



1 | MATTHEW 9:1-13

JESUS, FRIEND OF SINNERS

Jesus will save anyone who comes to him broken and humble and ready for change.

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Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. ⁶Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord. ⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. —Psalm 36:5-7

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Introduction

Today, we are discovering how an encounter with Jesus Christ changes everything. We are learning something about ourselves, something about our sin, and most importantly something about our Savior. This is the case today as we read from Matthew's Gospel in chapter 9.

I want us to discover how an encounter with Jesus Christ changes everything. Someone who knew the incredible power of God to forgive was the Apostle Matthew. Let's read about him in Matthew 9.

Matthew 9:9-13 | 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. ¹⁰And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

¹¹And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Who was Matthew?

Who Was Matthew?

A notorious sinner

A man with two distinguished names: Matthew Levi

A man whose name was "mud"!

An educated man

A wealthy man

A scandalous man

A future apostle

The Apostle Matthew is listed a lot in the Bible, and every time we hear of him, only **his conversion is recorded**. Matthew was a Hebrew man. The Jews at this time had a very religious culture. But Matthew, being a tax collector, was seen as a traitor since he was an official of the Roman government in Capernaum, collecting taxes from his poor friends and neighbors, and overcharging them. He was skimming off the top of everyone. That's how he made his money. He would probably have been literate in both Greek and Aramaic as well as Hebrew. Many biblical scholars believe that Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Hebrew and then later translated into Greek.

In all likelihood, none of the Twelve was more **notorious as a sinner** than Matthew Levi. He's got **two very distinguished names**. He is sometimes called by his name, "Levi," for his priestly family (Mk 2:14, Lk 5:27-29), and sometimes as "Matthew," or "gift of Jehovah" (Lk 6:15 and Acts 1:13). Yet no one cares about his distinguished names, since to all the Jews, **his name was mud!**

Matthew was likely a very **educated** man. He had a **lot of wealth**, but he got it by ill means. Of course, no matter how much wealth and prestige he had in the world, it is sure that by choosing his profession, he was rejected by his family, his religion, and his country. He was a traitor working for Rome. He was a Jew that was basically part of the Roman mafia of sorts.

It seems likely that he **consciously rejected the faith of his countrymen and family in exchange for a lavish life** the world could offer him. It was the mafia life. He had more money than everyone, but they all knew where he got it. It wasn't good. He wasn't a nice guy. Surely, he had a **little posse of soldiers** with him who had to enforce payment. You know how ugly that must have been in his own hometown. It did not make him very popular.

There is Hope for Anyone

Perhaps you wonder if God can work in your life. Maybe it's a family member or a friend. I want to encourage you that we do not serve a small God, but a big God, an incredible God. We serve an incredible God! All that you see – he made it: from the galaxies beyond the Milky Way to the microscopic beauty of a strand of DNA. He's the Almighty, unchangeable God, and he loves you, just like he loved Matthew.

Key Thought: Jesus will save anyone who comes to him broken and humble and ready for change.

1. JESUS CALLS IMPOSSIBLE SINNERS (9:9)

Matthew 9:9 | 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.

Jesus had just done a miracle in the town where Peter and his wife lived. It was just a little tiny town called Capernaum. It's at this moment Jesus makes his way into the center of town where Matthew is. Here he is, a dirty tax collector—the lowest of the low. He's basically part of the corrupt government of Rome. And he's collecting money from his own hometown, making money off his poor fellow townspeople. He doesn't care. He just wants a little extra money. He's living large, and his townspeople are hungry.

Matthew has probably met Jesus before and heard him teach. Now Matthew sees a great mob coming toward him. Everyone would have known Matthew. He would have stood out. Everyone had to go to him to pay taxes. He was probably better dressed than anyone.

Jesus Calls the Impossible

A tax collector would have been considered an impossible convert. It's like the last person you'd think would turn to Jesus. **What is a tax collector?** Tax collectors were despised above all people because they would have had to purchase the right to collect taxes from their fellow Jews for the enemy Roman Empire. If the tax was 20% and they could collect 30%, they kept the remainder. So, he's like the scum of the earth. He's living large while his own people suffer. He's **like the mafia**. These are the kinds of people Jesus calls.

Jesus Calls the Unpopular

Jesus always called his disciples one by one. **His invitation was personal** versus yelling out into a crowd or sending a bulk e-mail. We know that Matthew is a tax collector. In Bible times and today, a tax collector wasn't anyone's favorite person. They had bad reputations. Who wants to be a friend of someone you know could financially ruin you—someone who is watching every dime you make and every dime you spend? It would be one thing if they were all honest people, but in those times, they weren't, and no one wanted to be around them—except Jesus.

Matthew 9:9 | 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.

Jesus Calls Those He Loves

Jesus knew who Matthew was, and he still loved him with a perfect love. Being God in human flesh, Jesus knew all about Matthew Levi's sin and where he was in life. And Jesus called him to follow him to become a disciple and one day an apostle.

Jesus calls people who know they cannot fix themselves. Matthew didn't have to fix his life, clean it up, and change his profession to follow Christ. He came to Jesus right where he was, as a tax collector. God describes in Jeremiah **how infinite his love is**.

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. —*Jeremiah 31:3*

You can just imagine; Jesus is leaving Peter's house by the synagogue. I've been there to that that house and synagogue. Matthew has his tax office set up right there in town. He's seen the hundreds and maybe thousands lined up to be healed by Jesus. He must have heard the good news that he taught, that anyone can come to him and be born again (Jn 3:3). That he's welcomes those who are weary and burdened with their bad choices and sins (Mt 11:28ff). I'm sure he's heard Jesus say to so many people, "Come to me and I will give you rest." "Come to me with your burdens and your heartaches and your sins. I'll give you rest."

Jesus' Call is Surprising

And as Jesus is passing that tax booth, Jesus gives Matthew something that is worth more than all the money he had ever earned or ever hoped to earn. Even though Jesus was known to show incredible mercy toward sinners, it still seems like a great surprise that he calls Matthew.

I can imagine Matthew thinking, "He's forgiven the worst sinners. Could he be coming for me? Is there mercy for me as well? Can God forgive me?" Yes, Jesus had come to **forgive Matthew and give him new life**. And we read in Matthew 9:9, that **Jesus said to Matthew, "Follow me." And Matthew arose and followed the Lord**.

And suddenly, Matthew Levi hears Jesus call him. I don't know what the conversation is. Matthew is very brief in what he records, but there had to be more.

Matthew 9:9 | 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.

I can imagine Matthew thinking. “What? The holy man is calling me? This one who is the long-awaited Messiah is calling me? Why would he want me?” Isn’t that what we all ask when we come to Jesus?

In Matthew 9:9, when Jesus said: “Follow me.” What was Matthew’s response? “And he rose and followed him.” It was an immediate response. This is how the love of God melts the human heart.

2. JESUS CELEBRATES SEEKERS (9:10-11)

After Matthew’s conversion, the next scene shows Jesus and the disciples at Matthew’s home for dinner—dinner with not only Matthew, but other tax collectors and sinners, including the Pharisees. Matthew had such joy, that he wanted to share it with his friends at a feast, a celebration at Matthew’s house in Capernaum.

Matthew was rejoicing that his sins were forgiven. “What a relief. Let’s have a party! Let me invite all my friends to show what a wonderful Savior Jesus is!”

Matthew 9:10-11 | And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEEKERS

Matthew is rejoicing because his rejection had been replaced by joy and the love of God the Father.

Matthew had already been rejected by his family, by his local congregation, and by his country. But **Jesus has open arms for him**. Matthew follows Jesus. He invites the Lord to his house, and it ends up being like a farewell party for Matthew. All of Matthew’s friends are there. The whole posse.

Matthew 9:10 | And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Matthew wanted to share his joy with his closest friends. Matthew would have had a posse with him—sinners of all sorts. Thugs who would do Matthew’s bidding if people didn’t pay up. Prostitutes were also well known to be around this crowd. You can imagine Matthew as a man who was filthy rich, with bad breath, bad habits, bad friends, and a very bad, bad reputation. He extorted people every day for a living. He was legally a thief. He was excommunicated by the synagogue, rejected by his family, and despised by his country. But there was one place of shelter that Matthew could go. There was one person on earth that loved Matthew. It was Jesus. Matthew probably would never have looked for Jesus. He would have been too ashamed. So Jesus went looking for him.

At Matthew’s house in Capernaum, there are all the notorious people of the day. So all the rejects of society are gathered at Matthew’s house. And Jesus took them in.

Celebrating Over a Meal

Having a meal with someone in the ancient near east was a relational and intimate event. It’s not like in our day when so many of us find ourselves as a family with pizza in front of the

TV watching a favorite series on Netflix. Eating supper with someone in Jesus' day was an opportunity to experience the soul of another person by spending a long time with that person in intimate, personal, and relational conversation. It wasn't like our relatively quicker dinnertime of 15 or even 20 minutes. It was an up-close-and-personal sharing of time—with food built around it. You didn't just eat, you dined. And you didn't just chit-chat, you entered into deep conversation, listening carefully and responding thoughtfully. When you do dine like that, you really get to know the people with you.

God Celebrates Repentance

God celebrates when just one sinner comes to repentance.

What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. —*Luke 15:8-10*

God loves sinners. He sent his Son to give us eternal life.

THE WORLD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEEKERS

Matthew 9:11 | When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Matthew gladly repents and follows Jesus, but he gets the worst kind of opposition for doing so. That's why following Jesus is not easy. You would have thought the Pharisees would have celebrated! But no! The leaders of Israel reject Matthew and his friends.

Often when a person gives their life over to Jesus there are two negative reactions. There are the **fellow sinners who don't want you to leave** their club. When I came to know Christ, my sister was always telling me, "I want the old Matt back." She wanted me to party and be in the world with her.

But then you have the **self-righteous in the church** who don't want you to join their club. When you go against the current of the world, you will get criticized. Here you have the most self-righteous people saying these sinners cannot be part of our club. But Jesus says something amazing and revealing to all of us.

Matthew 9:12-13b | Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The NLT has Jesus saying, "For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." —*Matthew 9:13, NLT*

We are all sin-sick sinners. We are all broken. There are always those self-righteous people who act like they have no sin or that they are better than everyone. But Jesus says, they are deceived too. He's **actually using some sarcasm while speaking the truth**. He says, "I've not come to call you people who think you are righteous. You don't need me because you think you are so righteous." Of course, they are not righteous. They are the worst kind of sinners. They are self-righteous people who hide their sins with religion.

How about you, are you willing to **go against the current of the world**? You will lose friends if you follow Christ. You also may not be completely accepted because there are

some Pharisees in the churches. When you follow Christ, you have to do it for one person: Jesus himself.

Don't be dismayed when things go wrong in your life. Ephesians 2 says before Christ we were enslaved to the strong current of the world. We were slaves to the world system, to Satan, and to our sinful desires. But now you have been set free! You are now going against the current.

Jesus said, you may have to lose father, and mother and children, and houses and lands. You may have to lose your life. But if you are not willing to be opposed and rejected for the gospel then you are not following Christ. Even Father and mother may forsake you, but Psalm 27:10 says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

3. JESUS HEALS SIN-SICK PEOPLE (9:12-13)

We've all seen **God heal people physically**. I consider myself kind of a miracle. My **twin sister and I were born at 27 weeks** and flown in a helicopter to Loyola University Medical Center at the age of an hour old. Later I had **open heart surgery** to fix a hole in one of the chambers of my heart (called a VSD, or ventricular septal defect). They did a good job. My wife says I'm almost normal.

We all remember **Mike Moffat** who was given two weeks to live and need his heart repaired, and two organ transplants including a kidney and a liver. He made it fine too. It's **amazing to see God heal people physically**. But there is something even more amazing than physical healing and that is **spiritual healing**. God can fix all of us who are broken people. No matter who you are, you are broken, and Jesus came into this world to fix you.

In the midst of Matthew's party, the super religious people, the Pharisees, were very critical. If he's such a godly teacher, then why does he eat and drink and celebrate with sinners? Ah, good question. Let's find the answer. Jesus hears their question and answers it.

Matthew 9:12-13 | But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Only those who realize their need for Jesus, who know they are sinners, will come to Jesus. That's a sermon in a statement:

Only those who realize their need for Jesus, will come to Jesus.

Hospitals are only for folks who are sick. You can't stay in a hospital if you're not sick, right? It's not a place for just anyone to stay. You have to be admitted and you are admitted only when it has been determined that you are sick. And a church admits those who are sick, not those who are well. If you don't think you're sick, then you really don't belong, do you? Something to think about!

When do you go to the doctor? When you are well? When you are perfectly well? No. When? When you are sick. Jesus makes us new. Jesus can make anyone new, no matter what you've been through.

If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passing away, behold all things are becoming new. —2 Corinthians 5:17

Isaiah promises in chapter 53, “By his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). God can heal your sin sick heart! But healing comes through humility. David said, “The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God” (Psa 51:7, NLT).

The Bible says “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom 3:10). Paul says there is not difference between the religious person and the pagan, for “all have sinned” (Rom 3:9).

Jesus is saying “I can’t help people who think they don’t need me.” He can only help people who know that they’re sinful. You can’t have what Jesus offers until you know you need it. Is that true or false? True. Not only is that true at conversion; it’s true at every point of spiritual growth.

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

What are the keys to spiritual wellness? These are implications that surface from this passage. First:

1. YOU CAN THINK YOU ARE WELL, WHEN YOU’RE ACTUALLY SICK.

Have you known anyone like that where that was true for physical sickness? Maybe that describes some of you! You don’t want to admit when you are sick.

When I was younger I thought I could eat whatever I wanted. I thought I was well. But I was actually sick for years with undiagnosed Diabetes Type II. I had to receive the diagnosis and take it seriously. Finally my doctor started treating me, helping me make better food choices. I’m so much better.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. If you don’t admit you are sick, you won’t take your medicine. You don’t think you need it. You’ll spit it out. The preaching of the good news of Jesus’ death is only good news to the sin-sick soul. Unless you know you are on your way to a sinner’s hell, you won’t think you need Jesus. You can think you are well when you’re actually sick.

Only those who realize their need for Jesus, will come to Jesus. This truth leads us to the second key to becoming spiritually well, number two:

2. IF YOU ADMIT YOU ARE SICK, THEN YOU CAN BECOME WELL.

Jesus’ ministry was directed at those who were open, those who were willing to acknowledge their sinfulness. They had to be receptive to the truth in order to receive the truth. We can’t become well until we admit we are sick. But if we admit we are sick, then we can become well!

So we must admit we are, in fact, sinners. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned,” so we are all social outcasts, aren’t we? We are all misfits, all of us messed up in some way or other. Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no not one.”

We are all sick. Have you ever told a lie? What does that make you and me? A liar. Have you ever stolen something? That makes you a thief. Have you ever looked with lust on someone who you weren’t married to? That’s adultery. Have you ever hated anyone? Jesus says that’s like committing murder. So we are all lying, thieving, adulterous murders and we have to face God on judgment day. In other words, we are all terribly sick.

But here’s something really encouraging: No matter how sick we are, we can still be made well! Unlike physical sickness where some diseases simply cannot be cured, or illnesses that do not respond well to conventional treatment, especially given a particular aggravated

stage of the illness—all spiritual sicknesses can be cured by the medicine of God’s grace through Jesus Christ!

No matter how sick you are—whether you are a sick religious person, a sick alcoholic, a sick drug abuser, a prostitute, a criminal, no matter your social disorder of being among the riff-raff, an outcast, a misfit, no matter the depth of your spiritual sickness, the Good Physician can make you well. He has come for that very purpose.

I love the words of an old Anglican preacher from the nineteenth century. Listen to the words of Bishop J.C. Ryle.

We are not to keep away from Christ, as many ignorantly do, because we feel bad, and wicked, and unworthy. We are to remember that sinners are those he came into the world to save, and that if we feel ourselves such, it is well. Happy is he who really comprehends that one principal qualification for coming to Christ is a deep sense of sin!

When we feel that deep sense of sin, that we are sick, and that no one and nothing can help us but Christ, then we are in a place to be healed by the Great Physician, Jesus Christ. Jesus said it this way:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. —*John 3:16-17*

Here’s the medicine: though we are sinners, deserving of hell, Jesus Christ took our judgment upon him. He doesn’t want you to be judged. He doesn’t want you to be cut off for all eternity. So he died for you and rose again. He took your filth upon himself and gave you his righteousness. That’s good news isn’t it? Drink it down! Paul later said it triumphantly:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. —*Romans 8:1*

Here’s the medicine: though we are sinners, deserving of hell, Jesus Christ took our judgment upon him. He doesn’t want you to be judged. He doesn’t want you to be cut off for all eternity. So, he died for you and rose again. He took your filth upon himself and gave you his righteousness. That’s good news, isn’t it? Drink it down!

3. IF YOU ARE WELL THEN, YOU’LL HELP THOSE WHO ARE SICK.

We have to be open to those who are sick. We have to love the sick. We are “Jesus with skin on.” As Christians, we are to love others in their sickness like Jesus loves us in our sickness.

We as a church should be a hospital for sinners. We ought to be a place of healing and joy and hope.

Are we as open to sinners as Jesus was open? Are “tax collectors and sinners” as welcome here in God’s house as they were in Matthew’s house? Are the social outcasts welcome here, welcome to sit down with Jesus and everyone else?

The thing is—it is Jesus who became an outcast for us. As the friend of sinners, Jesus became the “ultimate outcast” for us. He took our sickness upon himself. He is the one who makes the sinner without sin.

And he is the one who takes our medicine. He takes our punishment. He takes all the filth of our sin upon himself. He is our substitute, taking the punishment we deserve for our sin. He became an outcast so that we could be accepted. As Isaiah prophesied 700 years earlier:

He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. —*Isaiah 53:4-6*

Jesus is the ultimate outcast, separated from the Father for us, cast out of the temple for us, cast out of the city for us, cast out and crucified on a cross for us. And in exchange he wants to give us life! Abundant life.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you are thinking, “Can God really save me? Can he forgive me!” Yes, God can transform you and me. He can do the impossible.

God says “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” —*Jeremiah 32:27*

Has he converted you today? Let us celebrate! But keep your eyes on Jesus. He’s the one that you have to always look to. Turn your eyes to him.