

Intro: The event in the life of our Lord which we are going to consider tonight grew out of:

I. THE CALL OF MATTHEW (Luke 5:27, 28).

This man was the writer of the first Gospel in our NT's. It was not the first Gospel written, as far as we know, but it comes first in our copies of the NT.

Matthew was a Jew, but he was also a despised publican, a tax collector. David Brown suggests that he may have been in charge of a ferry tax which the government imposed upon people traveling on the sea of Galilee, or merchants who were transporting goods. The Jews hated the publicans, looked upon them as traitors to their own nation because, in addition to collecting the tax which the government required, they added whatever fee they might want to for themselves. Consequently they, like Zacchaeus, were usually rich. We can safely assume that was true of Matthew. He was carrying on his business when the Lord came by and called him.

While we do not have any record that Matthew and the Lord had met before, it seems realistic to say that they had, that Matthew had not only been profoundly affected by the Lord's teaching, but that he had actually been saved. It is very likely, too, that they had more of a conversation than is included in the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What we are given is that which is significant as far as the story is concerned. The Lord said, "Follow me," and we are told that Matthew "left all, rose up, and followed him" (v. 28). I like what David Brown said about those two words of our Lord, "Follow me." He said,

Witching words these, from the lips of Hi who never employed them without giving them resistless efficacy in the hearts of those they were spoken to (Vol. V, p. 56, italics mine).

By "witching words" he meant that they had a mysterious power to cause the person so addressed to respond favorably. The Lord called; Matthew came. And his name is forever recorded among the men who gave their lives as the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, let us be sure that there is much included in Luke's words which indicated that Matthew "left all." He gave up a very lucrative profession. He ceased to seek great things for himself, especially money. Whether or not he refunded money which he had taken unfairly like Zacchaeus did, we do not know for sure. But it seems that we are on safe ground

in saying that he did.

Notice also this indication of the ways of the Lord. Many would have felt that it would have been a reflection upon the Lord to call such a man as His disciple. From the story which followed we can see that the Lord's association with the publicans did bring harsh criticism from the Pharisees and the scribes. And yet Paul wrote later telling us that the Lord delights to call those who are "despised...to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:28, 29).

And so it seems that Matthew, who previously had known the Lord, and believed in Him, now most amazingly was called to serve God as an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was a real trophy of grace. There is much here that the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to record, but we have enough to get acquainted with this man whose life was so greatly transformed.

Expositors differ as to whether or not Levi's feast followed immediately, or whether it was some time afterwards. While we cannot say positively one way or the other, it seems to me to be more realistic to say that the feast came some time afterwards. We can't say how long afterwards, but probably not long--perhaps a matter of days. It seems very likely that Matthew gave the feast and invited the Lord to speak to his friends because he did not yet feel prepared to speak to them himself. He had just started to follow the Lord. He was a new disciple, a learner. And so rather than misrepresent the Lord, he invited his friends, "a great company of publicans and of others" (which the Pharisees and scribes later called "sinners") so that they could hear the Lord.

Now let us look at:

## II. MATTHEW'S FEAST (Luke 5:29-33).

For Matthew to have the feast "in his own house" shows that he was a man of wealth. But the thing that is important for us to notice is:

### A. Matthew's desire to witness to his friends (v. 29).

Again, from all three of the Gospel records of this feast, we are not told how effective Matthew's efforts were. That was not the point of the story. But it would take a very superficial consideration of this passage to overlook what Matthew did. The fact that apparently he did not do much of the talking, is not a reflection upon him. Instead, it showed a great deal of God-given boldness.

You will remember our Lord's words to the leper who was healed. He was told not to say anything to anyone, but to show himself to the priest. This, in effect, was what Matthew was doing--not showing himself to the priest, but showing himself to his former cronies in business, taking a stand to declare himself a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Matthew must have been a man of considerable influence for the publicans and sinners to respond in such great numbers.

But now let us look at:

B. The objection of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 30).

The scribes and Pharisees had gotten wind of the feast, and probably spoke to the disciples as they were going in to Matthew's house.

We know who the publicans were, but who were "the sinners"?

All people are sinners, but the term could hardly be used here in such a general way. It was not a term which the scribes and Pharisees would have used of all people. But obviously the crowd which was gathering were people whom the scribes and Pharisees considered to be sinners. It is a term which was used by the Jews of Gentiles. Paul was speaking along this line in Gal. 2:15 when he wrote,

We who are Jews by nature,  
and not **sinners of the Gentiles**.

So this could refer to Gentiles. I doubt if it were used of immoral people, like a prostitute--another way in which the term sinner was used. It probably referred to Jews who for one reason or another were in disrepute with the powers-that-be of the Jewish religion. The publicans were looked upon as sinners to be sure, but there were others there, not publicans, who were in trouble with the Jewish authorities. It was a crowd that were thoroughly disapproved of by the scribes and Pharisees.

And so the Pharisees wanted to know, asking other disciples who were there, "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" You can be sure that the scribes and Pharisees would have had no part in entertaining such a group. They were not surprised that Matthew would have them in. They were his people. But why the Lord would be there, and why the disciples would be there, the scribes and Pharisees would not and could not understand. In Matthew's account he recorded their question like this: **"Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners"** (Matt. 9:11).

C. The Lord's response (v. 31, 32).

It would be interesting to know how the disciples would have answered the question. Perhaps the Lord knew that they did not really know why themselves, and so the Lord answered them in the words of these two verses.

Here the Lord called Himself "a physician." He only did this in one other instance as far as the Gospels are concerned. Cf. Luke 4:23. We know that no one ever healed as many people as our Lord did. He was truly the Great Physician. But he chose to use this term, not of the healing of the body, but of the healing of the soul!

Matthew knew why he had invited his friends. They were sin-sick, just as he had been. The Lord had cleansed him of his sins, and he wanted to see the Lord do the same for his friends whom he knew were still in their sins.

The Lord's statement to the Pharisees and scribes indicated that they had not been invited because they did not know that they were sick with sin. They believed that they were spiritually "whole," healthy, sound. They felt that they were already "righteous" because of their position and because of their good deeds. They looked upon themselves as right with God, but they considered publicans and sinners as actually beyond hope. And yet here was this good Man, this Miracle Worker, who was risking His reputation to be with a group who were socially and religiously outcasts. And they could not understand it! Why would He do it?

His answer was that this is why He had come. He had left heaven to come to earth, to become a Man which would mean that most men would not realize Who He really was, and he "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He did not come to deal with people who thought that they were already right with God (and who would not listen to Him), but He came to call "sinners to repentance." He did not intend to leave them in their sins. He did not come to excuse their sins. He came to redeem them out of their sins, and to make the new creatures.

In Luke 19 we have the account of our Lord's ministry to another publican whom I have mentioned: Zacchaeus. He climbed up into a tree to see the Lord as the Lord was passing by. To his amazement, the Lord looked up in the tree, called him by name, and said that He "must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). And that time, too, the people all said that "he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner" (Luke 19:7).

But how did the Lord explain it? Listen to His words which Luke has recorded for us in Luke 19:9, 10:

This day is salvation come to this house,  
forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.  
For the Son of man is come  
to seek and to save that which was lost.

People are lost. But they are also sick, spiritually sick, incurably sick, sick because of sin. And there is only One Who can heal us of this disease, the worst of all diseases-- and that One is Christ.

This is a disease which afflicts every person who has ever lived on the earth--with the one exception: our Lord Jesus Christ. He was "without sin."

How did we get it?

We were born with it! This is what David declared in his Psalm of confession, Psalm 51, verse 5.

But every single one of us had added to the offensiveness of our condition before God because we all have gotten worse because of our own sinful choices. Nobody improves at all until we come to Christ. He saves us. He heals us. He makes us different. We look at a little baby and we know that apart from the grace of God that little child is going to get worse, get farther away from God, get deeper and deeper into sin, unless God intervenes.

But let me tell you another way that we make our condition worse. And that is by associating with the wrong kind of people. The book of Proverbs warns us about even being with angry people, or with strange women, the prostitutes. Man's history is one of getting worse and worse, not better and better.

But the tragic thing about people is that they don't know that they are sick. And since they don't know that they have this deadly disease of sin, they aren't interested in Christ. They see no need for the Gospel. And they can't understand anyone like the Lord Jesus Christ Who would spend time with publicans and sinners.

People are dead in their sins; Christ came to give them life. People are lost; Christ came to find them and to bring them to God. People are blind, spiritually blind; Christ came to make them see. People are sick; Christ came to heal them of their sins. That is the reason Matthew was so anxious to reach his friends. He wanted them to learn something about themselves that they did not know. He wanted them to know that they had a fatal, an incurable disease. It is the disease of sin. Not even the scribes and Pharisees knew that

they were sick, and that they should have been among those publicans and sinners listening carefully to every word which the Lord Jesus said. HE CAME TO CALL SINNERS TO REPENTANCE.

Concl: We are not told what the results were. We are not told how many turned to the Lord, and were healed of their sin. We are simply told that Matthew made this great discovery, and one proof that he was healed was to be seen in the fact that he brought all of his "friends" to the Lord so they could hear about their condition and be healed, too.

What a tragedy it is when the men, such as the scribes and Pharisees, who should have known the answer, are just as ignorant of their real needs as the publicans and sinners were! That is true today. There are many religious leaders who do not know that they are sick, spiritually sick, and they will argue with you if you try to tell them.

But let us thank God every day if we have been healed. And let us live each day that others may know. The Lord has gone back to heaven, but He is still healing those who know that they need a physician. Most people will go to a doctor when they know that they are sick, and when they learn that they have a spiritual disease called sin, then and only then will they seek the help and healing power from the Great Physician.

If you have wondered why the Lord would eat with publicans and sinners, I hope you know now. And if you are still in your sins, I trust that God in His grace will draw you to Christ that you may be healed of your sin, and made whole by the blood of Christ.