

Matthew 9B

- Back to Matthew 9 tonight, where we've reached the second anecdote Matthew uses to separate the groups of miracles in Chapters 8 & 9
 - You'll remember that Matthew has arranged the miracles in these two chapters into three groups of three
 - We just finished the second group of three miracles last week, looking at Jesus declaring the paralytic forgiven of his sin
 - So that means we're poised to move into Matthew's third and final group of miracles
 - But before we do, we need to examine a scene that takes place between Jesus and His disciples, and the disciples of John
 - Back in Chapter 8, we studied the first scene Matthew recorded between the first and second group of miracles
 - That scene centered on certain disciples, those who had believed in Jesus, yet refused to put a priority on following Him
 - By Jesus' response, we learned that He has full authority over His followers, including having high expectations for our obedience
 - Today, we study a 2-part scene that explains the power Jesus wields over those in covenant with God
 - This full scene runs from v.9 to v.17, and tonight, we look at the first part of that scene from vs.9-13
 - This first part involves Jesus and His disciples and the Pharisees
 - The scene begins with an eponymous reference

Matt. 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

- To introduce the scene that follows, Matthew tells us how he came to be one of Jesus' disciples
 - First, he says Jesus left Capernaum to resume His travels in the Galilee

- Earlier in the city, Jesus had been confronted by a large crowd of Pharisees or scribes
- Those men traveled to investigate whether Jesus might be the Messiah, and their investigation takes two phases
 - First, the leaders conducted a passive investigation
 - They just observed what Jesus said and did to see if it supported or disqualified His claims
 - That's the period we're in now
 - If the passive investigation seems to support Jesus' claims to be Messiah, then the religious leaders will move to an active phase
 - They will begin to interrogate Jesus, asking Him questions to poke holes in His claims
- So Jesus left the house in Capernaum and began walking on the major road that passed by the city
 - As He went along, He was being followed by a large crowd of people, which now included those religious leaders
 - As He travels, He comes upon a tax collection booth
 - And in that booth, sat a Jewish man named Matthew
 - In Jesus' day, the empire of Rome stretched from Great Britain to India
 - Across that tremendous expanse, Rome maintained a vast infrastructure
 - They had military posts, roads and bridges, government buildings, ships and, of course, palaces
 - Constructing and maintaining all that infrastructure required vast amounts of money
 - So naturally, Rome levied heavy taxes on its subjects, especially on conquered territories, like Judea
 - Taxes came in various forms, including income taxes and custom taxes
 - For conquered territories like Judea, the customs tax was the chief means of raising revenue

- Customs officials, called publicans, were positioned at borders and ports of entry to collect tax on goods passing by
- The road going by Capernaum was a major caravan route, connecting Egypt with the East, and many goods traveled on it
- Furthermore, the road crossed the border between the territories held by Philip and Herod Antipas, sons of Herod the Great
 - They inherited rule over different areas of Judea after their father died
 - So Rome placed a tax collection booth on that road near the border to tax the goods flowing between these territories
- Publicans were generally not paid directly by Rome for their services
 - Instead, the Romans allowed these officials to keep anything they collected above and beyond their tax quota
 - So, the Roman authorities would assign each publican a certain quota of tax per day they must collect and turn in to Rome
 - If too little tax was collected, the publicans might be beaten or imprisoned
 - If the publican collected more than required, he could keep the difference
 - And Romans didn't use their own citizens to perform this role
 - Instead, Romans enlisted locals to collect taxes on their behalf, probably because a local would know the people and the language better
 - In Judea, tax collectors were typically Jews like Levi (Matthew)
 - Of course, any Jews who agreed to serve Rome in this way were considered traitors by the rest of the Jewish people
 - They were seen as supporting the Roman government in its campaign to oppress and rob the Jewish people
 - Pharisees so despised publicans that rabbinical writings of the day used the publican to represent the greatest law breaker possible in Israel
 - No Jew could be more sinful than a publican in the rabbis' eyes

- As a result, the Pharisees established special rules to punish publicans
 - Publicans were ostracized from the Jewish community
 - No Jew other than publicans and prostitutes could lawfully associate with a publican
 - In fact, the word “sinner” in Israel became another way of referring to tax collector or prostitute
 - Publicans could not testify in court or be a witness in any matter of law
 - And the Pharisees even taught that it was not possible for a tax collector to repent or receive forgiveness
 - So publicans were in a no-win situation, because they had no friends among Jews or Romans
 - The Romans had no regard for Jews whatsoever, while their own countrymen considered them pariahs and unredeemable
 - If they even tried to win favor with their Jewish brethren by collecting less tax, it would have been fruitless
 - The Jews weren’t going to be persuaded, so they only risked going hungry or being beaten by the Roman taskmasters
 - Therefore, the only sensible course for a publican, was to look out for #1 by collecting as much tax as possible
 - Publicans were generally ruthless extortionists
 - They pressured their fellow Jews for every last penny of tax, while Romans soldiers stood by to enforce their demands
 - After all, if a Jew was going to be a pariah in his own country, at least he could be a rich pariah
- But on this day, Jesus calls out to one of these pariahs sitting in his tax booth, saying to Matthew, “follow me”
 - The other Synoptic Gospels give this man’s name as Levi, which indicates he was from the tribe of Levi
 - But here, the author gives himself the name Matthew, which is *Mattai* in Hebrew, meaning “gift of Yahweh”

- Matthew's having two different names reflects a tradition within the Church in his day
- In that day, when a person became Christian, the person often took on a new name reflecting his or her new identity in Christ
- So Levi changed his name to Matthew after his conversion and that's the name he preferred to use for himself in his Gospel
- This tradition still exists in some places today
 - For example, you may meet believers in Africa or Asia who have traditional surnames with Biblical first names (*e.g.*, Moses Goswami or Barnabas Okonjo)
 - In those cultures, believers still change their given name to testify to their new birth in Christ
- Western Church culture doesn't follow this tradition, but personally, I think it's a great idea
 - I came to faith as an adult in my late twenties, so I can see clearly how much difference Christ has made in who I am
 - I marvel at how much Christ has remade me into His likeness
 - But when I look back on my life before Christ – on the way I conducted myself in my relationships and the way I lived my life – I'm not proud of who I was
 - I wasn't a terrible person, but still the person I was and the way I thought and acted were a far cry from the life I know now in Christ
- So when I run into someone from my past, I wish I had a quick way to demonstrate to them how much my faith has changed me for the better
 - I want them to know I'm not the same person they knew before, but how do I communicate that quickly in a chance meeting?
 - What if I told them my name has changed...that's certain to spark a conversation
 - And it effectively testifies that I'm a new person, and it reminds me to live up to my new identity in Christ
- Consequently, I've decided to adopt a new first name as a testimony of my new life in Christ

- I've chosen to adopt the name of an important biblical character
- The name I selected comes from Chapter 7 of Acts, chosen in honor of the first martyr recorded in the Bible
- His name in Greek is *Stephanos*...or Stephen, to us
- So back to the text, as Matthew sits in his tax collector's booth, Jesus calls to Matthew and says, "follow me"
 - Jesus was saying something very specific...he was inviting Matthew to become His disciple, to leave his current life and begin a new life
 - If you had been standing next to Matthew at that moment, you could have pushed him over with a feather
 - He would have been speechless
 - It would have been unbelievable that a respectable Jew would even speak to him, much less welcome his company
 - It's possible that Matthew hadn't spoken with another Jew, apart from other tax collectors and prostitutes, for years
 - And more than that, Jesus wasn't just your ordinary rabbi...Jesus was the talk of the Galilee, the man some were saying could be the Messiah
 - So as Jesus approached with His crowd in tow, Matthew would have watched in fascination – and maybe even a little jealousy
 - What Matthew wouldn't give to have just a little of the attention and respect Jesus was receiving from the Jewish people?
 - But that was a crazy dream, Matthew thought
 - After all, he was an outcast and without a true friend in the world
 - And then, a miracle happens...as Jesus passes by, He stops, turns, catches Matthew's widening eyes, and says, "follow me"
 - Matthew pinches himself to be sure he's not dreaming, but then almost immediately, he runs out of his booth to join Jesus
 - Luke adds that Matthew left everything behind
 - He left behind his booth, his money, his responsibilities to Rome, his protection by the Roman soldiers, his way of life
 - And most of all, Mathew left behind his shame and guilt

- While the Jewish people probably weren't so quick to forgive and forget what Matthew did
 - Gaining friends among the Jews would still have been tough for Matthew, but that didn't matter much to him now
 - When you're a friend of the King, you don't need other friends
- Immediately, Matthew invited Jesus to join in a celebration at Matthew's house
 - It's reminiscent of the story of the prodigal son, when the son returns home, the Father throws a party
 - That's where Matthew's account goes next in v.10

Matt. 9:10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

Matt. 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"

Matt. 9:12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

Matt. 9:13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- Jesus is reclining in Matthew's home
 - In that day, people ate from tables on the floor, so they reclined on cushions positioned on the floor around the table
 - So a meal in that day was typically an intimate and joyful affair
- So now, imagine Jesus in that environment surrounded by other tax collectors and "sinners," Matthew says, which refers to prostitutes
 - Now that's some party! Food, drink surrounded by rich bad guys and loose women of ill repute
 - We understand why Matthew keeps this kind of company... these were the only type of people who would accept him
 - But does it make you feel a little uncomfortable to think of Jesus sharing that company too?
 - Rubbing elbows (literally) with extortionists and prostitutes?

- That was certainly the Pharisees' reaction
 - They see Jesus enter Matthew's home, and they are beside themselves with disgust
 - A tax collector's home was off-limits to any self-respecting Jew
 - In fact, none of the Pharisees themselves dared to enter the house and join the meal, of course
 - They stayed nearby, grouching and grumbling among themselves
 - In v.11, the Pharisees speak with Jesus' disciples, asking why is your Teacher (rabbi) eating with these sinners?
 - These leaders were indicting Jesus' character to Jesus' disciples to suggest that they were following the wrong guy
 - The true Messiah wouldn't sin this way by associating with such ungodly people
 - Jesus wasn't actually sinning by associating with such people, because the Law of God never called it sin
 - Nevertheless, He was violating the Pharisees' rules, which they considered equal to Scripture
- Then Jesus responds in v.12-13 with His well-known and often-quoted observation
 - He says healthy people don't need a visit from the doctor; the sick need doctors
 - Luke also records Jesus' saying:

Luke 5:32 "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

- Jesus says these people were the spiritually sick
- Now that's something that both Jesus and the Pharisees could have agreed upon
- But the question they disagreed over was, "What is our spiritual obligation toward such people?"
 - The Pharisees had concluded that God had no mercy for such people

- They believed God showed mercy to those who were righteous, those who kept the Law of Moses and the oral law of the rabbis
- Naturally, the Pharisees saw themselves as perfect candidates for God's mercy, while tax collectors and prostitutes were beyond reach
- But Jesus reminds them that's not how doctors work
 - Jesus was acting like a doctor, bringing the medicine of God's mercy to those who needed forgiveness the most
 - That's why Jesus favored these sinners over the Pharisees
 - Jesus says He came to call the sinner to repentance, not the righteous
 - After all, why should God bring forgiveness to those who believed they had done nothing wrong?
- Now as obvious as that may sound to us now, it wasn't how Pharisees understood the mission of the Messiah
 - Pharisees saw themselves the best example of God's standards and expectations for His people
 - And so when the Messiah finally arrived, they expected that man to affirm Pharisaic rabbinical culture
 - They assumed the Messiah would be like a super-Pharisee
 - He would be like a teacher who puts gold stars on the papers of the exceptional student
 - And they assumed they had a lot of those stars coming their way
 - Therefore, they never imagined they were sinners in need of a Savior to forgive them of sin
 - That's the chief conceit of self-righteousness
 - Self-righteousness is thinking ourselves worthy of God's approval on our own merits, conveniently forgetting how bad we truly are
 - It's a self-deception that overestimates our virtues, while underestimating our faults

- The Pharisees could look down their noses at tax collectors and prostitutes, because they saw themselves as righteous
 - They could judge others, because they saw no need to judge themselves
 - But we know the Pharisees were not righteous, because the Bible says there are none who are righteous, no not one
 - Even one sin is enough to make a person a Law breaker, a sinner
 - And nothing that person does from that point forward can erase that one mistake
 - Only God can erase it, which is why Jesus came to earth...to erase our sins
 - But since these men said they had no sin, they were left in their sins to their eternal condemnation
 - While the so-called sinners in the house with Jesus were the ones receiving God's forgiveness by their faith
 - Pride is an ugly thing...it brought the first man to sin and it stood in the way of these men finding forgiveness
- To these self-righteous men, Jesus says in v.13, "go and learn what this means"
 - That is a rabbinical technique of teaching disciples...it's like a homework assignment
 - `Then Jesus quotes from the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament
 - So Jesus reacts to his disciples' misplaced concerns by assigning them some homework
 - So let's do their homework and see what we learn
 - Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6 where we read:

Hos. 6:6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hos. 6:7 But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant;
There they have dealt treacherously against Me.

- Hosea says the Lord delights in loyalty, rather than sacrifice

- In Hebrew, the word for “loyalty” is better translated, “lovingkindness”
- “Lovingkindness” is a covenant term, describing the self-sacrificial devotion and service one party shows to another in a covenant
 - In a covenant, you place the other party’s needs above your own
 - In a covenant, you are expected to remain loyal to the other person’s interests, regardless of what that person does
 - That’s what we have in our covenant with Jesus
 - Jesus showed us lovingkindness when He died in our place on the cross
 - And when we show Jesus’ love to the forgotten and rejected sinner of our world, we’re showing lovingkindness to Jesus
- God delights in these things, rather than in sacrifices
 - But we remember that sacrifices were also a part of God’s covenant relationship with Israel
 - Sacrifice was required under the Law, as a response to sin
 - So in what sense did the Lord not prefer sacrifice?
- The answer comes in the next line...He desires knowing Him over burnt offerings
 - In other words, the prophet is contrasting a covenant of faith in God with a covenant of Law
 - Both covenants had good purpose for God
 - But one was preferred over the other because one was internal, while the other was external
 - Knowing the Lord through faith in His son is a covenant based on lovingkindness, it’s an internal relationship with God
 - It’s a covenant of the heart, based on faith
 - While the covenant of Law was an external relationship with God
 - It took place at a distance, through outward actions of sacrifice

- It lacked the power to save, because it did not operate on the basis of faith
- So if you were to choose one of these ways to please God, He says rely on the covenant of faith over the one of sacrifice
- But that wasn't the way the Pharisees saw their relationship with God
 - The Pharisees believed the Lord delighted in their sacrifices,
 - Whether animal sacrifice in the temple, or the many personal sacrifices they made, these were the things they thought united them to God's mercy
- But sacrifice is an act of atonement and restitution required for those who have sinned
 - If you're sacrificing, it means you're still a sinner
 - It had a purpose in the Law, but that purpose was not saving a person
 - The endless repetition of the Law's sacrifices reminded a person they needed something greater to obtain eternal forgiveness
- The Pharisees were relying on self-righteousness under the Law, and self-righteousness doesn't breed compassion...it results in judgment
 - That's what allowed them to stand in judgment over those who didn't measure up to their efforts
 - Notice the next line in Hosea 6... like Adam, they too had transgressed the covenant, they were sinners too
 - They had dealt treacherously with the Lord
 - They obeyed the outward requirements of the Law, while violating the Law continually in their hearts
- Now surely, those who know and follow Jesus know better than to think like this?
 - We remember we were once the sick in the need for Jesus' healing too
 - So of course, that means we long to see the worst of society receiving Jesus too, don't we?

- And especially now, while Jesus is gone from the earth, we're all ready to take His place by visiting the worst sinners of our day, right?
- Well, I think if we're honest with ourselves, we would admit that's a tougher assignment than it should be
 - Ask yourself, would you have walked into that house with Jesus?
 - What if it was a crack house? What if it was a brothel or a homosexual bar?
 - I'm not saying we must go everywhere or foolishly throw ourselves in harm's way
- But self-righteousness is seductive and you can fall for it before you know it
 - In the beginning, we all come to Jesus repentant
 - We readily acknowledge we're a sinner in need of a Savior, the spiritually sick patient in need of a doctor to grant healing
- But then once we receive forgiveness, we can be tempted to turn into a Pharisee
 - We can start to think Jesus saved us because we were the spiritual all-star
 - And you'll know when you've taken that turn, because you'll forget the lesson of Hosea 6
 - We will lose sight of compassion and we'll start trusting in our sacrifices
 - The way we sacrifice time for God at church, or our sacrifices of money or the way we police our behavior
- From there it's only a small step to looking down our noses at those dirty sinners everywhere
 - You know the types...the ones with tattoos
 - The ones with a checkered past, the ones who watch R-rated movies, the ones who vote Democrat
- Want proof how easy this can happen today? Then let me ask you some questions?

- If the gay married couple living next door asked you to dinner, would you accept their invitation?
 - Would you invite them to your house for dinner?
 - If a prostitute walked in that door tonight (wearing scandalous attire) and sat a couple of seats away in your row, would you move closer to introduce yourself or move away?
 - If a Mormon invited you to a church meeting in their home, would you attend?
- The question is, do you see yourself as a doctor ready to meet the sick wherever they happen to be?
 - Or are you the Pharisee waiting for the sick to heal themselves before you're willing to reward them with your approval?
 - Do you think people need to clean themselves up before they come to Jesus, forgetting that you came to Him a filthy sinner?
- Look, I know we have to be careful and discerning about these things, and there will be times and places that aren't suitable for our company
 - But in my experience, those situations are few and far between
 - Meanwhile, there are many times you will pass by someone like Levi
 - Men and women who sit by the side of the road, so to speak, living under a cloud of shame and rejection
 - They watch the privileged of the world passing by them every day
 - And they never dream that they too could be called a child of the King
 - If only someone would stop long enough to take note of them and call them to follow Jesus, they're so ready to leave everything behind
 - The guilt, the shame, the hopelessness, the deprivation, the rejection and the pain
 - They're ready to celebrate finding purpose and hope in Jesus, and they'll be the first to invite their friends to follow

- Remember, the Lord expects our lovingkindness to Him in this covenant we have by our faith
 - And lovingkindness requires we represent Christ's interests to the world, just as Jesus did Himself
- But if we're going to be useful to God in reaching these sinners, then we have to be willing to rub elbows with them
 - We have to remember we were once just like them
 - We may not have shared their lifestyle, but we were no more righteous than they were
 - And we certainly shared their eternal fate were it not for the grace of God
 - Only by His grace were we made a child of God, by the same Gospel you can bring them
 - Go and learn this: Compassion is what God is asking us to demonstrate – the compassion He showed us first