

Surprised by Christ

If you have your Bibles go with me to the Gospel of Matthew Chapter nine, as we look at God's Word today. We begin by reading one verse in Matthew Chapter nine – verse 9: *“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and He said unto him, ‘Follow me’, and he arose and followed Him.”*

For several months now we have been traveling through the Gospel of Matthew together. It's called The Gospel of Matthew because the human author of the book was Matthew. Like the rest of the Bible, it is inspired of God. Here we read of the calling of this man by the name of Matthew, who wrote the gospel that we're reading. As we read this event in the life of Matthew, who in other gospels is sometimes called Levi, we are surprised by some of the things that happened in his life through the ministry of Jesus Christ. So I've called this message this morning, Surprised by Christ.

I. The Call of Matthew

The first thing I notice is that I am surprised at the call of Matthew. The call of Matthew itself is a surprise. We read here in verse nine that he was sitting at the receipt of custom. And the next verse mentions publicans. Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government. He was Jewish, but he worked for the Romans. To think that any Jewish person would work for the Roman government was considered treason and blasphemy by the Jewish people. Matthew would not have been a well-liked man among the Jewish people.

He probably sat on a road in Capernaum, and he taxed things that were coming down the road. If you caught fish in the Sea of Galilee, every fish had to be taxed. That's why we find sometimes the number of fish in the Bible because they had to count how many. If you travelled down the road to Capernaum, and you took merchandise down the road from one city to another, there would be a tax. The Romans had heavy taxes on just about everything.

Now these publicans are tax collectors, and that's a different word than Republican, by the way. (It's not a political message this morning.) These publicans were known for overcharging and would charge more than the real tax and pocket the rest. They were known for smuggling. They were known for bribery. If they didn't get the tax that they wanted, they would seize the property of the people. So they were known for owning property, that from a Jewish perspective had been stolen.

They were called publicans because they worked for the public Tax Revenue Service of the day: the state revenue department of the Roman government. They were usually rich, had lots of money. These were the upper crust, the upper people, the higher class people financially in and among the Jewish people. Every tax collector publican that worked for the Roman government was hated and feared, but mostly hated. If a tax collector took money down to the Temple in Jerusalem to give the money to ministry, he would not only be refused access, but his money would be refused - which was something.

The Lord Jesus Christ does some surprising things when he came to this earth. In verse nine here, as Jesus passed forth from thence he saw a man. Let's stop right there. Yes, the man was a tax collector. He may have been a cheat, fraud, a sinner. But Jesus saw a man. A human being, a man who had a need. A man who needed God in his life, a man who needed to repent. Jesus saw a man.

And in the very next verse Jesus said some words to this man, two words. He saith unto him, "*Follow me*". And he arose and followed Him. "*Follow me*," says Jesus. Matthew's going to follow Jesus for the rest of his life. When Matthew decided to follow Jesus it meant leaving a sinful job. When Matthew decided to follow Jesus it met that he would no longer be overcharging. There would be no more bribes; there would be no more mistreatment of others. He would no longer get rich by mistreating poor people. Bad business habits are incompatible with the teachings of Jesus Christ. So to follow Jesus who is the Truth, Matthew would have to quit some of the things he was doing. To follow Jesus in heart and life and body meant some big changes for Matthew. Jesus said, "*Follow me*." And following Jesus is not just being religious or being good. Following Jesus is following His way, His teachings, His will. It means Jesus will be Lord of Matthew's life. Jesus will be the shepherd of Matthew's life. Jesus will be the King of Matthew's life. As Matthew follows Jesus, it will take Matthew to a cross where Jesus Christ will die for Matthew's sins. It will take Matthew to an empty tomb where Matthew will know that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. And Matthew will follow Jesus until he is martyred for Christ.

The Bible says he arose and followed Him. I find it amazing sometimes and surprising that the people who will follow Jesus if they are invited to do so. I imagine almost every Jewish person in that community said that if there's one person who will never get right with God, it's Matthew. He has everything he needs. He's rich, and he's a sinner.

But Jesus stopped one day where Matthew was working, and said, "*Matthew, follow me*." And Matthew was going to follow Jesus. And rising up, the Bible says, he followed Him. The evidence of Matthew being a real believer in Christ was that he followed Jesus. "*My sheep hear my voice*," as we read this morning, "*and they follow me*."

Evidence of genuine conversion is the fact we would follow Christ as Matthew did. I'm surprised by Christ. I'm surprised that he called Matthew, a publican, to be one of his disciples, and eventually one of the twelve apostles of Christ and the author of the Gospel that we're now reading. Who would have ever dreamed that?

II. Surprised by the Company Jesus Had

Not only am I surprised at that, but let's read on here in verse ten – *“And it came to pass as Jesus set at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it they said unto the disciples, why eateth your master with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard that He said unto them they that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick. Go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* I'm surprised by the company that the Lord Jesus Christ had.

When I read this little story that we've just read about a feast, about a big meal. I do not read Matthew's name in this Gospel. But when we read the other gospels we know it was Matthew's house. Matthew was the one that invited folks to come. In his own gospel, he didn't reveal who it was. But it's Matthew. He's a recent convert to Jesus Christ. He has recently decided to follow Jesus. But Matthew has lots of non-Christian friends; he has lots of unsaved friends. As the Bible says in this passage, *“many publicans and sinners.”* He has lots of people that were lost and needed Jesus in their life. And he begins to think, “How could I reach my friends with the gospel of Jesus Christ? How could I let them get to know Jesus?”

I don't want to raise your hand this morning -- are you saved, do you know Christ? Well, aren't there people you know who need be saved? Sometimes we need to think of creative ways of reaching those people. Last week we noticed they let a man down through the roof; that was creative. Matthew's not into letting people down through the roof. *“It came to pass and Jesus sat at meat in the house.”* Matthew decides, you know what I think I'll do? I'll have a big meal. I'll have a feast. I'll invite all my tax collector friends. And I'll also invite Jesus and His disciples, and I'll get the two together in the same house. We'll have food together. We'll have a big meal together. And that's what he does, because he knows this, that if you invite Jesus and His disciples to your house, eventually the conversation is going to get around to spiritual and eternal things. So that's what he does -- he invites these folks to come. Christ accepted the invitation. His disciples were present. To sit down in the same house and have a meal with tax collectors and sinners.

Now that was considered very, very bad by the religious leaders of that day. First of all if you were to invite tax collectors and other sinners into your house, you might get contaminated by them. They may say something that you don't like being said in your house, or they may do something, or just having them in there, what are the neighbors going to think? And then who knows what these tax collectors and sinners are going to serve for the food. It may not be kosher; it may not be what we spiritual people eat. Who knows? And so what Jesus did was something the religious leaders of that day would think was very bad.

When I think about it, I think you know what? There does need to be some caution here. And we give you a couple of verses. "*Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners.*" We become like the people we are around the most. We begin to pick up their habits. And if they're doing sinful things, we begin to look at it as not so bad because they're our friends. And they begin to corrupt us. I've seen young people doing pretty good until they got around a certain friend, and then that friend begins to corrupt them.

The Bible says, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" The Bible says be careful who your companions are. Be careful who you walk with, who you are around all the time. If you're around wise people, and people who have the wisdom of God in their life and love the Lord, they're going to influence you in a positive way. But if you're around foolish people, they're going to influence you to be a foolish person. Be careful who you are around all the time. And the Bible says the companion of fools shall be what? (destroyed) It's very destructive, and so we do need to be careful.

But on this occasion, Matthew, along with Jesus planned a meal, not to become like the sinners, not to sit there and just chat about the weather. But a meal in order to be able to present the good news of the gospel to people who would be present. In fact Jesus in this very passage says, "I came to call sinners to repentance. That's reason I came." The Lord Jesus Christ knows this -- that we cannot totally isolate ourselves from the unsaved people around us that live in this world and ever reach them. And so He says I'll be there. You invite me I'll come to the meal. Just a parenthesis here -- I don't read if anybody came to know Jesus Christ as Savior as a result of this meal. Whether they did or didn't isn't mentioned. And the truth is we need to love people and reach out to people no matter what their response is.

III. Surprise of Criticism

So it's surprising that Jesus would walk over to a tax collector Matthew and say, "I choose you, follow me." And then it's surprising who he would eat with and dine with. And the third thing I would like for us to notice today is the surprise of criticism. If you do the right thing, if you serve God, if you love Jesus, and if you try and reach people, you're going to be criticized. Not

everybody is going to like it when you really serve God like you should. And so on this occasion we find that Jesus was criticized. I'm sure He was not surprised -- because he knows everything, but we're surprised sometimes by criticism.

And the first group of people that criticize our Lord is found in verse eleven. The Bible says the Pharisees said, "Why is your Master eating with publicans and sinners?" I notice on this occasion they did not go directly to Jesus. They went to the disciples of Jesus, and often, those who are critics will go behind people's back to criticize. They lack the courage and the dignity to go to Jesus Himself, and say, "we are struggling with this. Why are you eating with these folks?"

Jesus was eating with these people, and as I read this passage I thought that if Jesus chose to never eat with sinners, who would He eat with? He would always have to sit by Himself, wouldn't He? Because we're all sinners! And Christ gives two illustrations as to why he was eating with sinners.

The first one is from a medical doctor perspective. "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" Yesterday I was well. Yesterday I felt healthy. I was not sick. So yesterday guess what? I didn't go to the emergency room and run in there and say I have a need. I didn't go see a doctor. I stayed away from the doctor because I was well. And Jesus is saying, you know what? These publicans, these sinners, these people that you're criticizing. They're sick. There's an awful disease called SIN that's killing them, destroying them, and will take them to hell, and they need to be saved.

When you a look at the life of a doctor, you know a doctor spends a lot of time with sick people, with people in pain. with people who have all kinds of problems, all kinds of struggles. The doctor isn't there to catch those diseases. He's there to help those people overcome it. The Lord Jesus Christ says the reason I showed up at the meal was to help people overcome, be victorious in their life, to repent and know God. And the Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Physician who would die for our sins and rise again that we might be saved.

Another thing that He mentions is to "Go and learn what that means," and then he quotes from the book of Hosea, chapter six verse six. "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice*", and then He applies it. "*For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*" That's what God says. "I am more interested," God says, "in showing mercy and compassion and pity than I am in religious ceremonies."

The Jewish people were great at bringing their sacrifices down to the temple and offering the right sacrifices on the right day -- and going through the ceremonies just perfectly. Where they

really struggled was loving people. Showing and pity and mercy and compassion to struggling people.

So Jesus said, "You need to go and learn what this means." Go back and read Hosea again. And understand what God is really interested in. Mercy is compassion for people, giving help to needy people. And so Christ said you know what? "I don't come to call the righteous people that think they're already right with God. I don't come to call them. I came for sinners. And I didn't come to call sinners just to remain in their sin. I come to call them to repentance, to have a change of mind and heart." And it's going to lead to a change of life as they put their trust in Christ.

Well that was the first criticism, but the next one's a little bit more difficult to take. It's found in verse fourteen. Then came to Him the disciples of John the Baptist saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples fast not?" You know it's one thing to get criticism from the Pharisees; it's another thing to have criticism from other believers. From the disciples of John the Baptist. And the disciples of John the Baptist weren't so upset about who Jesus was associating with because they knew John the Baptist reached out to the sinners and publicans and whoever, too. But they were concerned because Jesus was having a feast. Because their leader John the Baptist had taken such a stand against sin and against wrong that he was in prison. And they were having times of prayer and fasting concerning that. They fasted on the Day of Atonement, and they fasted at least twice each week, two days out of the seven, in order to keep the Jewish traditions and so on. But the idea was, "Jesus, shouldn't this be a time of prayer and fasting and morning and really seeking God's face? But here you are sitting with sinners having a meal and having a good time."

Sometimes we expect criticism from those outside the church, those outside in the world. But it's more difficult to bear it when it comes from disciples. And the Lord Jesus Christ gives him at least a two, maybe three fold answer. Before going and farther, let me say this. If you are doing what's right, you will probably experience criticism. Sometimes from the world. And sometimes from God's kingdom. If you're doing what's right, do not change what you're doing just because people are criticizing. Keep on doing right. The Lord Jesus Christ would not back up and say, "You know what? I kind of think maybe I shouldn't have done that." No, He would not, because He did what was right. He stuck by it, and He gives an illustration.

The first one is this: "*Can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them?*" You and I who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ know that we're going to be the Bride of Christ, and He's the bridegroom. This is kind of the engagement period when we're to keep ourselves pure unto him -- as we wait for Him to come and take his bride home. But when the Lord Jesus Christ was here, the Bridegroom was here. There he was -- Jesus.

And He said, “This is not a time for mourning and weeping, but this is a time for rejoicing.” You know. One of the poorest times to choose to fast and pray and mourn would be a wedding. Here's everybody else having a good time enjoying maybe the cake and the punch and so on, or maybe a meal together and you're sitting there saying, “I'm praying and fasting.” He said this is not the time for that.

And then the second illustration He gives is found in verses sixteen and seventeen. He says that “*no man puts a piece of new cloth on to an old garment for that which is put in to fill it taketh from the garment. And the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine in old bottles else the bottles break and the wine runneth out and the bottles perish.*” “Bottles” here is goatskin, not glass bottles. But they put new wine into a new bottle, and both are preserved. Christ used the illustration of what I call patches. You get a tear in the pants or in the knee, and I used to do that when I was a kid. Now, mom asked why I always did this. I wasn't praying! So there was always a patch down there sometimes.

And everybody back in Bible times, in that culture, wore cotton garments. And the old cotton garments had been worn many times and washed many times. And Jesus said you wouldn't take a brand new patch that's never been washed and put it on the old garment. You make sure that the patch had been washed. You don't take the new and put on the old or it will rip out again. Same thing with the new wine in the old goat skins. If you put new wine in the old goat skins, the gases will break the old wine skin, and everything will leak out.

So here's an illustration. Jesus is telling the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees, “I did not come to put a patch on Judaism. I did not come to just patch up the old. I come to bring a new covenant. A new way of living. A new Way of Life.” It's not just a patch on the old. Not only that, Jesus Christ did not come to patch up Matthew. Matthew had some issues, but Jesus wasn't here just to put a patch on some parts of his life and leave things other things the way they were. He came to totally and dramatically change Matthew from top to bottom beginning in his heart, giving him a new heart and a new life.

Jesus Christ did not come here to die for your sins and be buried and rise again just to kind of patch you up in those areas that you think you've got a problem. He came to make you a new creation in Jesus Christ. And so the Lord Jesus Christ is saying to these people who are criticizing Him, I didn't just come here to patch you up. We're going to do something different. We're going to do things different. We're going to reach out to sinners; we're not here just to patch them up. We're here to see them totally changed by the power of the Holy Spirit when He comes into their life.

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