

# GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

## Lesson Six

### IN THE GOSPELS: Matthew (Levi)

#### Burden to Impart:

*God's calling is not based upon a person's goodness or righteousness, it is based upon His own selection and love (Eph. 1:4). Matthew was a despised tax collector, a "publican," one who loved filthy money even more than his fellow countrymen. But the Lord loved him, chose him, and called him. Matthew was immediately set free from the love of money. Along with his call, he received a new heart, one that loved the Lord and wanted above all else to follow Him.*

**Memory Verse:** "...Jesus...saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the customs office, and says to him, Follow Me. And he rose and followed Him" (Matthew 9:9).

#### Facts to Teach:

1. The Lord's calling of His disciples was not based on any natural virtue. Some that He called were good, and some were not so "good." He called all those whom His Father had chosen for His kingdom (John 17:6; Eph. 1:4; Titus 3:5).
2. One of those called by the Lord was a tax collector named Matthew (or Levi). Tax collectors were despised by the Jews for two reasons: 1) they were considered as traitors to their countrymen because they collected their tax money for the Roman empire, and 2) they often overcharged the people and kept the extra money for themselves.
3. The Lord purposely went to Matthew's place of work to find him. Although Matthew was a tax collector, he was selected by the Father to be in His heavenly kingdom. The Lord looked upon Matthew as he sat at the tax office and then called him, saying, "Follow Me" (Luke 5:27).
4. In one instant a great miracle happened. Matthew, a slave of money and sin, was set free. As he looked back into the eyes of the Lord Jesus he was set free from the love of money and everything else. Matthew instantly "leaving all...rose up and followed Him."
5. So great was Matthew's joy and gratitude that he prepared a great feast for the Lord at his house and invited many of his friends to come and meet the Lord. As they ate together and talked, some others came and blamed the Lord for eating with "tax collectors and sinners." Jesus answered them saying that He had not come to call the "righteous" (for there are none). He had come to call "sinners" (like Matthew and his friends) to repentance.
6. Matthew loved the Lord and was very thankful that the Lord had come to call even such a sinner as himself to be one of His disciples. Matthew faithfully followed the Lord, and was even chosen by the Lord to be one of the twelve Apostles. Matthew's gospel was the first permanent record of the life of Jesus.

**SUBJECT: GOD’S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: In the Gospels – Matthew (Levi)**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matt. 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32

**AIM:** To see that the Lord Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

**MEMORY VERSES:** Luke 5:31-32; 1 Tim. 1:15m

**BACKGROUND:** At the time of the Lord Jesus, the land of Palestine and the Jewish people were under Roman rule. The Roman government imposed many different kinds of taxes on the people. (Teachers may need to explain what taxes are.) The Jews despised being under Roman rule and hated to pay all the taxes, which were often unfairly imposed on them.

People were often hired, called publicans or tax collectors, to actually collect the taxes. The tax collectors were especially hated by the Jews. First, because they collected money for the foreign power that occupied their nation, they were considered as traitors. Also, they often overcharged the people, their own countrymen, much more than was necessary, keeping the extra money for themselves. So, typically they would become very wealthy but at the expense of their own people, even the poor of their people. They loved their filthy money and thereby became slaves of money—and sin. Furthermore, they had much contact with Gentiles (non-Jewish people), thus making them unclean.

No Jew, especially a religious one, would associate with a tax collector. Tax collectors, and their families, were shunned, despised, and considered to be the lowest of the low—on the same level as despicable sinners. There was a religious group at that time, called Pharisees, who were the strictest religious Jews in following God’s law (Acts 26:5). They were proud of their superior religious living, their devotion to God, and their knowledge of the Scriptures (Matthew 3:7 RCV, Footnote 7<sup>1</sup>). They were also separatists, i.e. they insisted that they, and any other good Jews, should be completely separated from anything and anyone unclean.

**CONTENT:** The Lord Jesus was at the seaside by the city of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. As He was passing by He saw a man named Levi (or Matthew) sitting at the tax-collecting booth. Matthew was a tax collector. The Lord Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” Although he was a despised tax collector, Matthew was now being called by the Lord to follow Him—what a word of grace! In one instant, a great miracle happened. Matthew, the tax collector, was set free. Leaving all, he rose up and followed Him.

Matthew was so happy and filled with gratitude that he prepared a great feast for the Lord in his house. He invited many of his friends to come and meet the Lord. So there was a great crowd of tax collectors and others reclining at the table with the Lord Jesus and His disciples, for there were many, and they were following Him.

As they ate together, some Pharisees were observing. They asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your Master eat with publicans and sinners?” The Lord Jesus heard them and said to them,

*“Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill...”* In calling people to follow Him, the Lord Jesus came as a Physician, not as a Judge. He wanted to heal people of all their illnesses and save them. The Lord's word here shows that the self-righteous Pharisees did not realize that they needed Him as a Physician. They considered themselves strong. They were blinded by their self-righteousness—they did not know that they were ill.

*“But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’”* The self-righteous Pharisees were confident that they knew all things about God. In order to humble them, the Lord told them to learn more.

*“For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* The religious Pharisees thought they were very righteous—they were the ones who were best following God’s law, so they thought that they were better than anyone else. They did not realize that they too were sinners. They were so righteous in themselves that they did not think they needed a Savior.

After the Lord called him, Matthew loved the Lord. He was very thankful that the Lord had come to call even such a sinner as himself to be one of His disciples. He faithfully followed the Lord, and was even chosen by the Lord to be one of the twelve apostles. Matthew’s gospel was the first permanent record of the life of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament.

### **APPLICATION:**

#### **1. We should be like the Lord.**

The Lord desires that all men would be saved. He cares for everyone. We should never think, “The Lord would never call that one!” The Lord did not think this way about Matthew. We should not judge, condemn, or criticize people. The Pharisees were like this, but the Lord was not. The Lord desires that we show mercy to others. Our heart should be like His heart—to love the sinners. We should not be selective; we need to be willing to speak to whomever the Lord would have us speak to.

#### **2. We should be like Matthew.**

Once we come to know the Lord, even if we know Him just a little bit, we should be like Matthew, who told his friends about the Lord and invited them all to his house to meet Him. We also should tell all our friends about the Lord Jesus and invite them to come to children’s meeting so they can meet Him and know Him.

#### **3. We shouldn’t be like the Pharisees.**

We should never think, like the Pharisees, that we are so strong that we don’t need the Lord. Actually, we all have many “illnesses”. For example, we’re often disobedient, we can lie so easily, and sometimes we take things that don’t belong to us. The Lord can heal us of all our sicknesses. We need to come to the Physician, our Lord Jesus, and pray so that we can be healed. Thank the Lord that He is our Physician!

The Pharisees were self-righteous—they thought that they were so great and so much better than anyone else. Again, we should not be like them. There is none righteous, not even one (Rom 3:10). The Lord did not come to call self-righteous ones, but sinners. We should acknowledge that we are all sinners and that we need Him as our Savior.