

Matthew in Biblical Perspective: A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King – The Conversion of Matthew and the Call of Christ

Matthew 9:9-13

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The man who wrote this book by the Holy Spirit, we now get to find out how he gets converted. Matthew 9:9–13 says

[9] As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. [10] And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. [11] And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” [12] But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [13] Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Matthew is also known as Levi. The name Matthew means ‘gift of God’ and Matthew’s name was likely given to him by Jesus. I don’t know that for sure but it’s likely. It’s not unusual for people to have two names in that day so he may have already had it. As we come to this text I’d like to give you some reason to stay tuned with me. Don’t text. Stay with me. One reason is that these few verses are an absolutely treasure trove of certain aspects of the Christian life particularly to those who want to love what God wants you to love which is sharing the Gospel – evangelism, and to understand what discipleship is.

Another reason I want you to stay tuned is we finally get to meet the man the Holy Spirit used to write this book. He is modest and humble. I will give you five or six reasons that affirm his modesty and humility. He is very attractively unassuming in the way he conducts himself in the Scriptures. You get to see his conversion, his call, his initial commitments to be a Christ follower and what he

does right after he is converted. It's always interesting to see what people do right after they get saved.

Another reason is what I'm about to say caused me for the last fourteen days in preparing for this to be weak kneed and intimidated. So why am I weak kneed and intimidated? I'm that to begin with because I'm handling the Bible and preaching and teaching the Bible. When you get to a text where Jesus concludes the entire narrative by saying "Go learn" and you're the one responsible to help people go learn that's an eye opener.

I'm reminded of the time I read about the CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch. One of his vice presidents tried an initiative and he utterly failed costing GE 1.25 million dollars. The next day he came into Jack Welch's office and handed him his resignation. Mr. Welch read it and said "What is this son?" He said "It's my resignation and I know that you know that I just utterly blew it and you won't have to hunt to fire me. Here's my resignation. I'm going to fall on my own sword." Welch tore up the resignation, handed him back the pieces of paper and said "Son, go home, get another piece of paper and write down everything you learned from this failure. I have 1.25 million dollars invested in your education right now."

The Lord has given this text and invested it in our education and He has just told us "Go learn." As unable as I am, I am called to help you do that. I want to get to the text with you because my confidence is that the Holy Spirit is my teacher and there is something here for us to learn. I want you to learn it with me and I want to share with you some things I've been learning because I think there are some really insightful things in this text that have helped me. Let's use a series of statements in the text to walk our way through this.

Matthew is clearly a tax collector. He's not like Zacchaeus who was a big time tax collector. Matthew is one of the second line tax collectors who sits in the booth and actually takes the money. He is not over it, controlling it and counting it. In the original language it's the name used for the second line tax collectors so that's the giveaway here. The tax gatherers in that day were required to know shorthand. Look at the text.

Matthew 9:9 says *[9] As Jesus passed on from there...* Very likely He had left Peter's mother in law's house. Capernaum had become His hometown and Peter's mother in law's house had become "the house." Jesus is moving toward the sea. There is a highway that goes right by there called the Via Maritima. The Via Maritima was like our US Hwy 1 but it was more known as World Hwy 1. This road went from Syria to Egypt. It narrowed down at a place called Galilee to just a couple of feet wide and the Roman Empire put a tax booth right there. That was a money maker right there.

Matthew (or Levi) is sitting at that booth collecting taxes. They are making money from pretty much everyone who passes by there as well as the Jewish people in the town of Capernaum. There is actually a Centurion with a Roman cohort to make sure if you need any soldiers to get this money. Sitting right there is Matthew. So that is where we are.

I want to give you one evidence of Matthew's humility. Matthew, by the Holy Spirit, is the author to write the first book in the New Testament. In other words, Matthew is opening the door to the treasure house of the New Testament. We have to get through almost ten chapters before we find out anything about him. If I had written this book I'd probably have found a way long before this to let you know how great a guy I was. Here is another point of modesty. Of the twelve Apostles only three of them have nothing recorded of what they spoke during the life and ministry of Jesus – James the Less, Simon the Zealot and Matthew. Yet this is the one who has five of six sermons of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

Now what I'm about to say is purely speculation on my part here. I think that one of the reasons Matthew writes the first Gospel (what I call the model Gospel), the biographical treatise to tell us who Jesus is that includes five of Jesus' six recorded sermons, is that tax collectors had to know shorthand. So I believe the reason that Matthew, human speaking, gives us five of the six sermons is that he is actually writing them down. They had to know shorthand because so many people were coming by the tax booths where they had to put the figures, descriptions and all that down.

Here is another piece of modesty about him. There are three records of his conversion – Matthew 9, Luke 5, and Mark 2. Mark and Luke give almost twice as much information about Matthew's conversion and this event than Matthew does. As we go through this I will use some of Mark and Luke say to fill this out but we'll see how he leaves things out that the other Gospels don't that shows how extremely humble, modest and unassuming he is. Jesus comes to him and says "Follow Me." Then it goes on to say in Matthew 9:9b, "*And he rose and followed him.*" That's not all he did.

Again, what I'm about to say is speculation. I would love to leave here, go into Birmingham and say "Follow Jesus" and every one follows Jesus. My speculation is that Matthew is right at center point on the Via Maritima, Jesus has been in Capernaum teaching, preaching, healing, miracles and explaining discipleship, in other words, Matthew has been observing this Christ all along. Now this Christ whom he has watched, heard and listened to has come to him and says "follow Me", he rises up and follows Him. Luke adds something else that Mr. Modest Matthew doesn't tell us. Luke says he rose, left everything and followed Him. I like the King James language that says he forsook all. All Matthew said was he rose and followed him. Matthew is called, converted and he is the Christ truster for salvation who becomes the Christ follower with no strings attached. Let's look at what happens next.

He reclines at table. Matthew 9:10 says [10] *And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.* Who is there at this dinner party? There is Jesus who is the guest of honor. There are His disciples who are probably having a discussion about where they sit in relationship to Jesus in which they have a habit of doing. There is Matthew who is hosting this at his house. There are sinners who evidenced no concern for Biblical truth which would include prostitutes, thieves and those with bad reputations. That sinner term would cover all of that. There were also tax collectors like Matthew. In other words, Matthew is throwing a party for Jesus in which His disciples are invited along with sinners, other tax collectors, and also Scribes and Pharisees.

Why would the Scribes and Pharisees be there? I want to suggest something to you. Matthew is a very conflicted man. On the one hand he is a “tax collector” and it’s as if you can almost hear the sneer when you read about those who are at this dinner party. We have some in our church who work for the IRS and I don’t go up to them and say “tax collector!” Why do they refer to them in that way? There are three reasons. Number one when the Romans collected taxes they always used one of the citizens from whom they were collecting taxes from. So in other words, the Jewish people saw the Jewish tax collector working for the Romans as a traitor. Number two, they were part of the oppression. When you work for them then you’re considered an oppressor also. Number three, they were considered thieves.

We have some wonderful business men and women who have come to me on numerous occasions with the struggles they have of integrity in their jobs. I admire these men and women and love them dearly. There are companies in this culture of greed who won’t pay their employers the salaries they ought to pay them but they tell them they can make their money on their expense accounts and they tell them how to “pad” their accounts. In other words, they tell them how to lie on their accounts. These men and women will come to me and say “I can’t do that.” I’ll say “Praise the Lord! I wish I could take some of the bullet for you but let’s figure out how you’re going to deal with this.” Why am I saying this? It is because that is exactly how the tax collector was paid in Jesus’ day and there wasn’t even a “padding” of their account. They didn’t get a salary from the Romans. They were just told “You collect the money. Here is what you bring to us and anything else you collect is yours to keep.” That’s why Zacchaeus later will say “All this stuff I’ve stolen, I will start paying it back.” That’s the way he collected his money. So they despised tax collectors.

So why would Levi (Matthew) have Scribes and Pharisees there at that house observing all of this? Matthew is probably of the tribe of Levi and I would halfway speculate that Matthew was a conflicted man who was working at this job with all this stuff around him but yet in Matthew’s Gospel we see how he is always pointing out the prophecies, principles and precepts of the Old Testament.

Matthew knows his Bible. He knows the Scribes and Pharisees around that area. He has probably had extensive dialogue with them. So here are all these different people that Matthew knows gathered in his house at this one time. Now what happens?

Here comes a question that is really not a question but is given as a question which comes from the Scribes and Pharisees. Note that the Pharisees didn't address this question to Jesus but His disciples. Matthew 9:11 says *[11] And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* This is a question, like most rhetorical questions that have a sensibility about it that should not be dismissed. It's really a question that is an accusation to get information that is basically saying your teacher, Jesus, is a hypocrite. You see He is eating with tax collectors and sinners. It is a thinly veiled charge and accusation they are making. The Bible says what fellowship does light have with darkness. It also says come out and be ye separate. God's people have a distinctiveness called Godliness and they hate worldliness. So in light of that how can Jesus sit down and eat with the worldly? Sexually immoral, sinners, prostitutes, thieves and tax collectors are all there. So how can He possibly do that and be who He says He is? That's their question.

The disciples didn't answer but Jesus did. Matthew 9:12–13 says *[12] But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [13] Go and learn what this means (Jesus now quotes Hosea 6:6), 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* So how can He be the Holy God of Israel having come in the flesh as the Messiah and hobnob with the sexually immoral, sinners, prostitutes, thieves and tax collectors. Jesus says this is a teaching moment so go learn. He tells them they need to learn what Hosea 6:6 means. It means when God sends His Son, He's not sending someone to receive your sacrifices for He doesn't desire that because He desires mercy. The Messiah came on a mercy mission to sacrifice Himself. That's why the Messiah came.

I understand that the Christian life is supposed to be sacrificial but we don't give sacrifices to earn the Messiah but we give sacrifices because of His sacrifice as the Messiah. His mission is a mercy mission to save sinners by grace. Then He gives this marvelous metaphor of the Messiah. Jesus calls Himself a physician. What does a physician do? A physician comes to heal the sick. Who are the sick? They are the sinners. Righteous people don't need Me. Jesus is fully aware of what I know is going through your mind right now. Is Jesus saying there are two categories of people, righteous and sinners? No, the Bible is very clear on this. There is only one category of people. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Jesus is fully aware of that but the Pharisees aren't. Why won't the Pharisees say that He is their teacher and Lord? They don't need a physician. They think they are well.

Jesus is giving us two wonderful insights here. Insight number one is that He has come to heal what ultimately breaks your life and brings death. I have come as the antidote and the cure to your sin problem. This Physician makes house calls. He goes where sinners are. He has come into the world. He has gone to the brothel. He has gone to the house of blasphemy. He found me there. He has gone to those who are self-absorbed and would use anybody and everybody to exalt themselves. He found me there. He goes to tables where you find prostitutes and tax collectors.

He has given us another insight. What keeps people from coming to Him is that they don't think they need Him. They think they're okay. It is the self-inflicted blindness of self-righteousness and arrogance of 'I don't need Him' in which they think people ought to be paying homage to them. They don't think they need Him but before you get mad at the Scribes and Pharisees that's where we are too. We don't think we need Him. In fact, the One who didn't need us came on a ministry of mercy to save us from our sin sick, death dealing sin. He came to save us. He didn't need us. We needed Him but we didn't think we needed Him. It is the blindness of not only our sin but our self-righteousness and I don't want you to leave here today without Him.

You may have a truly valid question about Him and salvation. I would love to talk to you about this but the vast majority who may be even reading this today and who will yet say 'no' to Him is because deep down you don't think you need Him. You think your religion is enough, your baptism is enough, your intentions are enough, or that you're better than other people. The self-inflicted blindness of sin or the deafness of sin, can be healed with a Savior. He is the Savior, the Son of God, who has come to give Himself, not as a friend who will die for good friends, but who died for you. That is the Christ I offer you today, a death defying, sinner saving, grave robbing Friend. He is the Son of God. He is Jesus. I offer you that Savior today.

So Christ gives them the answer. I am the Physician. I have come. Good physicians not only announce a cure but this Physician has provided the cure and loves you enough to tell you what the disease is. That's something we're missing today. We think we can preach the Gospel without exposing sin and that's why we have people coming to Jesus as their coach, therapist or buddy. No, Jesus came to save us from our sins. You won't come to Jesus to be saved from sins until we know there is sin and we are sinners. If you go to the doctor and you have cancer, what would you think of the doctor who thought "I love this person so much I'm not going to tell them the biopsy said they have prostate cancer"? What would you do if you went to the doctor and you had a death disease and the doctor thought they may not come back to see me if I tell them they have that? What would you think of a doctor who was so self-absorbed of getting your fees or your attention that he didn't tell you what was really wrong with you and hid it under sentimentality?

We have loved no sinners when we have denied the reality of sin and its sinfulness but we have also not loved sinners if we have not told them of the Hope they have which is our only Hope which is Jesus Christ, the Friend for sinners who has come on this mission of mercy.

Now I want to give you this takeaway. Christ and therefore those who are Christ followers are on an intentional and relentless ministry of mercy to save sinners with the Gospel of grace. That is what Christ came to do and is still doing until He comes again. He will not hold His anger forever and when He comes again He'll come this time as Judge, but when He came He came as a Physician of your soul. He came and provided the cure to the disease of our souls which is sin. He has come on this mission for mercy. He didn't come for sacrifice but He came to make the sacrifice. Now He has come for us and we are sinners for even our righteousness is like filthy rags. So we come and put our trust in Him because of the cure of the Gospel of grace. The Physician has the cure. It is the Gospel of grace and as the hymn writer says "It is a double cure." It cures you of its guilt and its power.

As far as the east is from the west He has removed my sins because He took them upon Himself and buried them in the sea of His love and atoning death. He frees you from its power that you can now grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. A redeeming and transforming grace is what this Physician brings therefore I have some practical things from this treasure trove of a text to leave you with. Here is the first one.

A commitment to Christ is not gradual but its implications and experiences are. Jesus tells Matthew to come and follow Him. Matthew says "Okay I'll follow You for a day or two." No, he left everything and followed Jesus. When you come to Christ it's surrender and it's not negotiated. Now the implications of this surrender are not known and the experiences of it are not known. Let's look at Peter who is a wonderful walking illustration in the Bible for us. When people were leaving Jesus He turned to His disciples and said "Will you leave Me also?" Peter, speaking for the disciples, said "Lord, to whom shall we go? We have left everything to follow You. You alone have the words of life." Then when Jesus is about to ascend He tells them about John and Himself and in paraphrasing He basically tells Peter if he knew the death he would die for Him then he'd probably leave Him.

In other words, all the implications of being a Christ follower are not known yet but as your days are so shall your strength be. Jesus says "Peter I'm not going to tell you how you're going to die but when that day of death comes you'll have the dying grace you'll need on that day and until that day you'll have living grace to deal with everything until that day." So it's not that we take Jesus as Savior and negotiate the lordship thing later. No, it's a surrender, a surrendering of all. It is Christ as Savior and Lord.

Here is the second implication from the text. New believers seem to be the most motivated and many times the most effective evangelists. Have you ever noticed that? Here is Matthew and the next thing we know we have a house full of people ready to be led to Christ. We don't know how many came to Christ but we do know what Matthew did. The first thing he did after he started following Christ was to bring other people to Christ and bring Christ to other people. In other words, he went on the same mercy mission of grace that Jesus had come on. The Scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand it but Matthew understood it and knew it. The disciples knew and Jesus explains it. It almost always seems like new believers are leading many to Christ.

Why do new believers seem to be the most motivated and effective? Here are three reasons. One, I think they're the most effective because their friends are unbelievers. Eventually as a Christian because of the Biblical doctrine of fellowship you'll be drawn into a closer and closer circle of believers and you'll lose contact with unbelievers. Don't let that happen. Lose contact with sin but not with sinners. Build bridges into their lives. The tendency will always be to fellowship and don't deny that just make sure you keep building bridges to those who aren't in the fellowship.

The second reason is they haven't been a Christian long enough so that their comfort is more important than the destination of their friends. Even though as a new Christian we didn't know the four laws or the bridge to life we were more concerned about letting our friends know about Christ because of where they were going as an unbeliever. The longer we're a Christian we are more concerned about whether we'll be embarrassed or not if we share with them rather than where they will spend eternity. How many of us are silent out of self-preservation because we don't want to be the object of derision when a group gets together?

A third reason that new believers are more motivated and effective is because they are still amazed at grace. They haven't memorized their Bible yet but they know enough to come to Christ as Savior and they just know they were lost and now they're found. They were blind and now they see. They were deaf and now they hear. They were dead and now they are alive. Christ did it and they are amazed at grace. How many of you when we got to singing "Amazing Grace" thought 'are we going to sing all the verses' or started yawning part way through or thought 'I can't believe we only sang the first verse'? New believers are still amazed at grace.

Here is a third implication from the text. Hospitality in general and evangelistic dinners in particular are significant Gospel outreach opportunities. I know it's wonderful to get into someone's life and share the Gospel. I'm not opposed to door to door or university visitation but I really believe one of the most effective ways to do evangelism is to open up your house, your home and your life and invite people into it and share and show the love of Jesus Christ to them.

Hospitality is an unbelievable asset in evangelism and a dinner party is really good. When you get people around a table they won't get up until the food is gone and so you can just keep talking. At Christ Covenant they used to have a 'stump the preacher' night where people would invite their unbelieving friends over for dinner and at the end all these unbelieving friends had free access to ask any question they thought might stump the preacher. There are all kinds of possibilities in this category for evangelism through hospitality.

A fourth implication is Christians and churches with integrity intentionally create safe havens for sinners and Gospel death traps for sin. Matthew created a safe haven for sinners but then he brought Jesus and that's a death trap for sin. I used the word integrity because we are not loving people when we redefine sin as a syndrome or a genetic abnormality. You have to speak the truth in love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6). Jesus wounds. We're sinners and we can't save ourselves. We have become consumed with the deceptiveness of the idolatry of addictive sins but there is nothing but death there. Now here's Hope and Life. I didn't come to coach you up or give you therapy. Jesus came to save you from your sins. He did not come to make good people better or make bad people good but He did come to save sinners from sin's guilt and power. So Christians and churches find ways to create safe havens where sinners are loved with respect, courtesy and civility and yet sin is destroyed by the power of God's grace. Greater is God's grace than all our sin.

Fifthly, Christians are both able and committed to distinguish between fellowship and friendship. We have no fellowship with darkness. We don't have open reciprocal relationships with unbelievers in which there is a free flow. No, that's among ourselves but we do have friends. We do make friends continually of those who don't know Christ and that means we befriend them, love them, care for them and we open our homes to them.

Finally, our pursuit of Christ and hatred of sin must never be allowed to become a hatred of sinners and a denial of Christ's pursuit of them. You might think you'd never deny Christ's pursuit of them. Are you pursuing them? If not, you just denied Christ's pursuit because Christ's pursues them through us. We are the body of Christ. He pursues them through us.

In my first church I pastored in Miami there were no children. The average age was 70 and probably in one good flu season I wouldn't have had a church. I'm sure we kept the prune industry alive though. In the first month I was pastoring there was a man sitting in the fourth row who was six foot four with big shoulders and little hips and had a gorgeous Puerto Rican lady sitting right next to him. I went to meet them as soon as the service was over. I said to them "Thank you for visiting" and they said "We were headed to this other church but got the times mixed up so we saw yours and came in." I said "I'd like to visit you so could you sign the guest registry?" They did and I noticed something. They had different last names with the same address. This is 1980 and I had come from Tennessee

where they did that kind of thing but they didn't go and sign church registers. So this was a new experience for me. I thought 'what do I do? I think I need to go and share the Gospel.'

I visited their house and shared the Gospel and they became Christians. I talked with them about what it means to be a Christ follower where we covered what a Godly marriage was and so they separate. I counseled them, married them and it was just a glorious wedding. After that, every Sunday when I would stand to preach there would be a whole section of young couples sitting there with Ted and Fran. Ted and I had something in common for we were both Clint Eastwood fans. We both knew about every dialogue of every Clint Eastwood movie that had ever been made that you can appropriately go to. He would always talk like Eastwood when he came up to me and he said "Harry, all those people who are coming, I hope you don't mind, they are kind of like us, they are not married for they are living together. Is that okay?" I said "I'll rope off a section, just bring them in. It's okay if I tell them about Jesus isn't it?" He said "That's why I'm bringing them. Don't get offended but the other way I'm getting them here is I told them my preacher is 'dirty Harry'." So that was my only hope right there.

Do you get the picture here? New believers who come to Christ know the joy and find ways to win people to Christ because they know Jesus is a friend, not to sin for He kills that but Jesus is a friend to sinners with a double cure. He will cleanse you of sin's guilt and power. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word this Lord's Day in this wonderful rich text. Those on my heart are those who are not yet clothed with Jesus even knowing this day He made a house call to them to invite them. He didn't call you to say 'get better and I'll help you' but He came and gave a sacrifice for you. In Him you can be made whole. I'll rob the grave, kill the sin, defeat death, destroy Satan, I'll save you and you will call Me friend, Lord and Savior. If you'd like to come to Him and live for Him who gave His life for you and rose again, to be accepted because He was condemned, to be forgiven because He was forsaken, just come and say "Jesus I rise from my death stupor. I leave the idols of this world and I follow You." For those who already know You, may we be engaged in this intentional mercy of rescuing sinners and bringing them to the Physician and the Gospel cure. May we find many ways to do it, being creative, insightful, opening our homes, buying dinners, spending time but may You pursue sinners through us, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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