But in so doing, they missed the point. This miracle demonstrated that Jesus was in fact the Messianic God-Man Who had the authority to forgive sins. He was no mere man that God had given this power to, but rather God Himself come in the flesh, doing what only God can do.

Having demonstrated His authority to forgive sins, Jesus then proceeded to call to Himself a tax collector named Matthew, who would have been considered by the Jews in the worst category of sinners.

Matthew 9:9 (NKJV)

9 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.

Matthew thus becomes an example of Christ’s forgiving and life-changing power.

The other synoptic (similar) gospels of Mark and Luke refer to Matthew as Levi (cf. Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27). Many commentators think that Matthew may have been a sort of “nickname” given to him by Jesus (cf. Mt. 16:17-18; Mk. 2:14; 3:18; Lk. 5:27; 6:15). It means “**Gift of God**”. If so, Matthew in effect was his “**Christian name**” and the name which Matthew himself (as the human author of the book) ascribed to himself, as seen here.

Matthew shows Christian humility here in that he acknowledges his past and makes only a passing reference to his calling. Still, thematically, it makes a major point. Matthew inserts this right after Jesus demonstrates His authority to forgive sins and right before Christ dines with tax collectors and sinners, of which Matthew had been one.

Matthew himself is an example of a forgiven sinner whose life was changed by Christ so that he was greatly used by God. He is an example of a changed life brought about by true repentance.

We don't know if there was any previous interaction with Jesus on the part of Matthew prior to his conversion. We do know that Matthew was busy at work collecting taxes, and suddenly, in that context, Jesus said to him, ***"Follow Me."*** And immediately Matthew arose and followed Him, showing that indeed he recognized Christ's Lordship authority in his life.

Following Christ denotes a complete break with his former life. He went from being a tax collector to a follower of Christ just like that and never turned back. He heard the voice of Christ, arose, and followed Him.

John 10:27 (NKJV)

27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Following Christ was no small thing. It wasn't like he locked up shop for an hour or two and then went back to collecting taxes. This was it. He was done as a tax collector.

And that was saying something because tax collectors were generally very wealthy. They were hated by the Jews because they were considered to be traitors who now worked for Rome. And they tended to be corrupt - overcharging on taxes and keeping the excess. Because of their characteristic corruption and extortion, the Jews considered fellow Jewish tax collectors the scum of the earth.

Don't you love this about Jesus? He often chooses those that religious pride would never touch.

1 Corinthians 1:26–29 (NKJV)

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, [nothings] to bring to nothing the things that are,

29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

God doesn't want anyone to get the glory except for Him. If we had nothing but the elites on God's team, they would make all over each other and not give God the glory. So, God chooses mainly the nobodies, those the world has no regard for, who know they are nobodies and therefore are careful to give God all the glory. Now notice it doesn't say not ANY wise, mighty, or noble, but not many are called. Yes, there are a few.

But if you were a pious Jew in Jesus' time, you would never have thought about selecting a dirty tax collector like Matthew to be an insider on Jesus' team. That would never have entered your mind. But God's ways are not our ways – they are better.

Note what Jesus said to Matthew. He simply said, “**Follow Me.**” This is the stuff of true conversion. We are not saved by following. We are saved by faith, but if it is the right kind of faith, it will follow. “It follows that faith follows.” (Pun intended.) True faith follows.

John 10:27–28 (NKJV)

27 My sheep hear My voice, [respond in faith] and I know them, and they follow Me.

28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Jesus makes it all about Him! Saving faith is about allegiance to Christ's person. Those who truly recognize Jesus as Lord follow Him. Imagine if Matthew had said, “**Let me think about it and I will get back to you.**” How do you suppose that would have gone? Well, we would have a completely different story in the gospels than the one we have.

Following is a “Lordship” issue, and it is the fruit of true faith. If you truly believe on Jesus as Lord, you want to obey Him. It is why people get baptized – because Christ says to do so. He says, “**If you are going to believe on Me I want you to testify of that in baptism,**” and so we do so. Just like Matthew, when Jesus says, “**Follow Me,**” true faith responds by following. The following is the fruit of true faith.

Now, none of us follow perfectly, but we do follow. We grow in grace. We grow in consistency. We often falter, but we still follow, imperfect as it may be. James says we all stumble in many ways (Ja. 3:2). There is a lot of stumbling on the course, but still, by the grace of God, we never completely leave the course, and God makes adjustments in our lives as we go.

Matthew is an example of what Jesus came to do. He came to call sinners to repentance. And what does that look like? True repentance is seen in a person becoming a follower of Christ.