**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 3-7-21
 Follow Me Matthew**

Last week we began a new sermon series entitled “Before Jesus Picked Up the Cross, He Picked Up the Fork.”

It is truly fascinating how many of the gospel stories center around settings involving food. This just goes to show that special gatherings involving food took place long before our special church dinners here at Chestnut Grove.

The first story that we highlighted was the wedding celebration in Cana. Today’s passage again involves a celebration, but a very different kind of celebration.

Instead of a celebration of a new life of marriage beginning, today’s celebration is about a new spiritual life for a brand-new disciple of Jesus – a man named Matthew.

Now people may expect to see a rabbi to celebrate at a wedding, but what about going to a party at a tax collector’s home? What was this all about? Why was Jesus choosing to celebrate with some of the most hated people at that time – with tax collectors and others labeled as sinners?

What would this holy man, Jesus, have to do with tax collectors, who were known to commonly commit fraud and were viewed as sell outs to the Roman oppressors.

But before we go any further, let us turn to this remarkable passage now. It is found in the first 3 gospels, but I would like for us to read it from the writing of the tax collector turned disciple himself. The man called Matthew.

It is Matthew 9:9-13:

**9As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.**

**10While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”**

**12On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

The first of many things that is fascinating about this story is the fact that Jesus calls Matthew to follow him.

At that time, rabbis didn’t call people to follow them, instead people would approach a rabbi and ask them if they could be their disciple. But instead, Jesus asks Matthew to follow Him. We see Jesus doing this with others as well, including Peter and James and John.

And not only is it the case that Jesus is asking them to follow Him, but if a rabbi would call someone to follow Him, certainly one would expect that these students would be the best and the brightest of the trained religious leaders.

But not Jesus. We see Jesus choosing blue-collar workers and scandalous tax collectors like Matthew.

Why would Jesus do this? It is because Jesus is willing to break cultural expectations in order to invite people who were willing to follow with a teachable and humble heart.

Sadly, this teachable and humble heart is not something that most of the religious leaders possessed themselves. They saw themselves as the pure and holy ones and this made it more difficult for them to submit to the true Holy One of God – Jesus Christ.

In fact, if a Pharisee was out in public and accidently brushed against someone who was a non-Pharisee, they would see themselves as defiled and in need of ritual purification because of it. This would even include if they bumped into a godly person like Mary or Joseph or Elizabeth or Zachariah or others that were godly women and men. So they stayed away from non-Pharisees in fear that they would be polluted by them.

And certainly, the Pharisees would never be entering the home of a hated tax collector like Matthew.

But Jesus was no ordinary rabbi. And as Jesus walks by Matthew’s tax booth, He invites Matthew to follow Him. Matthew quite possibly had witnessed one more of Jesus’ miracles and here is this amazing rabbi now calling him to be His disciple.

Israel saw him as an outcast and a traitor, but Jesus saw someone who was precious and significant and a potential follower.

And in this powerful moment, Matthew stands up, leaves the tax booth and begins to follow after Jesus.

Now while Matthew had a poor reputation because of his occupation, he would have been living a rather comfortable life. Tax collectors were not poor and were probably rather well-off.

But even though Matthew was well off financially, Matthew was likely very empty spiritually. And in writing of his own call story from Christ, Matthew is basically saying that if Jesus would call him to be his disciple, He calls anyone and everyone. No one is off limits of His loving beckon.

And immediately after this awesome moment of Jesus’ call and Matthew’s response, we find Jesus at Matthew’s home.

Matthew was throwing a party. Other tax collectors were there. Those deemed as sinners were there as well. And that was about it, as most of regular society had already written off people like Matthew and would not want to spend any time with him, let along celebrate with him.

One thing that is very important to note is that having table fellowship or sharing a meal with someone was understand as being a symbol of unity and friendship and intimacy.

This explains why Pharisees begin to question Jesus’ disciples. They ask **“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”**

This question was basically an accusation. What in the world is your rabbi doing eating with these unclean lowlifes? That is the basic gist of what they were saying.

And Jesus’ response is fascinating. He says: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

Jesus is quoting the Old Testament prophet Hosea (Hos. 6:6). He is telling these men who had studied Scripture heavily that they needed to study it more closely. These Pharisees had their priorities backwards. God is far more concerned that people are turning to Him and receiving healing in their soul rather on His receiving sacrifices. It is truly very possible for people to offer all the proscribed sacrifices to God, but miss the very heart of God.

**FOR THE BEST SACRIFICE THAT WE CAN GIVE TO GOD IS A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART OF SURRENDER TO HIM.**

Jesus is telling these Pharisees that they were acting very much like those guilty in Hosea’s day. The reality was that the Pharisees needed the spiritual doctor of the Messiah as much as the tax collectors and “sinners” did.

\*It is also fascinating that Jesus says ‘it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.’ This calling of Matthew and this banquet at Matthew’s house is set in the midst of many healings that Jesus performed over people. Jesus was healing many sick and suffering bodies.

But in this story, in this meal, we see a celebration of a far more significant healing. Matthew was lost. Matthew was likely spiritually sick and Jesus has just made Him well. And we see Matthew responding by following Him.

Jesus’ presence at this meal may have brought more healing to those that were spiritually unwell. The sad reality of the religious leaders was that they saw themselves as the healthy. They did not recognize their own need for spiritual healing. They didn’t see their need for the Savior, the Messiah.

So what are a few takeaways from this powerful story from Matthew’s gospel?

**First, avoid the trap of self-righteousness that the Pharisees fell into**. Everyone is in need of recognizing that no matter how physically healthy we may be, every person is in need of healing spiritually. Every person is spiritually sick. And Jesus came to make us well. Only in Jesus can anyone be made well. So, never look to yourself to make you spiritually healthy and well, always look to Jesus. He is the healer of our soul.

And even as Christians, we must never become self-righteous and try to hide our sins before God. Christ continues to be the healer of our brokenness and the forgiver of our sins. So when we mess up, let us keep coming to Jesus and inviting Him to make us continually well and clean and whole before Him.

**Second, take time to celebrate your salvation**. Matthew was lost and Jesus found Him and called Him. Matthew’s joy led him to throw a party. Like Matthew, we are to celebrate our salvation as well. In fact, every Sunday morning is meant to be a celebration, not just of what God has done in Jesus Christ, but a celebration of what God has done in us through Jesus Christ. Every Sunday we come together to celebrate that we were once lost, but now are found.

And every day, God’s mercies are new to us. Every day we are to overflow with thanksgiving because of God’s amazing grace towards us in Jesus.

**Third, choose to pick up the fork with others as well**. Whether we do this literally or figuratively, we are called to build relationships with people outside of our church. We must learn from Jesus’ example that sharing meals with others can be opportunities to bring the love and light of the Lord to them. While sharing meals with others does not have as strong of a stigma as it did in 1st century Palestine, relationships can be strengthened over breaking bread together. And sharing meals with our unbelieving neighbors, relatives, friends, or co-workers may be divine opportunities to share the goodness and grace of God with them. Like Jesus, we do not have to affirm everything about the person with whom we are dining. Like Jesus, we shouldn’t worry about what others may think of us eating with this person.

(**there is something disarming about sharing a meal or enjoying ice cream with someone**!!) I know that these have been unusual times, but this too shall pass.

**And fourth and finally friends, let us choose to be like Matthew. Let us choose to follow Jesus.** Follow Jesus every day and wherever He leads us. There is nothing more important than choosing to live every day for Jesus and to follow His Spirit’s leading for your life.

**Let’s pray…**

Resources: BibleGateway.com; D.A. Carson – Matthew Commentary; Leon Morris – Matthew Commentary