

God's Invitations in the Bible, Part Seven
Matthew Pays Forward Jesus' Invitation
Matthew 9: 9 – 13

I admire Matthew's story; he was unique in many ways within the group known as Jesus' disciples. First, his work history was scandalous – he was a tax collector for the hated Romans; second, he was wealthy – again, because he was a tax collector; third, and most appropriate in the context of this sermon series, when Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, he returned the favor by inviting Jesus to a dinner where many of Matthew's disreputable associates were in attendance.

There are several valuable lessons we can learn from Matthew paying forward Jesus' invitation. Let's read the account in Matthew 9: 9 – 13 (read).

1. There are no hindrances I cannot overcome if I really want to follow Jesus (Matthew 9: 9).

A. Matthew was a wealthy man, an exception to the average man of the day. He moved in exceptional circles, and rubbed shoulders with the movers and shakers of Roman-imposed society.

B. Jesus left little doubt about His opinion of the rich.

1. Matthew 19: 23 – 24: *"I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

1. He said that in reference to a wealthy young man from the ruling class who had approached Jesus wanting to gain the kingdom of God. But sadly he was unwilling to give up his wealth to follow Jesus.

C. Matthew was an exceptional man; he was willing to pay whatever the price to follow Jesus.

1. His willingness to surrender whatever was required of him shows the depth and conviction of his commitment to Jesus.

D. Each of us have something in our life that must be surrendered to the sovereignty of God.

1. A person who says, "I want to be closer to Jesus," but is unwilling to forgive someone, is not willing to pay the price to get there.

2. A person who says, "I want to be closer to Jesus," but is unwilling to change the lifestyle they are living, is obviously not willing to pay the price to get there.

2. I can tell a lot about your spiritual self by the people you hang out with (v. 10).

A. Matthew has a dinner party with Jesus as the guest of honor and he invites his friends. Not surprisingly, his friends are tax collectors – sinners to the Jews!

1. These are people just like Matthew.

2. We tend to associate with people with people who have the same interests, hobbies, and even careers as us. Matthew didn't invite the governing board from the local synagogue – they wouldn't be caught dead in his company anyway.

B. This is why the most effective witnesses for Christ are often new Christians!

1. Many Christians shun their unsaved neighbors and co-workers, and even feel “spiritual” for that reason.

2. Remember that Jesus said, “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which lost.”

3. Some people will question your spiritual motives just to build themselves up at your expense (v. 11).

A. Say what you will about the Pharisees, but they were equal opportunity offenders when it came to putting people down.

1. They put down the disciples; “You follow Him?”

2. They put down Jesus: ‘He can’t discern the riff raff!’

3. And of course they put down Matthew and his tax collector friends: they were sinner scum.

B. Churches are full of this type of people; in fact many churches seem to have a blue-ribbon committee charged with putting down folks for their unqualified status.

C. You can have the same attitude in marriage, work, as a parent, every area of life.

D. The challenge for every Christian is to allow God alone to pass judgment on your worthiness to follow Him.

4. Jesus can do what He desires in the heart of the person who knows they are sick (v. 12).

A. The Bible says a lot about the heart: it is deceitfully wicked; even when know the right thing to do, the heart will often choose the wrong thing.

1. In what kind of church do you think God can do His best work?

The church that feels they are well healed, or the church that is hurting?

2. The church that is hurting, of course.

B. If I have a choice to be religious or to be gracious, it is better to choose to be gracious (v. 13).

1. Jesus was not religious: He was gracious to the woman caught in adultery.

2. He was gracious and not religious to the person who was an invalid for 38.

3. He was gracious and not religious in allowing the prostitute to wipe His feet with her tears.

C. The point is that religious persons are harmful to themselves and others. They are professors without portfolio.

1. They can only perform one of two functions: they either point out the failings and sins of others; or they explain away the sins, making excuses for them.

2. Both functions do nothing to heal the spiritual sickness; in fact they leave the sinner in worse condition than before!

D. Jesus, in contrast to the merely religious, performs a vital service: He is able to impact a sin-sick life with divine grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

1. Furthermore, He seeks out those who identify themselves as spiritually sick, and offers them salvation.

How many .people do you know whom you would identify as “spiritually sick?” I remind

you that there was a time when you were in the same place in your life as they are now. Someone invited you to come and meet Jesus; why not pay it forward, and share that invitation with them?

Let's pray!