

Week Three reading: Matthew 5 – 11 | Mark 2 – 3 | Luke 5 – 7 | John 5

A closer look at Matthew

Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32 gives us several details about the calling of Matthew – who he was and the totality of his life change. He was a Jew, working as a tax collector. According to Torrey's New Topical Textbook, the tax collectors (also known as publicans) were:

- Collectors of the public taxes for Rome (Luke 5:27)
- Suspected of extortion (Luke 3:13)
- Often guilty of extortion (Luke 19:8)
- Were very rich from extorted money (Luke 19:2)
- Were despised; classed with the most infamous characters (Matthew 11:19, 21:32; Luke 18:11)
- Jesus was despised for His association with them (Matthew 9:11, 11:19)
- Often kind to their friends and hospitable (Matthew 5:46-47)
- Many of them embraced the gospel and Jesus' teaching (Matthew 21:31)

The Jewish Encyclopedia comments:

“The fact that they {Jews} were helping the Romans in the exaction of the heavy taxes imposed upon the Jews, combined with the rapacity of some tax-collectors who, taking advantage of the indefiniteness of the tariffs, overcharged the taxpayer, rendered this class of officials hateful to the people. Hence the stringent Jewish legislation which classified the tax-collectors with robbers. Thus, for instance, it was forbidden to take payment in coin from the treasury of the tax-gatherer or to receive alms from it, because the money had been gained by robbery (B. K. x. 1; "Yad," Gezelah, § 5; Shulḥan 'Aruk, Ḥoshen Mishpat, 370, 389). The tax-gatherer was ineligible to serve as judge or even as a witness (Sanh. 25b). If one member of a family was a tax-gatherer, all its members were liable to be considered as such for the purposes of testimony, because they would be likely to shield him (Sheb. 39a).”

Other details we can conclude about Matthew from known Jewish practices and context are:

- He was raised with a Jewish education (his knowledge of the prophecies and his continual references to Old Testament texts)
- He was banned from the synagogue and forbidden to sacrifice and worship at the temple (Jewish law ostracized him because of his profession, seen as in the same class as harlots and Gentiles)
- The writing of the Matthew's gospel displays an undertone of humility – he only mentions himself twice, once when he records his call and once in his listing of the 12 apostles in 10:2-4

We study Him to know Him, and by knowing Him, learn how to better live for Him.

- He downplays the extravagance of the banquet at his home after his calling - according to the Luke's account (5:29), Matthew was a wealthy and well-known tax collector who threw a large banquet of his colleagues and friends for them to meet Jesus

Matthew had a conversion experience and walked away from his wealth and status to follow Jesus' teaching. He certainly would have seen the polar opposites in the treatment between the religious teachers and Rabbi Jesus.

Read Matthew 7:1-5. Why would this reprimand from Jesus resonate with Matthew? _____

What are the dangers of passing judgment on others? _____

THE SOCIAL GROUPS THAT INTERACTED WITH JESUS

The publicans and sinners

3 mentioned publicans: Matthew, Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18); social gatherings involving them

According to Matthew 9:12, why did Jesus interact with this group? _____

The religious leaders

Pharisees (a group of influential Jews who advocated and adhered to strict observance of the Sabbath rest, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and on later traditions)

Nicodemus was one religious leader who was receptive to Jesus' teachings. That encounter is in John 3; he challenged the chief priests in John 7:48-53; and he is also mentioned in John 19:39-42 as one who helped prepare Jesus' body for burial.

Sadducees (another prominent group of Jews who were probably a smaller "elite" group, but even more influential than the Pharisees; they followed the laws of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah), but rejected newer traditions)

Priests (descendants of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices, and thus were the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people)

Zechariah was a priest and father of John the Baptist, mentioned in Luke 1; Caiaphas was the High Priest at the time of Jesus' trial before the High Council

Scribes (men specially trained in writing and thus influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law; agents of

the rulers); mentioned as those that debated and criticized the sayings of Jesus (Mark 9); Jesus warned of them in Mark 12:38 for their arrogance and sense of entitlement and self-righteousness

According to Matthew 23:2-3, it wasn't the teachings of the religious leaders that were the issue, but the living example they failed to be as leaders following the truths they taught. There are several woes spoken against the religious leaders in Matthew 23:13-32. List a few of them:

Every one of us has pharisaical tendencies – any time we elevate our method of _____ {fill in the blank} over another, we exhibit a pharisaical mentality; any time we criticize someone's sin more than we grieve over our own, we exhibit a pharisaical mentality. How can we, as Christians, heed these same warnings and surrender that mentality to Christ? _____

The disciples

Jesus had several layers of disciples – there were the 3 closest ones (Peter, James, and John) who were part of His most personal moments (Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2; Luke 8:51); there were the eleven (after Judas' death) who were commissioned to spread the good news of His resurrection (Matthew 28:16-20); and there were additional disciples of His teaching who followed with the crowds (Luke 6:13, 17)

Mark 8:34 states, "Summoning the crowd along with His disciples, He said to them: "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." The Greek word for to deny (aparneomai) means "to forget one's *self*, lose sight of one's *self* and one's own *interests*".

The curious crowd

While the other people groups were often included in this group, the crowd represents those that wanted the signs and miracles. Each person in the crowd made a choice about the Jesus they were witnessing – some chose to follow Him, others chose to turn away from Him, and yet others chose to betray Him.

The crowd wanted something from Jesus

The religious leaders wanted nothing from Jesus

The disciples couldn't get enough of Jesus

The sinners knew they were nothing without Jesus

APPLICATION FROM WEEK THREE

We looked at Jesus' reprimand about judging in Matthew 7; in Matthew 9, Jesus says at Matthew's banquet, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (which is a reference to Hosea 6:6). How does that statement relate to the reprimand in chapter 7? _____

Are there times when you prioritize your sacrifice over extending mercy? _____

Mark 8 continues in verse 36: "or what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life?" If the meaning of deny in verse 34 is *to forget one's own interests*, what is the irony of rejecting His invitation to deny one's self?

Are there area(s) of your life that need to be forgotten...to lose sight of...to be denied...in order to better follow Jesus?

May we approach every task this week with a willing heart to deny ourselves and follow Jesus' lead. And may we understand that no personal sacrifice is greater than what He has given to us. May we be like the sinners who knew they were nothing without Jesus and grow like the disciples who couldn't get enough of Jesus!

Memory/meditation verse: Summoning the crowd along with His disciples, He said to them: "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." Mark 8:34 (HCSB)

Week Four reading: Matthew 12 – 14 | Mark 4 – 6 | Luke 8 – 9 | John 6