



Matthew 9:9-38 Understanding Jesus

Summary: Jesus reveals His compassion for people as He proves He can heal things no one else can, including lives broken by personal choices or misfortune.

This morning we continue our look at a biography of Jesus written by Matthew. We're going to cover a lot of ground – we'll see how Matthew became a disciple of Jesus, several miracles of healing that Jesus performed, and then we'll take a look at what motivated Jesus to do all this. So, we jump right into the flow picking up where we left off last week with Jesus traveling through the region of Northern Israel:

Matthew 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

To understand what is happening here you need to consider the big picture. You need to know the historical and cultural context. Remember, the Christian faith is based on history - on dates, locations, and real people. In fact, if you lived back then and had your smartphone, you could type Matthew's tax office into Google Maps or tell your Uber driver that's where you were headed because Matthew was a real man, living in a real town that you can still visit today.

That town was part of Israel, but Israel was part of the Roman Empire. So Matthew was ethnically Jewish but he was working for Rome. He lived in Capernaum, a city located along a major transportation artery – the main road that connected Egypt in the South to Damascus in the Northeast. Naturally, Rome wanted to tax whatever they could that traveled on this road as well as levy all sorts of taxes on the people living there.

Matthew's job was to collect those taxes. He was a publican, that's based on the Latin *Publicani*, meaning a person who dealt with the public's money - receiving it, tracking it, and if the government wanted to, spending it on certain projects. It was a job that lent itself to both extortion and bribery, demanding a little extra payment from the weak and receiving a little something on the side from the rich to turn a blind eye.

As a result, tax collectors and customs officials were typically sly, cunning, opportunistic and universally hated by their fellow Jews. After all, they had entered the service of the Empire that had conquered their homeland and they were getting rich at the expense of their fellow Jews. So, people like Matthew were excluded from the local synagogue, the Jewish equivalent of the church. They were not welcome to come worship. They also couldn't testify in a Jewish court because their honesty was so questionable. When you read the Bible you frequently hear them linked together with undesirables as "tax collectors and sinners."

And yet, this is the man Jesus looked at and said, "Follow Me."

Jesus showed up in Matthew's life and changed everything instantly. Years later He would do the same thing with a man known as Saul of Tarsus, who would become the Apostle Paul. It's not unusual for Jesus to call someone you wouldn't expect, interrupt their life, and suddenly take them in a completely unforeseen direction.

And pay attention to the immediate context here too, because it's important: right in middle of two chapters on miracles Matthew chooses to tell us about the day when Jesus called him to be a disciple. Because, for him, this is as big of a deal as raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, and healing lepers.

Many of the people Jesus helped had needs in the physical realm, but for Matthew, the transformation that occurred when Jesus called him to be a disciple was just as life altering, just as healing, just as miraculous. So, he dropped everything and followed. He trusted Jesus and proved it with his life.

That day Matthew lost some material wealth and a comfortable, secure job but he received far more than he gave up. As a tax collector, Matthew was good with keeping records, so God used him one day to make a record of the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus – the book we're reading now. Jesus had the ability to see not only what Matthew *was* in the tax collector's booth, but *what he could be* as a servant of God.

What does God see in you?

What does He want to do in and through your life if you'll just be available to Him? When Jesus comes and says, "Follow Me" where will He lead you? He may require you to give up your current position, the wealth you could earn, and the predictability you love, but if so, I can promise you, it will be worth it. So, when you hear Him call, go. Follow Him, wherever He may lead.

But, let me also warn you - following Jesus can produce a little friction at times.

We don't see anything said here, but just imagine for a minute – what happens when Matthew, the despised tax collector, joins the group of men and women already following Jesus? Do you think there were some awkward moments here and there?

My personal relationship with Jesus is one thing, but being with Him AND everyone else, now that's a different story. Isn't it?

If we're honest, sometimes it's difficult for us to accept the people Jesus wants to reach. Church people aren't always comfortable with the other people He wants to bring in. We have biases. We have prejudices. We even have our own expectations of what it means to be a part of this group around Jesus. And so we cast glances sideways. We give short greetings. We make little whispers and comments and judgments. And it's WRONG.

We should be as welcoming to other people as Jesus was to us. Now, we know that, and it's fine, so long as He's calling other people like us. Andrew, Peter, James, John, they were all fishermen, they had a common bond, they shared a common culture, they "spoke the same language." But now Jesus invites this creep Matthew in. This guy who has "never done a hard day's work in his life" this guy who has ink stains on his hands instead of calluses. Do you think they all just automatically got along?

Probably not, at first. This is why Jesus had to teach them so much about love. And brothers and sisters in Christ, this is why Jesus needs to teach us so much about love.

John 14:6 says Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him.

He's the only Gate to God. And, if that's true, and it is, that means that if we go through His gate, we're going to brush against a lot of people that aren't like us because He's the only gate for them too. That means we all have to figure out how to get along. And that doesn't mean me becoming more like you or you becoming more like me, that means each of us becoming more like Jesus.

Because guess what? The same Jesus that called you to follow Him also called me. We both got to His church, through the same invitation. So now that we're here, we have to figure out how to get along. And not just coexist, but seek to understand Jesus and each other, and seek to love each other despite our differences in race, ethnicity, educational background, profession, politics, diet, or even preference for musical style.

It's not going to be easy, and we will, no doubt, offend each other at times – though hopefully never intentionally. But there's only one Jesus. The One who called Peter was the same who called Matthew, and you, and me. So just know that – know that there has been friction among Jesus' followers from the very beginning. That doesn't mean you don't belong, it just means we all need to grow.

Well, look where things go from here, because it seems plenty of people have a problem with Jesus or a question about what He is doing.

Matthew 9:10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.
11 And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
12 When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what *this* means: '*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

After Jesus called Matthew, Matthew opened up his house for dinner, invited all of his friends, and said, "You have to meet this Jesus I know!" That was great for his friends, but there was a group of religious conservatives who found it unthinkable.

When they ask what in the world He's doing hanging out with such riff-raff, Jesus reminds them that it's only sick people who need a doctor.

Jesus is not rejecting sacrifice or ritual, but He's elevating right relationship with God and right treatment of the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed and saying don't pursue one at the expense of the other. Don't create a religious country club. One author re-phrased Jesus as saying: "I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders." (Peterson)

He's not saying there are people who are so righteous they don't need Him. He's saying some people are so self-satisfied they think they're OK. Meanwhile, Jesus is calling those who are convinced of their need, conscious of their sin, to follow Him. So, beware of those who are more concerned with criticism than encouragement when it comes to following Christ.

Sinners are welcome to come to Jesus, you'll need to repent when you come, but you are absolutely welcome to come to Jesus today.

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, [this is a group that would be more sympathetic, after all John had baptized Jesus saying He must increase and John must decrease, but they didn't understand why Jesus' approach was so different, so they ask] saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. 17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Jesus is saying there's nothing wrong with Fasting, but this is not the time for it. Things are changing; the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Don't think of what you're seeing in Jesus as just an extension of the past. It's connected to the past, it's built on the foundation of the past, it's actually the fulfillment of the past, but it's also the beginning of something new, not just a patch on the old.

I think we can all understand that some new clothes shrink when washed for the first time, or if washed in too hot of water – I've lost a shirt or two to Madeleine that way. So, obviously, you don't want to put a new piece of fabric on some old piece of clothing as a patch. That's an illustration we can understand.

The reference to wine and wineskins is somewhat similar. Wine wasn't bottled until the 18th century and the first patent on a corkscrew to open those bottles is from England in 1795. Prior to that wine was stored and transported in clay pots and even wineskins which were waterproof bags made by sewing together an animal's skin. As wine ages though, it

ferments, giving off gasses. A new wineskin full of new wine will stretch as the fermentation occurs, but this can only happen once – if you put too much new wine into an old wineskin, it doesn't have enough elasticity to keep up and will burst.

The point for the Jesus's original audience, and for us, is that we need to make sure we're not shutting down or resisting the new things Jesus wants to do.

Matthew 9:18 While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live." 19 So Jesus arose and followed him, and so *did* His disciples.

We learn from other parts of the Bible that this man's name is Jairus. He was the ruler of the local synagogue, like the local church. He was elected from among the elders, but his job wasn't to teach or preach – they had a rabbi for that – he was a sort of executive pastor responsible for planning the order of the services and caring for the building.

When his daughter fell ill, Jairus turned to Jesus for help and found it, but before they could get to the little girl, they ran into someone else in need of help.

20 And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. 21 For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." 22 But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.

It turns out other people need Jesus to do what only He can do.

This woman had what is generally thought to be an unceasing menstrual period and she's been dealing with this for twelve years. Those of you who have dealt with various persistent illnesses or injuries can completely understand. Twelve years of disease, depression, and frustration is a long time for anyone. But you need to know that her particular issue also made her unclean in religious and social terms.

In other words, she was under something of a social quarantine and shouldn't really have been out in the crowds with Jesus this day. Her illness was not only something to endure personally, but it also cut her off from other people. For twelve years she didn't attend dinner parties or hang out with friends, she was pulled out from the core of society but she heard about Jesus and had the hope that He could do what no one else could.

So, she found Him and with a heart and mind full of superstition reached out to just brush against His clothes¹.

¹ Hebrew: *zizith* – Num 15:38-41, Deu 22:12; blue and white cords woven together on the four corners of the outer garments and prayer shawls

She thought she could get away with it quietly – as if she could pickpocket a miracle. But Mark and Luke tell us Jesus stopped everything and asked who had just touched Him – a ridiculous question in the crowd of people gathered around Him.

The woman came forward though and shared her testimony. And Jesus told her, “[your faith has made you well.](#)” That’s interesting to note because her belief was superstitious. And yet, Jesus used it. He accepted her misguided faith. The lesson for us is – you don’t have to know and understand everything before coming to Jesus. Just come, put your faith in Him, and then let Him teach you as you grow.

Now, while all of this is happening, remember Jairus is standing there, probably thinking, “Let’s go Jesus! It’s nice that You’ve taken care of this lady, but really, couldn’t she wait? Do you understand the concept of triage? We take care of the most needy patients first?” But Jesus knew what He was doing.

[23 When Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, 24 He said to them, “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.” And they ridiculed Him. 25 But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. 26 And the report of this went out into all that land.](#)

Jairus shows up with Jesus and the people in his house ridicule Jesus. You ever walk into a hostile environment? It seems like Jairus wasn’t surrounded by the most supportive people. And friends, sometimes that’s true of us. It won’t always be easy to have faith in God. Sometimes your friends will ridicule, but if you keep the faith, Jesus will still do what He came to do.

[27 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, “Son of David, have mercy on us!”](#)

Now, you need to know it was always people who were distant from Jesus who used the title “Son of David.” It’s a reflection of the hope for a Militant Messiah – when you find people calling Jesus the Son of David, they’re thinking of Him as the next king of Israel who will throw the Romans out and re-establish the kingdom.

[28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be to you.” 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, “See *that* no one knows *it.*” 31 But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.](#)

Like the woman who touched His clothes, these men didn’t have the best understanding of who Jesus really was or what He came to do, and they didn’t obey His instructions about keeping quiet, but notice: Jesus healed them anyway.

I keep focusing on this because I want you to see the grace and kindness of our Lord. If we take the smallest steps toward Him, He receives us. And yes, there will be correction that comes later, instruction and guidance, but you don't have to be perfect to come to Him!

32 As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. 33 And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!"
34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."

What the eye sees depends on what the heart feels. Jesus will always seem wonderful to the person who is aware of their need. But to the person who feels no need, to the person who doesn't perceive his or her own sickness, there is no need for a doctor.

Jesus is divisive – you have to have a response to Him. You can either marvel at Him as the Son of God who came to take away the sin of the world or you can search for ways to explain Him away, but you have to have an opinion. My hope is that as you see what happens next, you develop a better understanding.

Matthew 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. [they were "exhausted by their troubles and their long, aimless wanderings"] 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Jesus went around teaching and preaching, proclaiming a message, and backing that up with some spectacular miracles, but the teaching was always the main point. There was something He wanted people to know, He didn't just want to heal them for a few years, He wanted to heal them forever. He came to bring a message: that the Kingdom of God was beginning and anyone who was willing to admit their sin and ask for forgiveness could enter in. Jesus would eventually lay down His own life as a sacrifice for sin on the cross and open the door for us to God's kingdom. The point of the physical healings was only to draw attention to the greater message about the healing He offered for our souls.

So, if you notice only one thing this morning – I hope you notice what motivated Jesus. He looked out on the people and He was moved by compassion. What we find here is the strongest word for pity in the Greek language, a feeling that moves a man or woman in the deepest part of their core. That's what Jesus felt when He looked out on the people. That's what Jesus feels when He looks at you.

Jesus sees you and wants to help you. He really does love you. He knows your difficulty and your pain, He knows your fear and frustration, He knows your embarrassment and shame, and He wants to help.

Even if you don't fully understand. Even if you think you just need to touch his clothes, even if you don't really understand why He came. Even if you think this is for other people, but not you. Even if, like Matthew, you've turned your back on the way you were raised, and gotten yourself into a mess with the direction of your life - Jesus still wants you back.

We're going to close our time now with prayer, and I want to encourage you - Jesus is calling - He's saying "Follow ME." Maybe it's time for you to respond to that invitation. If so, I'll give you a model prayer in just a moment to respond with. But it's something all of us need to consider - knowing the kindness of Jesus, knowing the compassion, knowing His power - do those of us who call ourselves Christians also hear the call "Follow Me" and are we willing to go wherever He leads? If you've heard that call this morning, will you follow too - follow closer, or follow even through this, or follow in that new direction?

Jesus has compassion on us all, and calls each of us to follow. So let's respond to Him now - starting with you if this is your first time responding - if you want to become a Christian this morning, you don't have to get words exactly right, but if this is desire of your heart, pray something like this:

Heavenly Father, God of compassion, I hear you calling me to Follow You. I ask You to forgive me of my sins, all the wrong things I have done, and show me a new way to live. Give me Your peace, Your help, Your healing, and teach me how to follow You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

If you pray a prayer like that, God promises He will hear you, forgive you, and give you a new life today. If you pray that, let me know, we have some things to give you to help you follow Jesus.

And for the rest of us, let us pray as well.