

Reading: Matthew 9:9-17

Theme: Calling Matthew and questions.

As a minister I hear various reasons why people will not become Christians. One of the more common reasons is *“I’m good enough, so I don’t need to believe in Jesus.”* One occasionally mentioned by some people as they feel such - *“I’m too bad, I’m beyond His care and He wouldn’t want me!”* People may feel like that, even if they do not express it. perhaps someone in this service feels that some the things we have heard and thought about recently are fine for nice, respectable, middle-class churchgoing people, but it would not apply to them, for they feel they are ordinary, everyday, run-of-the-mill people, besides which they know things they have said, done, seen and thought and Jesus couldn’t possibly have time for or welcome them!

Some questions for us all are *“Do we think Jesus would ever really care about or bother with us as individuals?”* *If He really is God in human form, if He is now in heaven in amazing glory, adored by billions in heaven; would He really have time for someone like you and me? What basis have we of hoping, even daring to hope or dream that Jesus would have time for you and me and show us His love?* I guess I’d better try and answer the questions I have raised.

I will begin by saying *“Yes”* - Jesus really does have time for you and me whoever we are, whatever part of society we feel we are in and whatever we have done. He wants us to know His love and care, especially in having our sin forgiven and become His child. *“Yes”* - even though He’s in heaven and is God, He still will take notice of someone like us. *“Yes”* - we can dare to hope and dream that He will accept us, for this Jesus is the God and Saviour of all hope and He will make that hope a reality and known and real to us.

The account we read in v9-13 shows us of these things - it deals with the call of Matthew and the nasty things said by the Pharisees, who were the religious bigwigs and hierarchy and we'll note Jesus' answer to them. 3 things to note:

1. The Call. (v9)

On His way from the amazing events we read of in v1-8, Mark tells us that Jesus passed along the lakeside and He saw there a man called Matthew, also known as Levi - people often had 2 names e.g. Simon Peter and Matthew was sitting collecting taxes at his office, probably a table or a little booth with a table in it.

We may not like paying our taxes, but the tax collectors in Jesus' day were, well, greedy traitors. They were traitors as they worked for the Romans, who gave them set taxes for people and they made their profit, their wages off their own people as they could increase people's bills at their own whims! Because of these things, tax collectors were shunned by society and usually their only friends were other tax collectors and the less respectable members of society, who didn't care with whom they ate, drank or slept!

Matthew was one of these tax collectors! We'd also be down on him and probably shun him, but Jesus walks by and said "*Follow Me*". We read Matthew gets up, leaves his occupation and follows Jesus. It all seems so sudden and dramatic. Does it mean we need such a dramatic call to follow the Lord Jesus? Does it mean we have to give up our jobs even!?

It may have appeared sudden, but I suspect Matthew had encountered Jesus before. Matthew was at Capernaum, which was the centre of Jesus' ministry at this time. By this time Jesus had done and said many things, even preached on the seashore and

Matthew probably heard Him; probably had heard much of Jesus, may even have seen much and may have thought things through a lot, but he may have felt that Jesus would have had no time for him, a tax collector, and be just like all the people, especially all the religious ones!

So, when Jesus called to him and said “*Follow Me*”, Matthew realised it meant that he was accepted and welcomed! To him it was almost unbelievable, beyond his hopes and dreams, but because he was called, he knew he had to follow – which is what he did! From what we read afterwards, we know that Matthew was called to follow and serve Jesus in a special way as he was an apostle. It was to be a life’s work and so he left his job.

If we feel or “*hear*” Jesus saying to us “*Follow Me*” as our Saviour and Lord, He calls us to follow Him in the situation we are in, in the job we are in - unless it is illegal or immoral. We are to leave that which is wrong in our lives, but continue on in the good. So, we are to live as Christians in the school or workplace we are in, the places where we live and among family and friends.

This call to follow Jesus may come in a dramatic way as we may hear a message or read part of God’s word, the Bible, and it is as if God Himself calls us there and then - as if He is speaking only to us and we trust Him as our Saviour. People here have had that experience.

For others it may be that God deals with us gently, bit by bit - we hear a sermon, read part of God’s word and it may raise or even answer questions and doubts. We may think things over and during a period of time - shorter or longer, we become more and more convinced of who Jesus is and what He has done and we are beginning to understand and realise Jesus did all He did for us

personally, as an individual. We come to gently trust Him as our Saviour because we realise it's the only thing we can do. We may not be able to put a date or a time, but we recognise that once we did not believe, but now we do. There are people here like that. Sometimes it is a combination of the 2 - over a period of time we think, question, get answers, things begin to make sense and then one day it clicks and we commit ourselves to follow the Lord Jesus as our Saviour as it is the only thing we can do. I've mentioned these things just in case someone feels that their experience has to be exactly like...

Realise that the Lord will deal with us as individuals who have different backgrounds, temperaments, needs and personalities. Yet all of us need to trust the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour and follow Him. It may be someone is feeling '*called*' to trust and follow Him and yet may feel you cannot do so as you feel too bad – then learn from Matthew and do not hesitate, for as Jesus calls you to Himself, so He helps you to trust Him and to receive Him as your Saviour. If you feel your need of Jesus as your Saviour, then be sure that God is at work in you and is drawing you to Himself – so trust and follow Him as He will welcome and receive you as His follower.

We are also to realise that no one is too good so that they do not need to trust and follow Jesus, but thankfully none of us are too bad that we cannot! Matthew was called and follow Jesus. This event led to:

2. The Criticism. (v10-11)

After leaving his job, Matthew held a leaving meal at his house. It was out of gratitude for Jesus calling and changing him, but also to let other friends and associates know that this Jesus had time for them. He wanted them to meet and hear Jesus. The leaving meal,

the feast is organised, Jesus and His disciples are there, is laid on free of charge by this new disciple Matthew and we are told that many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with them.

No doubt word of Matthew’s call and conversion had spread. It may have seemed incredible to his friends, but it was even more incredible that this great teacher and man of God would be at a feast and associate with them! Usually the religious hierarchy had nothing to do with them at all - for they were tax collectors and “sinners”. They were not going to miss the opportunity to hear and meet Jesus - this great teacher and miracle worker.

We are not told what was said and discussed there, or if it affected the lives of any or all who were there, but this act of kindness, of love on Matthew’s part - to tell others of Jesus, to introduce them to Jesus and get them to hear Him, led to the criticism from the Pharisees.

Perhaps the meal was ending, as Jesus is speaking to one and the other, the Pharisees come and criticise Jesus to His disciples. Basically, they were saying *“You do not really respect and follow someone who has time for tax collectors and sinners, who has time for the riffraff of society do you? Look if He was of God, then He would not bother with such ones because He would know better!”* These Pharisees looked down their religious noses and sneered at the disciples and especially Jesus. Because of this Jesus is written off for having time for such “sinners”.

Personally, I am so thankful to these Pharisees for what they did and said, because it underlines to me that Jesus will have time for someone like me and also someone like you! The criticism of the Pharisees is a signpost of safety, a neon sign of hope that Jesus will receive sinners - whether they’re the greatest sinner on earth

or the most moral person; highborn or low born, rich or poor. The words of these Pharisees are a beacon of hope in the darkness of despair and it says *“Yes, Jesus has time for ordinary people like you and me with all our faults, failings, hang-ups, problems and all the wrong and the sins that we have ever done.”*

We should listen and pay attention to such words of hope if we do not know Jesus as our Saviour. Those of us who do know Jesus as our Saviour should be imitating Matthew and be willing to tell others, invite friends to come to hear of Jesus - whether at a meeting at church or in our homes. In so many, many ways we should seek to tell others of such a wonderful Saviour. We will now move on to see Jesus’ reaction to these words of criticism, so see:

3. The Clarification. (v12)

The word ‘clarification’ means to make something clear. Strangely, the word ‘perspicuity’ is the obscure word used that means clarity, plainness, intelligibility and transparency! Why use such an odd word to describe making things clear!? Jesus said, what is considered to have been an ancient proverb - *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”* If we had all the top doctors in the world here in the church, we may say *“So what, I am healthy and I don’t need them!”* Yet if you were taken ill, you would be relieved to have the top doctors here. Picture yourself on holidays, on a beach, sunny, warm and the lovely clear warm sea is only yards away. You noticed as you came onto the beach a sign saying that the best lifeguards in that particular country were on duty on this beach. You would not really bother with that as you lay there, turning yourself regularly on the beach, but if you were then in trouble as you were swimming, you would be so glad that those lifeguards are on duty to rescue you.

Jesus is saying to the Pharisees *“Look, these see their need, see they are not right with God and so they are ready to hear, receive and even follow Me. Yet you Pharisees think you are so good, that you do not see your need and do not bother to seek My help and healing.”* We are to remember the Pharisees prided themselves in all they did - giving up food, money, even tithing various herbs, but Jesus basically says to them *“So what, you do this and that, but you have no true love for God and certainly no love for other people - having no mercy at all.”*

At the end of v12 Jesus states His mission clearly - that He had not come to call the righteous, but sinners. He was not calling those who were smug, proud, self-righteous, self-sufficient, but He came to call those who realised their need, that they had failed and messed up concerning God and His ways, so that they could turn away from their wrong things and turn to God for forgiveness, acceptance and a new life - that last part we summarise by saying they repent and turn to God in faith.

Jesus didn't beat around the bush. He said that all who see their need of Him can go to Him. Those who do not see the need of the Great Physician will not seek Him for the healing of their sin-sick souls. I have to ask questions – *“What of you? Have you seen your souls are sick with sin and you need healing? Have you trusted Jesus to deal with and heal your sin-sick soul?”*

If we were unwell, under the weather, or far, far worse suffering with man flu, would we want to see the doctor? We would not say *“I am too unwell for the doctors to bother with!”* Or *“I expect they wouldn't see me.”* Not at all, we would want the doctor, even want them to come and see us at home. The worse we felt, the more we would want and need to see a doctor. So, it is with the Lord Jesus, if you feel you have done, said, thought wrong things, no matter

how bad they are, then realise Jesus is showing you your need to go to Him and to be healed spiritually.

I urge you if you have not trusted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, do not ignore God's diagnosis about you, for we all have been infected with sin and we are not to just carry on as if we were fine. If you do so, you will ignore the great offer of healing for your soul i.e. salvation and you will not go to the only One who can help you and do you good. Do not be like the Pharisees, but be like Matthew and follow the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Like Matthew you do not know the great things Jesus can do through you as He can use ones like you and me in remarkable ways we never through or dreamt were possible. This Saviour is the God of surprises and He can use the weak, the written off ones to accomplish much. Even if He doesn't, He promises never to leave us or forsake us and be with us in every situation of our ordinary lives and yet they will extraordinary lives in His hands as we will know His acceptance, care, love and help.