**Sunday 28th June 2020**

**Glynde Lutheran Church**

**Sermon on Matthew 9:1-13**

**Theme: “How God changes lives through Jesus”**

**“How are you going to live out the rest of your life?”**

***Introduction:***

Well, the situation in Victoria reminds us that the corona virus is not that far away…. And that reality is that many, many people throughout the world are dying from this corona virus pandemic….

All this makes me think about death and dying…. Maybe it is just an older person thing, given that older people, *particularly those with heart conditions,* are prone to die if they contract the corona virus…. But I think that the COVID-19 virus pandemic is a reminder to us all that the span of life is limited.

All this, I think, focuses our attention on two key life questions:

* **Am I right with God?**
* **How am I going to live out the time that God gives me for my life?**

It is the second of these two questions that I want us to focus on this morning. *I speak a lot to you about the first question, because I want to remind you again and again that you can face the future with peace of mind, as you trust in Jesus as your Saviour…. And I’ll speak to you again about this today some more…*. But it is the second question that I want us to really focus on this morning: “How are you going to live out the rest of your life?”

I want to look at this question with reference to the story of Matthew, whose whole life was changed by meeting Jesus, *just as your whole life and my whole life has been changed by meeting Jesus.*

Well, let’s look at Matthew’s life, and I want to look particularly at Matthew’s life and his priorities *after* meeting Jesus…. And then I want to lead on to thinking about our life and our priorities *now that we have met Jesus and had our whole life changed by meeting him.*

***Part 1: Matthew’s life-changing experience***

Well, who was Matthew? We are not told a lot about him in our Bible reading. So in one sense, we don’t know a whole lot about him. About all we know about him, other than his profession, is his name, *or rather his two names.* In Mark’s and Luke’s gospels, he is called “Levi”, but in Matthew’s gospel, he is called “Matthew” *(Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32; Matt. 9:9-13).* We don’t know why this is, but the most likely reason is that Levi was his birth name, and Matthew, *a name meaning “the gift of God”,* was a name given to Levi by Jesus, *just as Jesus called Simon, “Peter”, meaning “the rock” (John 1:42).*

But in other sense, we know a lot about Matthew, because we know his profession: that he was a tax-collector. There was no class of men in Jesus’ time more hated than tax-collectors. The tax-collectors were the customs officials of the time. They collected taxes from people on goods being taken from one place to another. They apparently didn’t hesitate to overcharge people and even blatantly rob people *(William Barclay, The Master’s men, p. 57-60).*

The Jews, in particular, hated and despised tax-collectors as traitors, because they worked directly or indirectly for the government of the occupying Roman government. Tax-collectors were people whom the religious leaders of the Jews regard as people whom God had set his face against *(Ibid, 60).* Tax-collectors were not allowed by the religious authorities even to worship, which is almost certainly the reason why the tax-collector in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector was said by Jesus to have “stood at a distance” in the Temple, *probably in the outer court of the Temple* *(Luke 18:13).* In the New Testament, tax-collectors are classed with Gentiles, prostitutes, and “sinners” *(Ibid, 60).*

That’s who Matthew, *or rather Levi,* was: a tax-collector, who knew himself to be hated and despised by virtually every person around him, and who would have believed what the religious leaders said about him, *that God despised him, and that he had no hope of a relationship with God.* But then he met Jesus....

Matthew worked as a tax-collector in the town of Capernaum, a town on the northern most part of the shore of Lake Galilee. And it was here that Jesus was beginning his ministry. Jesus has left his home town of Nazareth, and had begun his public ministry for God, his Father, in Capernaum. I guess that prior to Jesus calling Matthew to follow him and to be his disciple, Matthew had many, many opportunities to see Jesus and to listen to him. The makers of the DVD of Matthew’s gospel rightly, I think, have Matthew in the crowd watching Jesus, as Jesus healed the paralytic.

Jesus’ miracles would have convinced Matthew that Jesus had God’s approval that Jesus was worth listening to. And Matthew, too, I’m sure, would have heard Jesus proclaim God’s love for everyone, *that God loved and valued even “sinners’ like him, especially “sinners” like him,* that God offered forgiveness to us all, and that God wants all of us and each one of us to live our life in His family as His forgiven child.

So when Jesus said to Matthew, as he sat in his tax office, “Follow me”, Matthew got up and followed Jesus *(Matt. 9:9).* His action in doing this suggests that he believed Jesus, and that Jesus message had utterly changed that way that he viewed himself. If Jesus could be trusted, *and God had surely shown through Jesus’ miracles that he could be trusted,* then he wasn’t a ‘no-hoper’ in God’s sight. Rather, God loved him, forgave him as he cried out to God for forgiveness, and wanted him to live his life for Him. So Matthew “got up and followed” Jesus *(Matt. 9:9).*

And what’s the first thing Matthew now does?

He invites Jesus to his home for a meal, and he invites other tax-collectors and sinners to join them *(Matt. 9:10-11).* William Barclay points out in his chapter on Matthew in his book *The Master’s Men:* **Matthew’s first action** when he had found Jesus, *or rather when Jesus had found him,* **was to seek to give others the opportunity to meet Jesus** *(p. 61).*

Why? Because he wanted them to meet Jesus and to hear Jesus.... Because he wanted them to know the same peace and joy that he now knew, *the peace and joy of being loved by God, and being forgiven by God.* He invites them to come and to meet Jesus, out of love and compassion for his only friends, *his fellow tax-collectors and others who were looked down on and despised as “sinners”.*

Luke, in his account of Matthew’s response to meeting Jesus, says:

Levi got up, **left everything**, and followed Jesus *(5:28).*

“But there was something that Matthew did take with him, and that something was his pen” *(Ibid, 61).* Later Matthew gave of his time, his talents, and his treasure to write a Gospel, an account of all that Jesus had said and done in the time that Matthew was with him, *up to Jesus’ death, his resurrection, and his ascension.* By the way, Matthew was probably one of the few disciples of Jesus who could have done this. Most of the other apostles were men of limited abilities so far as writing was concerned....

Why does he do this? Why does Matthew give of his time, talents, and treasure to write an account of all that Jesus said and did? Out of gratitude to God? Yes.... But again, I suspect, that Matthew’s main motivation would have been his compassion for others, *his desire that all people might have the life-changing experience that he had had.*

It is noteworthy, I think, that Matthew finishes his gospel by quoting the risen Jesus’ words, spoken on a hill in Galilee:

**Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples**: **baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And will be with you always, to the end of the age** *(Matt. 28:18-20).*

It seems to me that by quoting these words of Jesus at the end of his Gospel, Matthew is emphasising what he regarded as being most special: that God wants *all people, everyone,* to meet Jesus and have their life utterly changed by him.

Well, that’s the real life story of Matthew, and how *his life* was utterly changed by Jesus. He was a tax-collector. He knew what it was to be despised by people and to be, seemingly, hopelessly cut off from any relationship with God. But then along came Jesus, whose message that God loved and valued him, would willingly and freely forgive him, and wanted him to live in His family as His forgiven child, utterly changed Matthew’s life.

It was only later that he really understood what it cost God to make it possible for us to live in His family as His forgiven children: the suffering and death of His Son, Jesus, on the cross *(Luke 24:44-47).* Jesus only explained fully to Matthew and the other apostles why he had to suffer and to die after he had risen from the dead. Thereafter, Matthew used his time, his talents, and his treasure to take the good news of Jesus to people everywhere.

We don’t know for sure where Matthew went personally to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Some say Ethiopia, some say Persia, and some Macedonia. But wherever Matthew went, the good news of Jesus went with him. And his writing, “The Gospel according to Matthew”, went out far and wide proclaiming the wonderful news of how Jesus could change one’s life. Tradition has it that Matthew died a natural death, having served his Lord with every fibre of his being *(Ibid., 64).*

***Part 2: Our life-changing experience***

Matthew’ life was utterly changed by meeting Jesus, and in the same way *our whole life has been utterly changed by meeting Jesus, and by becoming aware of what he did for us on his cross.*

1. Firstly, the way in which we view our *past* has been totally changed! Jesus brings *us* forgiveness for the things that we have done wrong in the past, *just as he brought Matthew forgiveness.* All of us have messed up in life, in little ways and big ways. We’ve all hurt God and hurt others by things that we’ve said and done. We are all “sinners”, as the Bible puts it, *to describe who we are by nature.* We all desperately need God’s forgiveness, and this is what we realise when we meet Jesus*,* and this is what we receive as we come to God in Jesus’ name seeking forgiveness.

This is the heart and soul of the message of Jesus: that God is loving and merciful, and that He offers forgiveness to us and life as His child for *free!* It cost God plenty to make this possible...*.* But it’s ours for free, for the receiving*.*

And God’s forgiveness changes our life. It brings peace and joy into our life, *as it surely did into Matthew’ life!* *(cf. Luke 19:6).* Instead of being burdened down by past mistakes and failures, we are free to live our life serving God by loving the people around us, *knowing that whenever we mess up, and we will, that God forgives us for Jesus’ sake.*

1. The way we view our *present* has been changed too! When you come to Jesus, *or better when you allow Jesus to come to you,* you don’t ever need to feel that you are on your own fighting the struggles that come your way. You don’t ever need to feel that you are on your own, *as I guess Matthew felt before he met Jesus.* As you listen to Jesus, and trust in him as your Saviour, you are right with God, and you are God’s forgiven child. You have a Father in heaven who loves you, and forgives you, and who values you as His dear, dear child. And you have a Friend in Jesus who promises you, as he promised his disciples, “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” *(Matt. 28:20).* And we are part of the family of God: we have brothers and sisters who know us, and love us, and forgive us, and care for us*.*

We have Jesus, too, leading us and guiding us along the right path, *so to speak.* As we follow Jesus, we discover what life’s all about: that life’s all about loving and caring for one another. That’s what God created us to do: to love Him, and to love the people whom He has placed around us. And when we follow Jesus, we find all this out, and we find what out what loving God and loving one another and others involves.

1. When you meet Jesus, *as Matthew did,* then how you view *the future* changes too. How you view the past changes *in the light of God’s forgiveness of you*, how you view the present changes *in the light of who you are because of God’s forgiveness of you,* and how you view the future changes, too. You know, through Jesus, that you are God’s forgiven child, and that nothing, not anything, no even death, can separate you from God’s love and His forgiveness *(Rom. 8:38-39).*

***Part 3: Our response to God’s compassion***

And what’s *our* response to all that God has done for us? This is what I want us to focus on particularly this morning….

What’s *our* response to God wonderfully and amazingly changing our whole life, through Jesus? Gratitude? Yes.... We want to serve God *with every fibre of our being,* out of gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us, *and all that He continues to do for us.*

But there are other motives for us serving God with our whole being, *our time, our talents, and our treasure*, as we live out our life, *however long that may be.* There is our desire to do what God wants, to be obedient to Him as His children….

And then there’s our love for others, our compassion for others….It seems to me that this is what motivated Matthew a lot: his desire to enable his friends and others to know the peace and the joy that he knew through Jesus, and to have “eternal life”. Does this motivate you? It certainly does me. I want people to know life now in all its fullness, rather than to live life now in guilt, and fear, and lostness, and I want them to have eternal life with Jesus, rather than to be separated from God’s Kingdom in eternity.

There are many, many different ways in which we can serve God out of gratitude to Him for rescuing us through Jesus, out of compassion for those around us who don’t know Jesus as their Saviour, and out of a desire to do what God wants us, His children, to do.

As we think about how we are going to spend the rest of our life, what things come to mind?

Let me share with you some of the things that come to my mind…. *Maybe they’ll help you as you think about your priorities for the rest of your life.*

* My family, and my extended family

**I want to love and care for my wife and our sons and their families, and to encourage them all in their journey with Jesus**

* My friends and my acquaintances

**I want to love and care for the friends that I have, and try to make new ones…. And I want to make use of every opportunity that I have to share the Good News of Jesus with them. *This was my resolution and my passion after my near death from my heart attack…. And that, it seems, was Matthew’s passion after he met Jesus….***

* My neighbours

**I haven’t been a very good neighbor to the people who live around me…. I have been very busy with people in my work as a pastor, so I’ve kept to myself often so far as my neighbors are concerned. I want to change that….**

* My church family

**I want to go on serving in my church family in any way that I can. Sure, I’m a pastor, and that a little different than most of you…. But I want to go on serving in any way that I can here in this church family, and after I retire in any church family that will have me as a guest pastor or a visiting pastor or as a volunteer in different ways.**

* The world around me

**The older I get, the more I realize that I can’t take my money and my possessions with me. I want to use my time, and my talents, *and my possessions* in service of my God who passionately loves me, and who has rescued me, and who I have got to know through His Son Jesus. I want to be more and more generous in giving to those in need around me, and overseas, and in enabling the Good News of Jesus to be taken everywhere.**

***Conclusion:***

May God bless us as we serve Him, *as Matthew did,* out of gratitude to Him for rescuing us; out of compassion for those around us, who wander lost this way and that; and out of a desire to do what our Father in heaven, and our Lord Jesus, want us to do.