

Sunday 23rd May 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Matthew 9:9 – 13
Theme: “The Chosen: Matthew”
“Matthew, his story, and what it means for us”
***Series on *The Chosen* (4)**

Introduction:

As I've said the last few weeks, this is a series of messages about some of the people who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry.... It is based on the Bible, and the Gospels in particular, but it also includes insights from the YouTube series, “The Chosen”....

What is “The Chosen” series? And what's its aim? Well in a nutshell, the series aims to provide a back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves about the characters.

Let me read what one commentator has to say:

The Chosen is the first multi-season show about the life of Christ.... The Chosen tells stories of radical transformation among the followers of Jesus....

The Chosen spotlights the real-life men and women who knew Christ....

The Chosen includes scenes and dialogue directly from Scripture, but it also includes scenes and dialogue not in the Bible. Viewers learn on the opening scroll that it is “based on the true stories of the gospels of Jesus Christ”. Some location and timelines “have been combined or condensed” and “backstories and some characters or dialogue have been added.

“However”, the scroll says, “all biblical and historical context and any artistic imagination are designed to support the truth and the intention of Scripture” (Michael Foust, 4 Things You Should Know about THE CHOSEN on YouTube).

Well, let's continue our look at some of the followers of Jesus.... This morning we're going to look at Matthew, his story, and what it means for us....

Part 1: “A Biblical view of Matthew”

Well, who was Matthew? The Gospel of Matthew introduces us to Matthew himself in our Bible reading for this morning. Let me read to you about what

Matthew tells us about his call to be a follower of Jesus.

Matthew writes:

Jesus left that place, and as he walked along, he saw a tax collector named Matthew, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, “Follow me”. Matthew got up and followed him (*Matt. 9:9*).

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 another sense, we know a lot about Matthew, because we know his profession: that he was a tax-collector. The tax-collectors were local men who were in the employ of the Roman invaders, either directly or indirectly. Tax collectors collected two sorts of taxes: firstly, what we would call “income tax” based on what you earned, what you produced, and for just existing (*Barclay, The Master's Men, p. 58-59*).

And secondly, they collected “customs taxes”: taxes on taking goods from one place to another. There wasn't much scope for extorting money from people with the income tax, but with the customs tax, tax-collectors often overcharged people and became rich in the process (*Luke 19:2; cf. Barclay, p. 59-60*).

There was no class of men in Jesus' time more hated than tax-collectors. The Jews 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 regarded 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 opportunities to see Jesus and to listen to him (*Ibid.*, p. 61). Immediately before our Bible reading for today is Matthew's account of the healing of the paralysed man (*Matt. 9:1-9*). The makers of *The Chosen*, and the makers of the Visual Bible of Matthew's gospel rightly, I think, have Matthew 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 offers 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.

Maybe even, Matthew heard Jesus tell the parable that I referred to before: the parable of the Tax-collector and the Pharisee in which Jesus made it clear that anyone who prays to God, "God, have mercy on me a sinner" will be in be forgiven by God (*Luke 18:13-14*).

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”*.

Let’s listen to what Matthew tells us happened at this meal. He writes in verses 10-13:

While Jesus was having a meal in Matthew’s house, many tax-collectors and other outcasts (Lit. “sinners”) came and joined Jesus and his disciples at the table. Some Pharisees saw this and asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such people?” (Lit. “...with tax-collectors and sinners”).

Jesus heard them and answered, “People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. Go and find out what is meant by the scripture that says: ‘It is kindness that I want, not animal sacrifices’. I have not come to call ‘respectable’ people but outcasts” (Lit. “the righteous, but sinners”).

It is interesting that at least twice in the Gospels, Jesus is asked this question, directly here in our Bible reading, and then later indirectly in Luke chapter 15. Listen to how responds....

He responds here by quoting Hosea 6:6 which says that God is more interested in “mercy, or constant love” towards people, rather than the ritual obedience of sacrifices in the Temple.

And in Luke chapter 15, Jesus replies by telling three parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.... By telling these parables, Jesus wants to emphasise how much God loves the lost, and to what extent He is prepared to go to find the lost....

Part 2: The story of Matthew in The Chosen

The writers of *The Chosen* use the facts from the Gospels, together with their imagination to craft a possible back story for Matthew. *As I’ve said to your before*, they do this to encourage us to read the Gospels for ourselves. Dallas Jenkins, a writer and the director of this series says:

“The ultimate goal is to get you to go back to Scripture, whether you are a believer or not”.

Let me share with you how Matthew is presented in the first season of *The Chosen*.

The writers of *The Chosen* ask themselves, “What sort of person works as a tax-collector?”

Answer, “Someone who is very good with numbers”....

And those who are very good with numbers are sometimes “on the spectrum” which includes autism, Asperger’s, and so on.

That’s how Matthew is presented: as someone who is obsessive with clothes, doing things in the correct order, and so on....

We first see Matthew getting ready to go to work as a tax-collector. He has a wardrobe of identical clothes, with identical jackets, and identical sandals. He leaves his house, and when he steps in some manure, he throws his sandals away, and selects a new pair from his bag. He is transported to his tax booth hiding in a covered wagon. The wagon owner says to Matthew that if anyone asks him what he is transporting, he will say:

“The biggest pile of dung in all Capernaum”

...Which brings me to how Matthew is regarded by his fellow Jewish citizens, *how he is seen by even his own family*: he is despised and hated for working for the hated Romans, *the invaders*, and seen as being a traitor. Let two examples suffice....

Talking to the Roman commander, Matthew says:

“I am not accepted...anywhere. I am a tax collector...hated by everyone. We’re worse than the Romans.... You were born a Roman; I made a choice”.

...And talking to Gaius, his Roman minder, Matthew says when asked about his family and his father:

“He says that he has no son”

Later on, when he goes to see his mother, she makes it clear that she is “ashamed” of him....

In different scenes, too, his situation with regard to being able to worship is depicted.

One scene stands out in my mind.... Mary Magdalene is in her right mind, having been healed by Jesus, and she is having her first Shabbath meal with her friends, *and some surprising visitors, namely Jesus and some of his disciples*. In contrast, Matthew is depicted eating alone with his dog on the Sabbath....

The Chosen writers present Matthew, the tax-collector as someone who is

despised and rejected by his family, his fellow Jewish citizens, and the religious establishment, *and someone who as a consequence feels rejected by God....*

...But then he meets Jesus! Matthew is presented by *The Chosen* writers as someone who becomes more and more intrigued and fascinated by Jesus.... Matthew is asked by Quintus, the Roman commander, to keep a watch on Peter, *who is pretending to be working for the Romans to pay off his tax bill.* While he is doing this, sitting on the shore of Lake Galilee, he witnesses the miracle of the huge catch of fish, and it astounds him....

Later on, Matthew *along with Nicodemus* witnesses Jesus healing the paralysed man, who was lowered into the house of Zebedee by his friends.... Matthew is invited onto a neighbouring roof by two children, *who are friends of Jesus.* He sees everything, and hears Jesus preaching.... When finally Jesus and his disciples leave, Matthew climbs down from the roof, and one of the children asks Matthew, "Are you lost". Matthew replies:
"Yes, I am".

As Jesus and his disciples are leaving the house, Jesus turns and looks directly at Matthew....

And then we have the scene that we watched before this message.... Jesus and his disciples walk past the tax booth where Matthew is the Tax-Collector. Jesus looks in Matthew's direction, walks past, and then turns back and looks at Matthew. Jesus goes to Matthew's tax booth and says:

J: "Matthew, son of Alphaeus..."

M: "Yes?"

J: "Follow me"

M: "Me?"

J: "Yes you! (*with a smile on his face*).

...And that's what Matthew does, *much to the dismay of Peter, and of Gaius, Matthew's Roman minder.*

Matthew then asks Jesus where they are going. Jesus tells him, "To a dinner party...at your house". Actually, I would have preferred Matthew asking Jesus and his disciples to come to his house for a meal....

At the meal at Matthew's house are Jesus and his disciples *including Mary Magdalene*, plus many of Matthew's friends, and Mary's friends from the Red Quarter. They obviously have been invited by Matthew *and by Mary*, to this meal with Jesus.

A couple of Pharisees look in, knock on the door, and Jesus invites them in.

Listen in to some of the dialogue between Yussif, one of the Pharisees, and Jesus and the disciples:

Y: Do you know who he is, and who she is, and who they are... Why does your master eat with tax-collectors and sinners.

J: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Y: What they do in the Red Quarter shouldn't even pass my lips.... And him (*pointing to Matthew*), and others like him, betray our people for money, and they are not even sorry. They've never offered guilt sacrifices in the Temple....

M: Tax collectors are not welcome at the Temple.

Y: This is not about me, this is about what God wants.

J: You are forgetting the scroll of Hosea....

God and learn what this means, "I desire mercy more than sacrifice.... Please let them know this Yussif: I have not come to call the 'righteous', but sinners.

Part 3: "What it means for us"

Well, as I've said before there's a lot of artistic licence here.... But remember that Dallas Jenkins' ultimate aim is to get you to go back to Scripture and read about all the things that Jesus did....

What are we reminded of in the story of Matthew in the Bible, *and in this The Chosen series?*

Three things *again* I think:

- * Firstly we are each reminded that no matter what you've done, *even if it is the worst of sins*, God is willing to forgive you, and wants you in His Kingdom. Matthew was hated and despised by people for what he had done and was doing, and Matthew thought that God regarded him in the same way.

But then he met Jesus and saw his miracles.... And he discovered by listening to Jesus that God loves and values each one of us, and that God forgives us as we cry out to him for forgiveness (*Luke 15:1-20; 18:9-14*).

Likewise, as we listen to Jesus, God's Son, we are assured that we are loved by God, and that God freely forgives us as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour....

- * Secondly, we are reminded that our faith is not a "blind faith" as *Richard Dawkins and some of the New Atheists would claim*. No, our faith *like Matthew's*, is based on concrete realities: realities like Jesus' teaching and who Jesus was, the miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Matthew didn't just say that he'd follow Jesus without any support. As the writers of *The Chosen* point out, Matthew follows Jesus because of what he's heard Jesus say, and because of what he's seen Jesus do.....

Likewise we follow Jesus because we've heard what he's said and seen what he did.

- * Thirdly, we are reminded that faith in Jesus leads us into a community made up of others who are following Jesus. Matthew followed Jesus and this led him into a community of followers of Jesus.

It is a reminder that we need the support of others as we follow Jesus....

But more importantly, this community is an outreaching community, a community that reaches out to other "sinners" and outcasts like you and me. Matthew invited his friends to eat in his house, and to meet Jesus. In the same way, God wants us to reach out and invite others to our table, so that they can meet Jesus through us.

Do you remember how Matthew finishes his Gospel? With Jesus' challenge to his disciples *and to us*:

"Go, then to all people everywhere, and make them my disciples (*Lit. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations*): 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 I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (*Matt. 28:19-20*).

Conclusion:

Let's finish up. It is a powerful picture in the Gospel and in *The Chosen* of Matthew sitting with Jesus, his disciples, and Mary Magdalene, *and all of their outcast friends* around that table in Matthew's house....

May God bless us as we enjoy being with Jesus who tells us of God's forgiveness of us, who inspires us with his Spirit, and who sends us to reach out to the lost around us....