THE CALL

And as Jesus was leaving there, he saw a man sitting at the collection (tax collectors office) named Matthew, and said to him: "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And it happened that when Jesus was reclining at table in Matthew's house, look, many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined at the table with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they (later) began to say to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said to them, "The healthy (strong) have no need of a physician, but rather those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."
Matthew 9:9-13

This is Matthew's version of his own call to discipleship.

Matthew is described as a tax collector who immediately follows Jesus when called. Shortly after Jesus celebrates a festive meal with Matthew and other social outcasts at his house, which triggers Pharisaic criticism.

Table fellowship in ancient Israel was reserved for intimate friends and most often implied an endorsement of the practices of those with whom one associated.

Tax collectors were infamous for taking in more than Rome demanded and the occupation was viewed as traitorous enough even when they did not charge excessive fees to line their pockets.

Jesus replies that it is not the healthy but the sick who need a physician and then (only in Matthew) adds the reference to Hosea 6:6 which cites the word "*sacrifice."* The word is most likely used as a figure of speech in which part of something (sacrifice) is used to represent the whole, in this this case *strict obedience to the commandments of God.*

It is important to know that Jesus never abolishes *any* of the written Torah (see Matthew 5:17), and even the dramatic changes he does introduce only come into play after his death and resurrection.

By Matthew's time, it will be recognized that the system of sacrifices in the Jewish temple has been superseded by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. Understand that if Jesus is hinting at that here, it would most likely not have been understood so radically by those who heard him speak in real time. At the time this account actually took place, the Hosea quotation was used to justify Jesus' celebration with at least one repentant sinner.

Remember in the last passage before this one, the subject came up about Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralytic. It's no surprise that now the narrative raises the further issue of Jesus associating with tax collectors and sinners. Discipleship and the forgiveness of sins are central to this passage and both of these point to the main Person of Jesus.

Through Jesus, discipleship and forgiveness come together in the scandal of the invitation of a tax collector to that discipleship.

Unlike Mark and Luke, only Matthew refers to the disciple being called in this passage as Matthew. Mark and Luke refer to him as Levi.

This passage consists of two major portions:
1) the calling of Matthew;
2) the controversial feast with tax collectors and sinners.

Once more Matthew gives a few parallels that offset the items in this passage.
Healthy – sick.
Mercy – sacrifice.
Righteous – sinners.

And as Jesus was leaving there, he saw a man sitting at the collection (tax collector's office) named Matthew, and said to him: "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.
Matthew 9:9

And as Jesus was leaving there – Matthew is often keen to give direction and location and here he tells us that Jesus is moving *from* Capernaum to somewhere else.

It is in this transition that Jesus sees a man at the tax collecting station, the place where Matthew worked. This was most likely an open-air tax market where tax farmers such as Matthew would have been selling tax collecting privileges, tax lots to others.

The name Matthew is important for this Gospel.

Phillip and Bartholomew, Thomas and <u>Matthew the tax collector</u>.
Matthew 10:3

We are clearly meant to understand that the tax collector named Levi in the remainder of the Gospel tradition is, indeed, Matthew.

It is not unusual for individuals in the New Testament to have more than one name. Matthew – abbreviated form of *gift of Yahweh* – may have been the Christian name taken by Levi after his conversion which would indicate his new life. We see this in the account of Saul to Paul.

Tax collectors, or tax farmers, in that culture were despised as greedy, self-serving, and parasitic. They grew rich at the expense of the poor by extorting from them more than was required by their superiors in order to fill their own pockets. They furthermore, often compromised regulations for purity in the handling of pagan money and their dealings with Gentiles. That Jesus should call a tax collector to be his disciple must have been in itself scandalous.
Hagner – Matther, page 238

This call is recorded in a short manner, almost as if it's a side to the narrative: Jesus says, "Follow me," and we are told that Matthew rose and followed him.

What is not written into the account and therefore could be missed is that Matthew left everything when he followed. (see Luke's account for this information).

I believe what Matthew - who has focused much on discipleship – is trying to show us here is the paradigm shift in obedience to the call of Jesus.

> *And it happened that when Jesus was reclining with at table in Matthew's house, look, many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined at the table with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they (later) began to say to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*
> *Matthew 9:10-11*

Matthew simply places Jesus in the house of Matthew after the calling. Luke, however, gives us more details possibly to emphasize Matthew's gratefulness.

> *Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.*
> *Luke 5:29*

The Greek does not state that the house belongs to Matthew, simply saying *"in the house,"* but Matthew's financial well-being most likely places the house under his possession.

"when Jesus was reclining at table" – suggests that Jesus was indeed the guest of honor. The *"reclining at table"* itself points to a special meal rather than an ordinary one.

Matthew again uses his characteristic *"look"* to draws the reader's attention to the type of people at the table who were now sitting and eating with Jesus and his disciples. The tax collectors in this group were most likely associates of the author. The fact that Matthew invited them reveals to the reader the importance he places on Jesus since his invitation gave them a chance to meet him. Also, present were *"sinners"* who associate with this group and were themselves disreputable characters.

One thing is clear about the *many* in Matthew's house: *righteousness* was not a chief concern.

A fellowship within such a banquet in such a culture as this was regarded as a very important symbol of the closeness of the group. This was one reason that Jews could not engage in such activities with Gentiles. Thus, Jesus is making an acceptance of those present.

This account clearly points back to the last chapter where Jesus made a claim about an event such as this.

"I tell you, many will come from the east and the west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 8:11

For Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners challenges a basic principle of the pharisees and from their perspective calls into question his real commitment to doing God's will.
Hagner – Matthew, page 238-239

The Pharisees once again describe Jesus as *"your teacher."*

Then an expert in the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you where you go."
Matthew 8:19

Though this term is appropriate, the context here betrays something more condescending. By calling Jesus a teacher, they keep him at a professional arm's length rather than acknowledging his divine authority. After all, their question to the disciples accuses Jesus of being ritually unclean.

But when he heard this, he said to them, "The healthy (strong) have no need of a physician, but rather those who are sick.
Matthew 9:12

The Pharisees questioned the disciples, but Jesus then directly addresses the Pharisees.

Understand that the Pharisees here were casting shade on the conduct of Jesus and not his disciples. The reason the disciples are included in this query is that in rabbinic tradition, the intimacy of the relationship between the rabbi and his disciples was such that the conduct of the rabbi was also the conduct of his disciples.

Jesus responded with what could be an allusion to a proverbial saying:

"neither does a physician . . . who is capable of giving health practice among those who are well."
Diogenes – proverbial saying in parable form, fourth century BC. Stobaeus, Eclogues 3,462,14

The clarification of this proverbial parable is found in the next verse when Jesus compares the symbolism of the righteous being the healthy and the sick the sinners.

In this case, the sick need to be made healthy. The sinners need to be made righteous.

But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."
Matthew 9:13

Since the Pharisees refer to Jesus as *"teacher"* he takes the opportunity to teach them.

He tells them to go and learn about a specific text from Scripture. That alone should stand out as a provocative challenge. Then he quotes the Scripture directly.

> *"Come! Let us return to the LORD! He himself has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us! He has injured us, but he will bandage our wounds! He will restore us in a very short time; he will heal us in a little while, so that we may live in his presence. So let us acknowledge him! Let us seek to acknowledge the LORD! HE will come to our rescue as certainly as the appearance of the dawn, as certainly as the winter rain comes, as certainly as the spring rain that waters the land.*
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> *What am I going to do with you, O Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, O Judah? For your faithfulness is as fleeting as the morning mist, it disappears as quickly as dawn's dew! Therefore I will certainly cut you into pieces at the hands of the prophets; I will certainly kill you in the fulfillment of my oracles of judgment; I have slain them by the words of my mouth; for my judgement will come forth like the light of the dawn.*
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> *For I delight in faithfulness, not simply sacrifice; the acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.*
> *Hosea 6:1-6 (prophesied between 785-725 BC.)*

That Jesus uses this text is a delight to anyone – Jew or Gentile - who desires their lives to be restored and committed as an offering to the Lord.

Do not miss that the offering mentioned here at the very end of this passage is the *burnt offering.* This was a common offering under the sacrificial system, and it provided a general atonement for sin, expressed complete surrender and devotion to God, and restored fellowship between the Creator and supplicant.

This quote is unique to Matthew and his use of it here would have been a scathing indictment to many Jews such as the Pharisees. In the first verses of this Hosea prophecy, there seems to be a genuine repentance on the part of Israel. The following verses, however, demonstrate that this repentance is merely feigned. For his part, God laments and threatens, but it is clear that the people's good behavior is short-lived.

God tells them obedience by mercy (in the context of Hosea) is better than sacrifice.

> *When a person's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies be at peace with him.*
> *Proverbs 16:7*

As in Matthew's context, Hosea is not abolishing the sacrificial system but rather is declaring that it is meaningless without a heartfelt transformation of affection demonstrated in consistent behavioral transformation through that changed affection toward the Creator.

Jesus here is following good rabbinic form in citing Scripture to justify what to the Pharisees is radical behavior. He never informs the Jewish leaders of principles that they do not already know. Rather, he calls them to consider (or "rethink") a creative interpretation of their tradition. He desires them to see beyond the limits of their conventional interpretations.

> *This is not a text about the fulfillment of Scripture so much as the application of a fundamental moral principle of the Old Testament that continues throughout the new age that Jesus is inaugurating.*
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> *Beale/Carson – Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, page 35*

In eating with the tax collectors and sinners, Jesus does not become unclean. Rather he acknowledges *their newly found purity.*

The Pharisees gave priority and strict observance to the law. From such a perspective, they would interpret Hosea 6:6 as *"I desire sacrifice and not mercy,"* or at least come to that conclusion through the text as the only way of obedience.

The heart of Jesus' healing ministry is truly about mercy as we have seen thus far in this healing narrative. This is summarized in the granting of unmerited favor to those unworthy. This is why he can say: *"For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."* Note that Matthew once again brings us to the central point of the ministry of Jesus, that is, the forgiveness of sin.

> *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.*
>
> *Matthew 21:31*

> *When Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector to be among his twelve disciples, he shows the universal scope of his compassion. Since Jesus' mission is predicated upon mercy and not merit, no one is despicable enough by the standards of society to be outside his concern and invitation. So Matthew's wonderful evangelistic banquet becomes in a very real sense a paradigm of the gospel itself. The totally unworthy are graced to be a part of the kingdom. No mistaken sense of the righteous demands of separation from sinners can be allowed to hinder this mission. Nomistic scrupulosity must give way to the gracious announcement to all of mercy and forgiveness. For the evangelist and his community, Jesus again stands with the Old Testament, not against it, in his authoritative interpretation of it.*
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> *Hagner – Matthew, page 240*

“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
8 He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6:6-8