

Title: “The Heart of Matthew Parties”

Text: Matthew 9:9-13

Central Thesis: *Jesus shows his mission of seeking and saving the lost by saving Matthew and inviting him to follow Him.*

Main Idea: *Jesus came to pursue those far from God*

Intro:

The blockbuster movie: “Moneyball” starring Brad Pitt tells the fascinating story of the 2002 Oakland Athletics baseball team that was originally told in the non-fiction book written by Michael Lewis.

You might not love the movie if you don’t like baseball. But there is a tremendous takeaway from it. The entire story is one where the general manager of the Athletics, Billy Bean, rebuilds the team by not going after the flashy and most talented players available. He develops an entire new method of scouting - and looks for things in players that no other manager is looking for. The story goes on to show that the Athletics have tremendous success when they field this team of underdog, ragtag and overlooked players.

I could not help but think of the way that Jesus assembles His team when I thought about this story. Jesus does not go after those with flashy resumes, or who have great standing in the world's eyes. Rather, he is looking for something else that no one else is valuing. He is looking for those who admit their spiritual need and who will run to Him.

These are those whom he calls on his team. Matthew 9:9-13 tells the story of Jesus calling a man no one else ever would have wanted on their team: Matthew the Tax collector. But in this story we see the powerful truth that should be our motivation to feast with others in our home: *Jesus radically pursues those far from God.*

Three Key Characters:

Understanding the three main characters at play in this narrative will be essential for us to understand this story in the Gospel of Matthew, and the implications for our own lives. As we look at this familiar story I am praying that God will open our eyes to see new layers of His grace and love that are hidden in plain sight.

1. Sinners - desperately in need of Grace

- “*And as Jesus passed on from there*” (v.9) So, this story of Jesus calling Matthew is part of a larger narrative that Matthew is painting for the reader. Matthew is going to paint a picture of Jesus the Messiah in Ch. 9 that shows that Jesus has absolute authority in heaven and on earth thus showing his validity as Lord and

Messiah. Throughout Chapter 9, Jesus will show his authority over sickness, sin, satan, death, and nature.

- Specifically in vv.1-8 Jesus had just healed a paralytic. But the central message of this story that Jesus portrayed in this healing is stated in v.6 - "... *the son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*" So, Jesus has shown clearly that He is the Messiah sent from God, with authority to heal and forgive sin. (An authority that belongs only to God, so the divinity of Jesus is on full display.)
- But there is a powerful reason while understanding the place of the story of the call of Matthew in the larger narrative of the gospel that is happening. Jesus has just shown and stated that he is power to forgive sins, he has shown that he is God and he can and will forgive sins. *However, the question that the story of Matthew the tax collector is going to answer is: "exactly whose sin will he forgive... or just how far will this Jesus go?"*
 - And this is not just a question that was asked in Ancient Israel, this is a question that if we are honest we ask today - maybe even if just in the quietness of our own hearts. Like I know that Jesus loves, I know that he *can* forgive. But would he forgive me? Or maybe it is outward-focused - I know Jesus can save and love sinners but that person over there, they just seem out of the reach of the grace of Jesus.
 - See we have a natural tendency to take the boundless, limitless grace of Jesus in the gospel and put categories to it, and put boundaries around it, and limits on it. But this story is strategically placed in the narrative of Jesus' ministry to show that this is not the case. To see this we need to examine the man that the story puts a spotlight on.
- V. 9 "*he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth.*"
 - Now this is interesting because this man Matthew is the same Matthew that is writing this story. So, we are about to see a personal testimony of when he met Jesus. Now there are two important words that immediately set Jesus apart from everyone else in this story. "*He saw*" See Matthew is a tax collector - and based on the times and the history that this story was taken he quite literally may have been perceived as the worst man in all of Capernaum. This is how he would have been seen by everybody else. A Tax collector was a corrupt outlaw sanctioned by the Roman government. The Roman Empire taxed the Jews oppressively and tax collectors were Jews who were enlisted by the empire. Here's the rub: the tax collectors could charge however much that they wanted as long as they gave the Romans the correct tax amount. Now there were two different types of tax collectors (*Hebrew Historian Alfred Edersheim*)
 - 1) General tax collectors - collected basic taxes like land and income tax.
 - 2) Mohkes - this was an even more despised caste of tax collectors. They could arbitrarily put taxes on anything. Food, clothes, boats, anything else you own. They were the most despised. All tax collectors were despised but these were especially so.

- 3) Little mohkes - But there was a way to make it even worse. Most mohkes would pay someone else to sit at the table to uphold their reputation. However, the “little mohkes” as the the Hebrews would refer to them were more shameless. They had no shame or regard for their reputation. Because they would sit at the tax booth and publicly collect tax. They would have been the most despised, the most publicly hated, and the most common understanding of what the worst of the worst sinner was. For monetary gain they had shamelessly turned on their own countrymen to be a paid outlaw by the Roman Empire. A scribe at the time aptly quoted “*For a little mohkes, repentance is nigh impossible.*”
- He would have been seen one of two ways: 1) by his countrymen as a despicable traitor. 2) by the Romans as a pawn to be used for the good of the empire that could be bought out by sinners.
 - So, lean in here. Matthew is writing the story of Jesus’ ministry on earth and he is saying, and catch this: *yes, Jesus the son of man has authority to forgive sin. Yes he has healed and saved the paralyzed man, yes he has the capacity to forgive. But just how far does his grace reach, just how deep is the well of love in his heart, where does he draw the line?*
 - And Matthew goes... “well he saved me”
 - And Matthew is the archetype for all the others in the story besides Jesus, and as well as all of us. See, Matthew’s occupation was an outward illustration of all of our inward spiritual state before Jesus. *We are Matthew.*
 - Ephesians 2:1-3 - “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*”
 - Matthew didn’t hide his past. He could have conveniently left his story out of this narrative. He could have pointed to someone else’s story before Jesus. But He says: you want to know how far this Jesus will go? You want to know just how much grace he has? He saved me.

Matthew shows a clear picture of our place in this story: sinners desperately in need of grace. But we need to keep reading because as I stated, the main idea of this story is that Jesus came to radically pursue those far from God.

2. Savior - radically in pursuit of sinners

- Now we will look at the hero of this story. Jesus. What is his response to this man? When others would see him as a traitor, as a sinner, as a pawn to be used, as despicable, Jesus sees him as a man with a need that he can meet. A man that has a need that only he can satisfy. Notice where Jesus calls him: “*a man*”

called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me'"

(v.9) Jesus goes to him and calls him right in the middle of his sin. Jesus did not wait for Matthew to come to the temple, or come to the synagogue. He goes to Matthew and *pursues* Him in the middle of his sin. Jesus is radically in pursuit of this man.

- Quote: *"The cumulative testimony of the four Gospels is that when Jesus Christ sees the fallenness of the world all about him, his deepest impulse, his most natural instinct, is to move toward that sin and suffering, and not away from it."* Dane Ortlund, 'Gentle and Lowly'
- We must let this sink into our minds and hearts if we ever want to host Matthew Parties in a missional way: Jesus does not run from those far from him, Jesus does not run from those who are sinners, Jesus runs to them, Jesus pursues them, *Jesus radically pursues sinners who are far from Him. And we see this vividly in this story of Matthew the tax collector. His heart, his impulse, his deep desire when he sees the worst of the worst, when he sees sinners is to say Here I am - I can help, I can save.*
- Jesus' interaction with Him was concise and right to the point: *"follow me"* (this was likely not Jesus' first exposure to Matthew or vice versa. Jesus had been teaching all over this region. So Matthew likely would have been familiar with Jesus. Yet, this is the watershed moment.)
 - Jesus' interaction with Matthew is a command wrapped in invitation. "Follow me." Jesus did not try to convince or prove or twist Matthew's arm behind his back. He invited Matthew to what he so desperately needed. Namely Himself.
- We see Matthew take this command and invitation and forsake those things he had clung to. *"And he rose and followed him."* (V.9) A Parallel passage in Luke 5:28 states that he left everything. (Matthew was humble in this brief autobiography of himself- he left out any detail that would paint Himself as the hero, he wanted Jesus to be at the center.)
- And something powerful happens when Matthew meets Jesus and becomes a follower of Him - He immediately throws a feast. Matthew does not withdraw and decide now that he knew Jesus he could part ways permanently with his friends and fellow tax collectors and sinners. *"And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples."* (V.10) (Again Matthew leaves out the detail that Luke 5 and Mark 2 mention that he is the one who threw the feast.)
 - Rather than separating from his former friends and fellow sinners, Matthew sets himself up as the middle man for his friends to meet Jesus. This is what we are called to do. There is one hero of the story and its not me, its not you, and its not Matthew. It is the Savior who radically pursued

Matthew and would eat with tax collectors and sinners. All we are called to do is be the middle-men. Jesus has authority over sickness, he has authority over Satan, and he has authority over sin. He has the power to save, he has the power to change a life, Jesus has the power for radically change the entire direction of someone's journey. He has the power to forgive sins, wipe away our past shame, change us in the present, and change our future for ever. We don't have the power to do any of this: Matthew understands this. So He is the one who invites those he knows to meet the one who dial this for Him. *Matthew understands his place in this story.* A sinner who met a Great Savior.

- Notice the imagery in v.10 "Jesus reclined" Jesus sat down and feasted with some of the worst of the worst. And had brought his disciples with Him. So there is a strategic mix of characters in this story. Jesus took His disciples to dinner with the worst of the worst in the eyes of the world. He took his disciples in the vicinity of those who were far from God. Something powerful is happening: *Jesus' mission is dictating who he hangs out with and why.*

What a beautiful and powerful picture we see in this passage of the hero of this story. The Savior, Jesus, who feasts with sinners, who radically pursues sinners, and takes his disciples to dinner with sinners. Jesus is not seen far-off and insulated behind the four walls of a temple yelling at the masses, he is seen reclining, and feasting with sinners. What a Savior.

3. Self-Righteous - blind to the grace of Jesus

- But there is one more group of characters in this story we must examine. The Self-Righteous. "*And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'*" (V.11) They are completely missing it. They are blind to the grace of Jesus, and instead of feasting with Jesus and those he is trying to reach, they are on the outskirts of the party totally missing out. The Pharisees were confused for a few reasons:
 - 1) They did not understand their place in the story - they thought they were the hero, not the sinner.
 - 2) They did not understand the mission of Jesus - they totally missed that Jesus at a table surrounded by sinners was the essence of His mission.
 - 3) They did not know the person of Jesus - They did not understand that the very nature of Christ is to move towards those who are in need of Him.
- Jesus responds in stunning fashion to their accusation: "*But when he heard it, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous but sinners.'*" (Vv.12-13) Commentators point out that Jesus destroys the accusation of the Pharisees from 3 different arguments:
 - Logic - Jesus effectively says: "I am a physician, it only makes sense that I would spend time around those who are sick."

- Scripture - Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6. "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." He appeals to the scriptures that the Pharisees would have been so familiar with and shows that this has always been central to the heart of God. *God doesn't want rituals, he wants hearts filled with His radical love and mercy.*
- His own divine authority - He states that He is the Messiah, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.' He says I am the Son of God and this is the essence of what I came in authority to do.
- The Self-Righteous Pharisees were completely blind to the mission and grace of Jesus, so instead of throwing a party and inviting sinners to meet Jesus they stood on the outside and grumbled and pointed fingers. They failed to see *that the only thing we bring to the feast is our need. That the only thing that qualifies us to be a follower of Jesus is that we are a sinner in need of grace.* The answer to the question they ask of why is quite simple: Because we need Him, because there is no one else.

Jesus came to radically pursue those far from God.

Only One Logical Response:

Come to the Feast and Bring others with You

- 2 Kings 7:3-20 tells this fascinating story of some lepers during a siege that the Syrians had on the nation of Israel. This resulted in a huge famine. But God chased away the enemy with a noise in the night. So the lepers stumbled upon a bountiful feast in the empty camp. They started feasting and enjoying the food, these men who would have been despised by the rest of society. But something powerful happens. V.9 - *"Then they said to one another, we are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household."* What a vivid picture of the story we tell. We have a feast, God has disarmed the enemy who would keep us from the table, but while we feast it isn't right, it is not good if we ignore the world that is starving around us.
- This is what Matthew Parties are all about. We know Jesus. We are seated at the table with Him. He has loved us, pursued us, changed us, and saved us. We are called to go and invite others who need to meet this Jesus to the table. *The church is a community sitting at a table supported by the cross - and all are welcome. Our motivation in throwing a Matthew Party is not that we are the hero and should feast with sinners - it is that we were the sinners! And Jesus has invited us to a feast, so how could we not invite others to join us as we celebrate our Savior.*

Throw a feast, have a party, celebrate the Jesus who has saved us - but invite some Matthews who need to meet Him to eat too.

