

## **Life of Matthew, the Apostle and the Evangelist**

This morning we thank God for the life of Matthew the Apostle and the Evangelist. He was also known as Levi the Tax Collector. Matthew actually represents a wider group of people who were considered as sinners by the Pharisees. In fact Jesus was in Matthew's house for dinner along with some of them, which drew sharp criticism from the Pharisees about the kind of people that Jesus was looking for his disciples. R.T. France says, "Discipleship is not for the comfortable and respectable people, but for whom conventional society would rather keep at arm's length. The Pharisees could only see their failures, but Jesus sees their need and the fact they acknowledge it themselves gives him the opportunity to fulfill his calling to "save his people from their sins".

In the previous passage to the one read to us this morning, we see Jesus healing a paralytic who was brought on a mat and he tells him that his sins are forgiven. The Teachers of the law who were around him were upset that Jesus was claiming to forgive sins, and they thought to themselves that this man was blaspheming. However, Jesus heals the man in order to show that he had the power to forgive sins as well. All this happens at Capernaum and Jesus moves out from there to the place where Matthew was sitting at the Tax Collector's booth.

The Tax booth was not like any fancy indoor office like we have today. It was a booth located at the edge of the city to collect taxes for trade. There was a tax booth in Capernaum which was on the trade route from Damascus to Galilee and the Mediterranean. Prominent among these taxes were customs duties of goods carried through and traded in the border town. The presence of a tax booth also indicated they were not bothered about customs of clean and unclean like the Pharisees. Moreover, these tax collectors were employed by the Romans and therefore these people were despised by the Jews who undoubtedly regarded them as traitors. Jews could only take on such a job if they loved money more than their national heritage. The tax collectors were mostly associated with sinners and so they were all branded together as group which was beyond redemption.

When Jesus approaches Matthew he tells him, 'Follow me' and Matthew got up and followed him. Luke informs us that he left everything and followed him. In spite of who Matthew was at the present an unholy, untouchable corrupt individual- Jesus knew what he could become. Matthew responds to the call immediately. There was implicit obedience. We too are challenged to respond to the call of Jesus in our lives with implicit obedience.

Jesus went to dinner to Matthew's house where a lot of friends and colleagues were present.

When the Pharisees saw this they asked his disciples “why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and “sinners”? The Pharisees were not able to understand the action of Jesus. They could not cope with an idea of a Jewish rabbi mixing with sinners. On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”. For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.’

Jesus reminds them that his primary purpose is to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous. We must remind ourselves that all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. None of us are righteous and we all need God’s saving touch. Jesus has come for us. If we confess our sin and repent and turn to him for salvation he is willing to forgive us and heal us. Many a time we are like the self-righteous Pharisees. We always consider ourselves more righteous than others. But if we truly examine ourselves in the light of God’s holiness all of us are terrible sinners. We need to recognize that as we sit in God’s presence and ask him for his forgiveness. May God help us to be truly repentant and seek his face.

***Paul Swarup***