

## 8.2.20

### The Gospel of Matthew

#### Who is Matthew?

This morning, as we start our study of Matthew, there are a few things we should look at first and the first one being, who is Matthew, the author of the first Gospel in the New Testament?

I think a good starting place for this is the acknowledgement and belief of God using man to write His words down so the world will have not only a record of His interaction with all of humanity, but the teachings of His Son Jesus.

In a day of confusion, half truths, non-truths, guesses and opinions, it is nice to know we have something that is solid and never changing. The Word of God. Like God, His Word is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Its teachings about God and our interaction with Him never shift, never need to be updated like a computer or a phone. They never grow old or obsolete. They are our bedrock, our understanding about God and how we should handle ourselves in the midst of our stay here on earth.

#### 1. God used men to **write** down His words

Paul wrote the following to Timothy. **2 Timothy 3:16**, “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness (right living according to God’s kingdom standards).”

We read the same message from Peter in **2 Peter 1:20-21**, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men spoke for God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

I know I am in some cases preaching to the choir so to speak. I believe that most, I pray all, of you have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit speaking to you the truth of scripture. You read in God's word and the Holy Spirit wells up inside of you and you know that you know, this is the Word of God, this book is a book of truth.

So as we move into the Gospel of Matthew, we know even though it was physically penned by Matthew, the words he wrote down, the words you have before you are not his words.

Paul put it this way. **1 Corinthians 2:13, "...which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."**

God inspired words written down by men. Men who in a lot of cases were a mess before Jesus and God got ahold of them. Such was the case of Matthew.

So who was this Matthew, the author of this book? Well, I'll tell who the Jewish religious leaders called him. The scum of the earth. Why?

Look with me at our first introduction to Matthew the man.

**Matthew 9:9, "As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth, and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he got up and followed Him."**

Why did the religious leaders and really all the other Jewish people call Matthew the scum of the earth? Because he was a tax man, an IRS agent.

Must of us know the people who collect our taxes for our cars, our homes and stuff like that but most people don't know any real IRS agents. Thirty years ago when I was self-employed, I had gotten behind on my taxes and was working with the IRS to get them all paid up and I remember getting really frustrated.

My business was in southern Kansas and the office I had to report to was in Wichita. My frustration was when I would go into their very sterile and cold offices I was not allowed to talk with the same agent more than once. They always assigned a different person for me to talk with. That meant I had to go through some of the same hoops over and over again with each new person. It was frustrating but it was by their design.

I developed a friendship with a guy in the church I was attending in Dodge City Kansas and he was an IRS agent and I asked why this was. He told me they did it this way because of the amount of abuse they had to deal with as they worked with people.

Nobody really likes to pay taxes and if someone has been dishonest or as I did, not keep up with the taxes they were to pay in, when it came time to pay the piper so to speak, it was never a happy time. You can imagine how unpopular being an IRS agent could be. This friend told me the turnover rate among IRS agents was pretty high because most people could not stomach all of the verbal abuse and the stigma of working for the IRS.

This is who Matthew was. He was tax man and all stigma that went with it. Let's read on about what happened when Jesus called Matthew to follow Him.

We'll look in Luke's gospel. **Luke 5:28, "And he, Matthew (or Levi by another name) left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him (Jesus)."**

After Jesus called Matthew to follow Him there was no hesitation on Matthew's part, no second guessing, no concern about what might or might not happen in the future. Jesus came and Matthew jumped at the chance to go with Him, leaving everything behind. We will talk more about this in a minute but first look at what occurred soon after.

**Luke 5:29-32, “And Levi (Matthew) gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them. The Pharisees (religious leaders) began grumbling to His disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?’”**

And when it came to the religious leaders of Jesus' day, they were appalled that Jesus, obviously a prophet of God, would not only associate with sinners and tax collectors but that He would sit down for a meal with them.

A couple of things. It is interesting to note that Matthew, back in his Gospel, wrote there were many tax collectors and sinners at the banquet he threw for Jesus. Matthew didn't hide anything but called things what they were. He was a tax collector and all his friends were either tax collectors or sinners of one sort or another.

But the Pharisees not only equated tax collectors with the sinners but they actually thought of tax collectors as the lowest of the low and with good reason.

During the days of Jesus, the Roman Empire was the ruling body of the land. In Jerusalem and the surrounding area, everybody lived by the laws of the Romans which included paying taxes to them.

Now in my understanding, how those taxes were gathered was a lot different than we think of today. We have a very organized and civilized way of collecting income tax, personal property tax and the like. Not so back then.

The Roman government would hire people from different people groups to collect taxes from their own people. For example, Matthew was a Jew so he was hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from the Jews. And because a Jew was willing to be hired by the Romans, who the Jews despised, and because these men were willing to take money, taxes, from the Jewish people and give it to the Roman government, well, it was like they had forsaken their own people and gone over to the other side.

That's why tax collectors were considered to be the lowest of low among the Jewish people. Not only this, the local tax collector could charge as much as he could get away with, lining his own pockets as long as he was giving the Romans what they asked for. So they were known to be an extremely dis-honest, back-stabbing, all they can get for themselves type of people.

You can imagine the religious leaders utter surprise when Jesus called such a person to come and follow Him. Not only this but Matthew also became one of His twelve guys. A member of His inner circle.

I know I'm giving you a lot of history but it is important for you to know who Matthew was.

## **2. Why did Jesus pick such a man (obviously a sinner) as Matthew?**

Well, I think it might have been the fact that:

### **a. Matthew was spiritually hungry**

First I think Matthew was spiritually hungry and Jesus knew it. Because Matthew was a tax collector, he probably didn't hang out at the local church much. He knew the reception at the house of worship would be pretty cool so he probably avoided it.

But as you study Matthew's account of Jesus, he refers to the Old Testament close to 100 times. More than Mark, Luke or John. So it is obvious, that at some point in his life, after selecting a self-seeking type of career, Matthew was empty and began looking in the scriptures for truth. He probably knew the prophecy concerning the coming Messiah.

Of course God was seeking him and drawing him so when Jesus came along, Matthew didn't hesitate. He already believed in God, he was looking for the Messiah and when he found him, or more rightly stated, when the Messiah found Matthew, Matthew jumped to follow Jesus and then he couldn't wait to share Jesus with all of his riff-raff friends.

The call of Matthew is a vivid reminder that the Lord often chooses the most despicable people of this world but people who have a spiritual hunger. The Lord dusts them off, forgives them, restores them and then uses them in remarkable ways.

### 3. God often chooses sinners to accomplish His will

Think about this passage.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-27, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God as chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong..."**

Matthew certainly qualified didn't he? He was not wise in his choices, he was not mighty, in fact he was probably pretty weak-willed. And he certainly was not of noble character. But that didn't matter did it. What mattered is that he was called by God and he followed that call.

There are a couple of other reasons I see that Matthew was qualified to write, with the power of the Holy Spirit, this account of Jesus' life and ministry.

Because Matthew referred so much to the Old Testament, some scholars say he must have had a lot of training in the Old Testament. I'm not so sure that is true. Because he was a Jewish he would have automatically been schooled in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. But as I stated before, because he choose the life of a tax collector, any further education he would have received probably was on his own some how.

More than anything I tend to think Matthew was able to write this Gospel because the power of the Holy Spirit was on Him and because he walked with Jesus.

Look with me at Acts 4:13. This speaks of two other apostles but was probably true of Matthew as well.

**Acts 4:13, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."**

As the religious leaders listened to Peter and John they were amazed at their depth of understanding of spiritual things. But they were also amazed that they had not received any formal education. The only thing they did recognize was the fact that they had spent time with Jesus.

Think of what Matthew experienced. If the New Testament's timeline is followed it looked like Matthew was the 5<sup>th</sup> apostle to be selected and that was pretty early on in Jesus's public ministry.

So Matthew had the great opportunity to follow Jesus and watch Him minister for 3 ½ years. Imagine what he saw. Jesus touching and healing thousands of blind, lame, mute, demon possessed individuals.

He saw Jesus walking on water, calming the storm and raising the dead. He was there, helping when Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes, blessed it and fed thousands.

Matthew was also there when Jesus was taken, crucified and miraculously raised from the dead. Acts 1:26 says the eleven apostles were together with possibly 120 others when the Holy Spirit descended on them and they were filled.

Is Matthew qualified to write an account of Jesus' life? Absolutely, more than qualified. Not by his own merit but by the power of God moving upon his life.

**Spending time with Jesus. Being filled by the Holy Spirit. That was enough for Matthew to be used in powerful and mighty ways and that is enough for each of us today.**

As I think about the call upon the life of Matthew and how, once Matthew answered that call, how powerful he was used, I know there is hope for you and me.

Matthew was living a life of sin but the Holy Spirit was obviously moving upon his life, creating a hunger for something more. Something more concrete, something that was truth. God answered his hunger and gave him Jesus and his life was never the same.

The same can be true of your life. Do you know all it takes? Taking a walk with Jesus.

Let's pray