

Jesus' Program of Discipleship

📖 Matthew 9:9-17

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We're studying Matthew 8:1-11:1. This is the second narrative followed by discourse section in Matthew's Gospel. This narrative-discourse section is dedicated to demonstrating Jesus' credentials as the King by way of His miracles. The miracles are grouped thematically into three, three and four respectively with two sections on discipleship separating the groups. Tonight we turn to the second section on discipleship and the dialogue, as usual, is full of surprises.

Here we find in Matthew 9:9 an event that seems to follow chronologically on the heels of the healing of the paralytic. We read that **Jesus went on from there** and the location **there** refers to the location where he healed the paralytic which is stated in verse 1 to have been "His own city." What was His own city? Capernaum. Why was it not Nazareth? Nazareth was the town where He had been brought up (Luke 4:16). Why was it not also His own city? Because He had been rejected by them, they tried to run Him off a cliff! So He had left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum (Matt 4:13). The event here then occurred near Capernaum. **As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew.** Mark and Luke refer to him as Levi (adhesion, joined, associate, companion). They are the same individual but Matthew alone referred to himself as **Matthew** (gift of YHWH). So Jesus sees Him. Where did He see Him? **Sitting in the tax collector's booth.** Herod's kingdom had been divided up and parceled out to various descendants. The dividing line between the Galilee and Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Trachonitis and Auranitis was essentially the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee. This was a natural dividing line. Herod Antipas was given the Galilee and the fixed revenue of two hundred talents per year.¹ Herod Philippus was given Gaulanitis, Batanaea, etc...and the fixed revenue of one hundred talents per year. All that mattered to Rome was that these amounts were annually collected. Matthew was stationed strategically where the trade route crossed the Jordan, most likely on the side of the Galilee. The amounts brought in by those like Matthew, who were called 'publicans' was irrelevant as far as Rome was concerned. Consequently, corruption was rampant. The position of publican was farmed out by Rome to the highest bidder who won the right to collect taxes for five years. Matthew had paid a high price for his post and had to bring in enough revenue to cover his cost for the post as well as what Rome required. Everything else belonged to him. Shepard points out that Matthew was no ordinary tax collector but the customs house official. The Talmud distinguishes the two positions. Both were

looked upon with disdain but the customhouse official with greater disdain. The ordinary tax collector collected the fixed rate taxes of property and income² but the customhouse official collected at variable rates on "imports, exports, toll on roads, bridges, the harbor, the town tax, and a great multiplicity of other variable taxes on an unlimited variety of things,"³ resulting in much abuse and illicit gain. "The Jews detested these publicans not only on account of their frequent abuses and tyrannical spirit, but because the very taxes they were forced to collect by the Roman government were a badge of servitude and a constant reminder that God had forsaken His people and land in spite of the Messianic hope... The publicans were classed by the people with harlots, usurers, gamblers, thieves, and dishonest herdsmen, who lived hard, lawless lives. They were just "licensed robbers" and "beasts in human shape." "According to Rabbinism there was no hope for a man like Levi. He was excluded from all religious fellowship. His money was considered tainted and deviled anyone who accepted it. He could not serve as a witness" in a court of law. "The Rabbis had no word of help for the publican..."⁴

As such what Jesus does next is shocking, seeing Matthew **He said to him, "Follow Me!"** This is almost a technical term for a call to committed discipleship. We saw it before in 8:22 with Jesus' call to "another disciple." It was not a call to become a believer because those called were already believers. These had already been convinced of Jesus' Messianic claims. What they were now being called to was committed discipleship. This was not Jesus' first contact with Matthew. Matthew had likely started off curious and followed Jesus around considering His teaching and claims. After some time he was convinced of His teaching and claims and believed in Him. Now Jesus called Him to become a committed disciple. Contrary to the other disciple who requested to "first bury my father," Matthew **got up and followed Him.** This man already knew the costs of committed discipleship; he would have to abandon his corrupt profession as customhouse official and yet remain in great financial obligation to Rome. Therefore his immediate response of following Christ signified that his dedication to Christ was greater than that to Rome. This would likely put him in a very precarious position.

One application we see is that Jesus' calling of Matthew shows that He did not require a believer to clean up their life before calling them to committed discipleship. Instead, Jesus reached right into the most detestable class of people in all of Jewish society; unwanted people, completely cut off from the community. He did this to demonstrate mercy, something the Pharisees knew nothing about as well as to establish this man as the author of the first gospel. It shows that God can do great transformative work in a person, no matter how bad they may be, no matter where they come from, no matter what their skin color, no matter what God is greater than all of that!

In verse 10 we have a change in scene. **Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house.** We're not told here but Luke mentions that this banquet was held by Matthew in his own home (Luke 5:29). Jesus was **reclining at the table** in his house. The picture of Leonardo DaVinci's *The Last Supper* is all wrong. Customarily they stretched out on mats on the floor leaning on one elbow around low tables that were fit together in the shape of a horseshoe. The server would come inside the horseshoe to serve the guests who

reclined around the outside. And **behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.** Matthew had apparently invited many other **tax collectors** and others classified as **sinners** to enjoy this celebratory banquet that signaled the end of his career as a tax collector. He apparently wanted to expose them to Jesus who was the reason he was leaving his career. It was an opportunity for evangelistic outreach. If Matthew, a tax collector himself, could be saved out of the depths of depravity then perhaps his friends could too. The word **behold** is an interjection designed to grab our attention. The presence of **many tax collectors and sinners...dining with Jesus and His disciples** is presented as a shocking scene.

Verse 11, **When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"** The magnitude of their astonishment is lost in our culture when sharing a meal with someone is relatively insignificant. In Jewish culture sharing a meal with someone signified "acceptance and camaraderie."⁵ In their view Jesus was approving the behavior of these people. It is notable that in their astonishment the Pharisees did not even attempt to approach Jesus. Instead they went **to His disciples.** Probably they had seen Jesus' stiff rebuke of scribes on earlier occasions and were reticent to approach Him. Perhaps they would get less stinging results from **His disciples.** Their question is telling; the people Jesus was **eating with** were social outcasts. How could any self-respecting Jew have table fellowship with such dregs of society? In their view, a **teacher** like Jesus who made such stupendous claims would necessitate seeking out the company of the righteous Pharisees, not **tax collectors and sinners.**

Those classified as **sinners** were classified as such, not in the terms we think of, but in terms of the standards of the scribes and Pharisees. These standards, as we've seen before in the Sermon on the Mount, did not reflect the true interpretation of the Law but a distortion. Repeatedly Jesus referred to their distorted standards by the phrase, "You have heard it said...but I say to you." Clearly Jesus did not share their interpretation of the Law and hence He did not share their view that only a segment of society were sinners. Nevertheless, He responds in terms they would readily understand.

It might have been interesting in verse 12 to see how Jesus' **disciples** responded but Jesus didn't give them the opportunity. Overhearing the question He stepped into the conversation and **said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."** His response is cast in terms of the standards of the Pharisees. In the Pharisees estimation they were already spiritually **healthy** and in no need of a spiritual **physician.** They had their own works of righteousness which, to their mind, were sufficient to guarantee a rich entrance into the kingdom of heaven. It was those **who are sick**, such as tax collectors, harlots, usurers, gamblers, thieves and the like who lived lawless lives and therefore needed a spiritual **physician.** Jesus put Himself in the role of the spiritual **physician** who could make them well. This was a role the Pharisees should have been fulfilling, meeting the needs of those most in need, but because of their incompetence and self-righteousness Jesus was filling the role. Ultimately, of course, the Pharisees were sick above all others and Jesus knew it. That is why He implores them to go discover it for themselves in the next verse.

Verse 13, **But go and learn** is a rabbinic phrase “that indicated that the Pharisees needed to study the text further.”⁶ It should be remembered that many were considered experts in the Law and had large portions of the Torah memorized so that they could debate the fine points of the text. In that light this is a stinging rebuke. They may have had the text memorized, they may have debated it and made legal judgments on the basis of it, but they didn't know the true sense. They had erected an erroneous system of interpreting the text that resulted in a ritualistic external worship. This is why Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6. What's Hosea 6:6? **I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE.** Literally it says “mercy,” I DESIRE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE. What's does this strange saying mean? I thought God did desire sacrifice in the OT. Is this saying that the sacrificial system given in the OT was wrong? No. It can't be saying that. God instructed them to sacrifice in Leviticus. So what is He saying? He's saying that if you do the sacrifices without showing mercy then the sacrifices had been reduced to mere external ritual. God wanted them to reach out with mercy to those in need. That was more important than going through the ritual of sacrifice. The same thing had happened in Hosea's day. The northern kingdom of Israel was in decline and they continued to offer sacrifice but they didn't show mercy. The prophet said this was hypocritical. What is Jesus saying by parallel? That the Pharisees were doing the same as Hosea's generation, their worship had become external ritual only without mercy. They had the form of godliness but denied the power thereof. Constable says, “God had revealed through Hosea that the apostates of his day had lost the heart of temple worship even though they continued to practice its rituals. Jesus implied that the Pharisees had done the same thing. They were preserving the external practices of worship carefully, but they had failed to maintain its essential heart. Their attitude toward the tax collectors and sinners showed this.”⁷ Jesus, on the other hand, showed mercy to those who realized they were spiritually sick. He reached out to them by having table fellowship with them. This is what the Law taught, mercy. The Pharisees, for all their memorization of the Law, did not have mercy. In order to discover their lack of mercy Jesus insisted they needed to go and study the OT text further. To do so would require them to humble themselves, accept His rebuke and go back to the text.

Jesus' final words indicate that He, in contrast to them, knew exactly what Hos 6:6 meant, **for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.** If they had understood the text they would have sought out sinners. But because they didn't He came to do what they should have been doing. Again, He makes the contrast in the terms of the Pharisees who viewed themselves as **righteous.** Jesus stated emphatically that He **did not come to call** them. Clearly then Jesus does not call all men to Himself without exception. The reason he did not come to call them is because they were self-righteous and thus saw no need of Him. Instead He came to call **sinners.** This does not mean that the Pharisees were not sinners but that they did not recognize themselves as such. By **sinners** Jesus means those who saw their need. He proposed Himself as the solution to their need. If they would believe in Him He would credit them with a righteousness that would fit them for the kingdom of heaven. Those who saw themselves as righteous within themselves would not be partakers of the kingdom of heaven.

So the first pericope tonight teaches that Jesus called disciples from the lowest rank of Jewish society. He did not require people to clean up their lives before calling them to be His disciples. In verse 9 He went on from

Capernaum near the Jordan River and saw Matthew sitting in the tax collector's booth. Matthew had already been following Jesus around the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Having considered His claims he had also believed in Him. On this day Jesus challenged him to give up all for the sake of Christ and follow Him. At that instant Matthew left his corrupt career and followed Him. In verse 10 Matthew had a banquet in order to celebrate the end of his career as a tax collector and to introduce his friends to Jesus and His ministry. His friends were, in the main, the dregs of society; tax collectors and sinners. In verse 11, when the Pharisees saw this they questioned Jesus' disciples, "Why was their teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" To them it signified acceptance and camaraderie. In verse 12 Jesus overheard and told them that only the sick need a physician. Since they considered themselves healthy He did not associate with them. He was reaching out to help those who sensed their need. In verse 13 he gives a stinging rebuke challenging them to go back and study the OT text further, in particular Hosea 6:6, which taught that God desired mercy and not mere external ritual. He had come to reach out to those who saw their need, not those who were self-righteous. Matthew was among those who were in need and Jesus reached out to him. Consequently, upon positive response Jesus took this man who was the low of the low of Jewish society and used him to write the Gospel of Matthew, one of the most important NT books. Matthew is an example of what the true Physician can do with any man, woman or child.

By application, do you require others to clean up their life before you give them attention? Do you only fellowship with those of good reputation? Jesus didn't go into bars, crack houses or whorehouses, that's not what He did and I don't recommend you do that, but in a good setting there is nothing wrong with reaching out to these people. There is everything right with it. And if you don't something is seriously wrong! The dregs realize their need of the Great Physician more poignantly than moral people. Because of this we should reach out to them. That is what Jesus did and that is what we should do!

The second pericope tonight is in Matthew 9:14. Here we have another change in scene indicated by the Greek word *τοτε*, translated **Then**. **Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"** This interaction may have grown out of the prior section. In the prior Jesus and His disciples had been feasting at Matthew's house and probably John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting so they ask, **"Why...do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"** There was a difference in Jesus' behavior, a sharp difference and it did not line up with either John and his disciples or the Pharisees.

So the behavior in view is fasting, this is at least what provides the occasion for this teaching. Fasting, you may recall from Matthew 6, was one of the three chief acts of piety as practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. Under Levitical Law there was only one day they were commanded to fast and that was the Day of Atonement. During the Intertestamental Times four other fasts grew up alongside the Law that became mandatory for the pious. At the time of Christ the Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday, not incidentally the very days the people met for synagogue. They did this in order to be seen by men. Fasting had become an externalized show of piety

in order to impress people with their spirituality. Jesus called it hypocrisy and apparently the hypocrisy wasn't limited to the Pharisees but extended to **the disciples of John**. Both groups took note of the fact that Jesus and His disciples did not behave in accordance with the religious traditions.

Now it was not the Pharisees that came to ask Him. It was **the disciples of John**. It's interesting that there were still disciples of John the Baptist around when John earlier pointed his disciples to follow the One coming after him, whose sandals he was not fit to remove. But we know that not all the disciples of John the Baptist were present the day Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John and pointed Him out as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Therefore these may be from an earlier group who had not yet come to know of Jesus or were not yet convinced for some reason that Jesus was the One. In chapter 11 John himself will question whether He is the one by sending his disciples to ask Him. And even in Acts 19 there are still disciples of John the Baptist roaming around near Ephesus twenty years later. So there began a sect of disciples who followed John and even today there are in the Middle East a sect of those called disciples of John the Baptist and that just shows how prone men are to latch on to religion.

Now at this time I take it they are asking a sincere question since Jesus does not rebuke them as He typically did the Pharisees. These people had repented at the preaching of John and so we would have expected them to now follow Jesus. But they are inquiring. Their question, ultimately, was why Jesus did not keep all the fasts that were expected in 1st century religious tradition. His answer in verse 15 employs the imagery of a wedding feast. **And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?"** Fasting was incompatible with the situation at hand. When a bridegroom is present at the wedding feast it is not appropriate for the attendants to fast because fasting is associated with mourning and a wedding feast is a time of joy, not mourning. Pentecost says, in Jewish custom "the wedding feast was not instituted and the invited guests assembled until the bridegroom was there to host the feast. When the feast began it was a time of rejoicing for all who were present. Christ said that just as it would be inappropriate to expect the guests at a wedding feast to fast, so it was inappropriate" at that time "for His disciples to fast."³ Clearly Jesus was **the bridegroom** and His disciples were **the attendants**. Since He had arrived and they were all together it was as if they were at a wedding feast. It was not appropriate to fast and mourn but to feast and rejoice. Therefore they didn't fast. The implications from the Messianic Kingdom are clear. The kingdom is commonly pictured as a great wedding feast. The Messiah will be the bridegroom and the guests will assemble not to fast and mourn but to feast and rejoice. The fact that Jesus indicated here that He was the bridegroom and His disciples the attendants indicates that He was offering the kingdom at this time. It was 'at hand' and if received the kingdom would come. Therefore it was not appropriate to fast and mourn but to feast and rejoice. This is why they did not fast!

Nevertheless, He predicts in verse 15b that the bridegroom would soon be departing. **But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.** Jesus is speaking of a time when His

disciples **will fast**. That time is when He **is taken away from them**. The verb **taken away** is *απαρθη* and is an aorist passive subjunctive. The aorist points to a definite event in the future and the passive voice means another will take Him away. Without question He is speaking of His death at the hands of His enemies. Glasscock says, "To be taken away... indicates a nonvoluntary separation. He would not desert them but would be *taken away*. The reference was definitely to His crucifixion and most likely alluded to Isaiah 53:8 (LXX, *airetai apo tes ges*)."⁹ Toussaint says, "The King gives the first intimation of His violent death in the verb which He uses. *Απαρω* does not simply mean *to depart* but *to take away*. This together with the fact that the verb is passive suggests that the Lord was to suffer violence at the hands of others. The aorist tense looks at it as a definite event. After Israel's Bridegroom has been taken away and all the consequent blessings of the kingdom postponed,"¹⁰ then His disciples shall fast. It is a fasting in my estimation that would last three days, for once He is risen there mourning should be replaced by joy, for death will have been conquered. Hence with the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit and formation of the Church, there is not much need for fasting since we are not in mourning. Our victory is secured by Christ's resurrection and the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a down payment ensuring more to come in the future kingdom. We have victory in Christ!

In verse 16 and 17 he gives two illustrations; one for John and his disciples and the other for the Pharisees. Both are seemingly difficult but communicate a basic truth; the kingdom Jesus was offering was incompatible with the old religious system. Jesus did not come as a reformer to fix up the old religious system. He came to replace it with something new. Verse 16 and 17 show that if He tried to wed His kingdom truths with the old religious system it would only result in more disaster, **But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined...** Both illustrations are a little difficult to understand from our modern culture. Glasscock explains, "both reflect common phenomena of the chemical and substance reaction when new material or new wine is introduced to old. The energy and dynamics of the new create pressure and tension with the old, and the results are disastrous."¹¹ The issue of fasting served as the perfect occasion for explaining that His kingdom offer and the old religious system were at total odds. Jesus was present, therefore it was not fitting to fast and mourn as the old religious system taught, instead it was time to feast and rejoice in light of the 'at hand' kingdom. The two responses to the kingdom offer were completely incompatible; one cannot fast and not fast at the same time, only one behavior is acceptable. To try and accommodate by putting the two together would result in a worse situation than already existed; the tear would become worse and the wine would be poured out and the wineskins ruined.

Therefore, instead of trying to patch up the old system by combining the 'at hand' kingdom truth with it Jesus says they need to set that entire old religious system aside and accept His fresh kingdom offer. He taught this by saying at the end of verse 17, **but they put new wine into fresh wineskins and both are preserved**. The point seems to be that His kingdom teachings were exclusive as to both time and kind. The word **new** is *νεος* and

means "new in time." The word **fresh** is *καινος* and means "new in kind." The kingdom was both new in time as well as new in kind. As to time the kingdom was 'at hand.' This was not always the case. Only when His forerunner came and began announcing His soon arrival was the kingdom 'at hand.' In this sense the kingdom was "new in time." As to the "new in kind" the kingdom He was proclaiming was of a fresh quality. It would not be a renovated form of the old tired religious system of the Pharisees. That system was worn out and crusty. His kingdom would be something new altogether.

The sharp contrast shows how far 1st century Pharisaism had drifted from the kingdom ideals as they were envisioned in the OT. Jesus thus came not to fix up Pharisaism but to replace it with the ideals that were intended from ancient times. What should the disciples of John who came and asked this question do? "They should...leave the forerunner and join themselves to the King. Unless they did, they could not partake of any new dispensation which Jesus might bring..."¹²

In summary to this pericope we are learning that the truths Jesus is teaching could not be wed with the truths of the system of 1st century Pharisaic Judaism. Even the disciples of John were following this system in the main with perhaps some minor reforms. In verse 14 the disciples of John came to Jesus, probably in light of the feasting that occurred at Matthew's home, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" The fasts they are asking about are fasts that developed during the Intertestamental Times that were not required by the OT Law but had become part of religious tradition for the pious Jew. In verse 15 Jesus answered that He was the bridegroom and the attendants of the bridegroom do not mourn as long as He is with them. Fasting was not an appropriate behavior at that time. For the disciples of John and the Pharisees to be in mourning was a tacit rejection that Jesus was the bridegroom. Then Jesus predicted a time when His disciples would fast, namely, when the bridegroom was violently taken away from them, a prediction of the crucifixion. Even then the fasting would last only a few days, for in the resurrection victory would be clinched. In verses 16 and 17 Jesus explained that the old system was incompatible with the new situation. The two could not be wed. Instead, what the disciples of John needed to do was leave John and become disciples of Jesus.

In conclusion, Jesus' point in both sections is that the system of 1st century Pharisaism was broken beyond repair. It required fasts which were simply unbiblical and hence inconsistent with how they should have been living. As to whether the new things Christ was proclaiming could simply be added to the old system to fix it up Jesus responded with an emphatic no! Their strong desire to hang on to their old traditions was causing them to live in ways that did not satisfy the King. By application this is the same thing that happens when people distort the biblical text today. For example, those who blend historicism with futurism in the area of eschatology end up focusing their efforts on prepping and trying to identify the anti-Christ when they should be sharing the gospel and looking for Christ! Their distortions of the text are Pharisaic and cause them to respond improperly to the surrounding state of world affairs. Another example is postmillennialism which says we are going to bring in the kingdom by putting into legislation the OT Law. This distortion of the text is not patching up the world and

making it a better place but diverting attention away from how to live the Christian life by the Spirit. Examples are legion of how a distorted corruption of the biblical text can cause people to respond to the current situation in an oblique way. We have to keep our focus where it is supposed to be and that all starts with knowing the text and then understanding the times in which we live. Such is Christ's program for discipleship.

¹ Cf Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land*, p 102.

² Geikie quoted by Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 154.

³ Shepard quoted by Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 155.

⁴ Shepard quoted by Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 155.

⁵ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 204.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 9:12.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 9:12.

⁸ Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 156.

⁹ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 207.

¹⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 131.

¹¹ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, p 208.

¹² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 131-2.