

Sermon – 30/01/2011 am

Calling of Matthew

Study Text: Luke 5:27-32

In his Galilean ministry Jesus had cast out a demon, healed a sick woman and many other sick people, including a leper. He had demonstrated his power and authority in the natural realm with a great catch of fish. Wherever he went Jesus preached the kingdom of God – because for this purpose he was sent (4:43).

The world into which Jesus was sent was, and still is, a fallen, sinful world. Sickness and disease are evidence of this sin. Death is the ultimate evidence of sin. So it was that when a paralysed man was brought for healing Jesus declared his sins forgiven. Although not labelled a sinner, everyone understood that he was sick because of his sin.

If Jesus could forgive a sick man what about a 'real sinner'? What about a man who was labelled a sinner because of the work he did? In Jewish society there were people who were particularly sinful, people who were despised by everyone. Tax collectors and prostitutes were among such people.

Such people were 'outside the pail' as far as the religious leaders were concerned. They were beyond help. They were to be avoided. They were not allowed to attend worship. They were not allowed to join the feasts. Eating with such 'sinners' was completely out of the question.

1. Follow

Jesus left the crowded house where he was preaching and where he healed the paralytic. He went out and went along the road by the sea. He saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in his tax office (5:27). We are going to call him by his other name Matthew.

Matthew was a Jew but was regarded by other Jews as a traitor because he worked for the occupying power. He had the contract, or subcontract, for collecting a toll tax for the Romans. A tariff was collected on any merchandise that passed along the international highway between Egypt and Syria.

Not only were tax collectors despised as traitors, they were despised for their cheating. Being despised probably contributed to their corruption. Most of them used their position for personal gain. They became rich by demanding more than the set rate of tax. Another tax collector called Zacchaeus was a rich man. Matthew had a big house and the resources to host a feast.

Others Jews, especially Pharisees, would have crossed the road to avoid the office of Matthew, but not Jesus. He saw Matthew sitting there, went up to him and said, 'Follow me'. Jesus did not see him as 'beyond the pale'. He did not regard him as a sinner who could not be saved. This man had a name. He was made in the image of God. He could be saved. The grace of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient to save the worst of sinners.

Do you think there are people who cannot be saved? I was asked fill out a survey form the other day. I was asked how I would feel about having a convicted criminal, a murderer or paedophile, living in my street after they had served their sentence. Many think such criminals cannot be changed. In

fear they refuse to let them into the same suburb let alone the same street. Do we believe they are beyond the power of God's grace?

The power of God's grace is seen in the change that took place in the heart of Matthew. I guess he was more like a corporate criminal than a murderer. The survey did not ask me about having a corporate criminal living in the street, a man who got rich at the expense of the poor.

We must be careful not to give the impression that certain people are beyond the reach of the gospel. Some people feel this way of themselves. They feel they are too bad to come to church because of what they have done. 'How can God accept a wicked person like me' they say. This is the tragedy of preaching salvation by works. This is the tragedy of portraying the church as a place for good, well-dressed people.

Jesus went up to Matthew and said 'follow me'. Matthew got up and followed Jesus (5:28). This is the power of the gospel. This is the power of divine love and grace.

Matthew knew about Jesus. He heard how he was healing people and maybe what happened to the paralytic. Matthew knew he was a sinner. Moreover, he knew that Jesus knew he was a sinner. Everybody knew this. Yet here was Jesus talking to him. Here was this holy person asking Matthew to follow him. We can imagine Jesus looking intently at Matthew, and Matthew looking at Jesus. It was weird. It was warm. It was working a great change in the heart of Matthew.

'Follow me'. With these words ringing in his ears and pounding in his heart Matthew left everything and followed Jesus. He did not say 'let me first go and count up the days takings'. He did not say 'let me talk it over with my boss or with my family'. He left all there and then to follow Jesus. Jesus would later speak about the cost of following him (9:57f).

For many the cost of following Jesus is too great. Jesus demanded everything of Matthew. He demands everything of anyone who follows him. If you cannot commit your whole life to Jesus, you cannot be his disciple.

Do you think such a demand is unreasonable? Then do not think that you are a disciple of Jesus. I wonder how many are fooling themselves in this matter. How many say 'I love Jesus but I cannot possibly give up my job'. 'I love Jesus but I cannot give up my family'. 'I love Jesus but I cannot give up my pagan friends'.

2. Feast

Jesus grabbed Matthew by the hand and dragged him away from his tax office – is this what happened? No! Matthew got up to walk slowly and sadly behind Jesus, thinking of all he was leaving behind – is this happened? No! Matthew went home rejoicing. There was rejoicing in heaven over this one sinner who repented and there was rejoicing on earth in the home of Matthew.

A feast, a feast to honour Jesus was the way Matthew chose to express his thanks. His salvation was by grace alone. He wanted to show his thanks for the wonderful saving grace of the Lord. No doubt some of his friends and family thought he was crazy leaving behind his lucrative work. But Matthew was not worried. He invited them all to his feast and they came in great number (5:29).

This was the biggest and best feast Matthew had ever given, bigger than any wedding or birthday feasts. We can imagine Jesus in the place of honour at the table. Matthew was bursting with joy, telling everyone of the new life he was given by Jesus, Jesus who was now his Saviour and Lord.

Do you regard the day you were saved as the greatest day in your life? We love to celebrate birthdays but what about our new-birth day? Do you celebrate your new-birth day? If not why not? Are you truly born again? Do you know, as Matthew knew, that you are a follower of Jesus? If you are born again into the kingdom of God do you celebrate?

I trust you celebrate not just on one day in the year, but on one day every week at least. Today you are worshipping Jesus, worshipping him with thanksgiving as you celebrate your great and wonderful salvation.

‘A converted man will not wish to go to heaven alone’ wrote J. C. Ryle. Matthew wanted his friends to meet with Jesus and to follow Jesus as he was following Jesus. Are you inviting your friends to meet Jesus? Are you sharing the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ? If not you must ask yourself if you truly know the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Maybe you feel weak and inadequate; but remember it is not you that changes people; it is the grace of Jesus Christ. You are simply called to live as one who is filled to overflowing with the grace of Jesus Christ. *We cannot but speak of the things we have seen and heard* is what the apostles said (Acts 4:20).

3. Physician

Enter the Pharisees! They enter the story not the house of Matthew the sinner. These self-righteous religious leaders were keeping a close watch on Jesus and his disciples. When they saw him feasting in the house of a sinner they were shocked. They started to murmur and complain to the disciples. They would never sit down and eat with a tax collector. Sharing a meal expresses close fellowship – much too close for the Pharisees. How could Jesus who preached the Kingdom of God do such a thing?

Jesus was ready to answer the Pharisees grumbles. *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick* (5:31). He was stating the obvious. No one could deny what he said. It is sick people who need a doctor. This was true of the body and also of the soul. People who know their souls are sick with sin are the ones who need spiritual healing. Jesus came to bring healing to broken hearts not just broken bodies.

Jesus drew this parallel, but not without a twist. ‘I have not come to call the righteous’ he said, meaning those who are self-righteous, ‘but sinners to repentance’. The Pharisees thought that by keeping the law they were righteous. They were self-righteous men. Remember how Jesus challenged them saying ‘let him who is without sin cast the first stone’. They did not say they were sinless but they were not ready to admit any sin.

In the presence of Jesus Peter said ‘depart from me for I am a sinful man’. Jesus forgave the sin of the paralysed man. He forgave the sin of the tax collector. But he did not forgive the sin of the Pharisees because they could not see their own sin. They were blind to their own sin. No one enters the Kingdom of God without first seeing their own sin. You cannot repent if you do not see your sin – the sin you need to confess to Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He sought out Matthew and later Zacchaeus who was also a tax collector and labelled a sinner. Jesus came to save men and women and boys and girls who are lost because of their sin. He will accept you into his kingdom when you repent of your sin and believe in him.

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