



WEDNESDAY 30 March 2022 “Matthew” Matt. 9:9-13

Hello my “Walking with Jesus” friends,

Teamwork is really important in our world, isn't it? If you grew up in a farm family, you understand. If you've played a team sport, you understand. If you've been part of a teaching team or a medical team or a business team, you understand. Today is day 21 of our journey with Jesus toward His Easter weekend and *teamwork was important for Jesus too, did you know that?*

Already in our journey we've watched Jesus invite Andrew and his brother Peter, James and his brother John to follow Jesus and become part of His team. They were professional fishermen and all four of them were part of fishing teams who worked Lake Galilee. Some people on their teams handled the fishing, others handled the marketing and sales side of their business. I don't know for sure what Philip and Nathaniel had as professions but as we saw a few days ago, Jesus had invited them to join His team as well. *Today, let's watch as Jesus invites someone to join His team that shocked everyone.* Luke, Mark and Matthew all record this event in their accounts, perhaps because it was so radical. I like Matthew's description, right in the middle of a flurry of Jesus doing several individual miracles, meeting the needs of a wide range of people, recorded in Matthew chapter 8 & 9.

Jesus spent quite a bit of time in the large town of Capernaum on the shore of Lake Galilee. It was a hub for cross country trade and travel. It had a large market which served everything from fresh Lake Galilee fish to crops grown in the rich farmland all around, to oil from the bountiful olive trees, and of course there were bountiful vineyards nearby. *You could find almost anything you could need or perhaps even want in Capernaum.* For those reasons a tax collector had his tax booth on a prominent corner in Capernaum and sadly everyone knew exactly where Levi the tax collector did his terrible business.

Levi was disdained on all counts. A Jewish man named “Levi” undoubtedly because his father Alphaeus and his mother had high expectations that he'd be a deeply religious man bringing the hope and help of God and the Scriptures to the people all through his lifetime.

I'm sure as a young lad Levi loved his studies with the other boys and the local Rabbi. *But it appears Levi had an appetite for money and that which money can buy.* In the first century one of the fast tracks to a substantial income was being a tax collector.

Despite the fact it would break his parent's hearts, and all Jews would view him as a traitor to the Roman corrupt system of taxation, Levi set aside everything to become a "Mokhes", a tax collector. Somewhere in that process Levi became known as Matthew and like all tax collectors, he was banned from entering the Synagogue or Temple. Matthew began his career reporting to a 'chief Mokhes tax collector', someone like Zacchaeus, who taught him the trade and probably received a cut of the taxes Matthew collected. A Roman soldier would have likely been near Matthew's tax booth just in case Matthew found someone reluctant to pay their taxes. *It was a dirty business, a friendless trade, a ruthless and corrupt way to live.*

Matthew had undoubtedly heard Jesus speak, seen Jesus in the crowded Capernaum streets, and maybe even seen Jesus do a miracle or two. I've often wondered if Matthew was on the edge of the huge crowd on the hillside just outside Capernaum when Jesus spoke what Matthew records as the "Sermon on the Mount"? When Jesus spoke of not worrying about food or clothing or even tomorrow, "...**because your Father in heaven knows what you need even before you ask Him**" (Matt. 6:8,25) did that challenge Matthew deeply? He had left his studies with the Rabbi to pursue tax collecting in part because he wanted to take responsibility for supplying himself with what he both needed and wanted.

Or when Jesus spoke the great truth that **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also..."** (Matt. 6:21) did Matthew feel convicted because surely that was why he was a money hungry tax collector? Finally, I've often wondered what Matthew felt when Jesus had said **"No one can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and money"!?** (Matt. 6:24) *How deeply did the Holy Spirit burrow these statements deep in Matthew's heart causing him to rethink his values, his priorities, his life purpose?*

Jesus showed up at Matthew's tax booth one day, and likely they simply chatted for a little while. Look around. Can you see the people pointing and wondering what could Jesus possibly want in spending a few moments with Matthew? Was Matthew trying to extort money from Jesus, some wondered? But then people saw something amazing. Matthew closed his tax books and closed the window on his tax booth, closed the door, locked it, and walked out of that tax booth following Jesus? Evidently Matthew went to his chief tax collector boss and resigned, turned in his tax record and the keys to his tax office and went home to prepare a celebration meal. He sent word to his fellow tax collectors and other scoundrels, and he invited Jesus and His disciples to dinner!

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this event in these words: **"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'**

On hearing this Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick... For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.' (Matt. 9:10-13) Look at the crowd across the street from Matthew's house. All kinds of people, lots of people, pointing, laughing, shouting, scowling! They can't believe what they see. Matthew having a party was not all that unusual, but Jesus and His disciples attending, now that was enough to make people talk all kinds of gossip!

Of course, Jesus' words do NOT mean Jesus came to earth for perfect people, there are no perfect people. *Rather it means Jesus came for any and all who recognize their need for rescue from their sin and their inability to save themselves, thus their desire for a Savior!* Matthew knew he was desperately needing rescue from his ever-increasing financial appetite and the deception, corruption and manipulation he was willing to engage to fill his pockets. Oh, Matthew needed a Savior and Jesus was willing to be that Savior... that was worth celebrating, even if it gave people an opportunity to make fun of him!

But this day was bigger than a celebration for Matthew's deliverance, for if we had been eavesdropping in on the conversation between Jesus and Matthew, we would have heard Jesus say to Matthew the same words He said to Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip and Nathaniel... ***"Come and follow Me!"*** *Jesus was inviting Matthew to become one of His disciples!* Can you believe that? Can you imagine how that would impact the other six men, all of whom Matthew probably had collected taxes from, perhaps for some of them maybe regularly, especially if they did business in Capernaum!

Can you imagine the attitudes that Jesus would have to deal with if real 'teamwork' was going to become reality for Jesus and His disciples, including Matthew? Now what about you and me? Are there any attitudes that are buried deeply in your soul that Jesus would have to work on if Jesus invited you to join Him and a team of other people very different from you? Perhaps you are already on a business team or community team or church team and there are some people on that team you simply ignore because you have some attitudes?

I'd like to leave us today sitting in the party at Matthew's house, looking around at a wide range of corrupt, prideful, sinful people... and then over there is Jesus and Peter, Andrew, John, James, Philip and Nathaniel and Matthew is rushing about making sure everyone has enough food and wine. What are you thinking and feeling as you watch this scene told to us in three of the Gospel books of the Bible? What does Jesus want you and I to consider about Him, Jesus, about Matthew, about ourselves? Anything need to change?

Today's Scripture is Matthew 9:9-13.