



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 38**

**MATTHEW**

**SEPTEMBER 17-21, 2007**

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	<i>ABBREVIATED STUDY</i>
<b>Monday</b>	Matthew 11-12, Psalm 36	Matthew 9:9-13, Psalm 36
<b>Tuesday</b>	Matthew 13, Psalm 37	Mark 2:13-17, Psalm 37
<b>Wednesday</b>	Matthew 14-15, Psalm 38	Matthew 1:22-23, 3:13-15, 4:12-16, 5:17-20, 8:16-17, 12:15-23, 21:4-6, Psalm 28
<b>Thursday</b>	Matthew 16-17, Psalm 39	Matthew 1:1-17, Psalm 39
<b>Friday</b>	Matthew 18-19, Psalm 40	Matthew 9:9-13, Psalm 40



Connecting people to abundant life.

**READ**

Matthew 9:9-13

Psalms 36

**REFLECT**

We do not know much about Matthew. In fact, all we know is included in this passage.

Matthew was a Tax Collector

His closest friends were “sinners”

He was the Son of Alphaeus (we know nothing about him)

He was one of the 12 original disciples

He was from Capernaum

He wrote the Gospel that bears his name between 58 and 68 AD.

He was a Jew.

Let’s begin with his being a Tax Collector. Remember that the Jews were under Roman occupation. Tax Collectors were Jews who worked for the Romans. They were collaborators. They betrayed their own people for their private interests and so they were despised. They also cheated. The Romans expected a certain amount of money to be collected, the tax collector could add to that whatever he felt he could get away with, making him hated even more. Today we might liken him to someone who worked for the Mafia, or the black market; especially in a country with a corrupt government that used such individuals to bolster their power base. Most likely much of their business would have been done under the table. They would also be considered unclean because of the contact they had with Gentiles; thus he was barred from the synagogue. So we might surmise that religion did not have a high priority in his life.

How did this man become a disciple? Jesus asked him. We have no hint of his having a heart that yearned for God. We see him doing his job, we see him in the midst of his sinful life. And we see Jesus walking

right up to him with the invitation: “Follow Me.” “And Matthew got up and followed.”

John Calvin puts it this way: in the calling of the tax collector, Jesus teaches “that the calling of us depends not on the merits of our own righteousness, but on His sheer generosity.”

How often do we try to be “good enough” for Jesus, or others? How often do we strive to be acceptable? Becky Pippert used to tell the story that when she was getting her masters in psychology she was a part of a support group. The group shared their deepest, darkest struggles. How sad it was, they would share but had no answers to the sewage in their lives. She would then go across town to her Bible Study small group, where everyone had answers, but were anything but real. I have also heard it said that we often miss Jesus because we are looking up, when all along Jesus is down in the gutter with those who need him the most.

This graceful acceptance of Jesus has always been a foundation point of my life. In the midst of our being at our very worst, Jesus comes to us with the invitation to drop everything and follow him. To throw ourselves, our longings, our hopes, fears, and garbage on Him.

**RESPOND**

Have you done that or are you still trying to be someone you are not? Do you give the same grace to others that Jesus gave to Matthew? When you look at another person do you see their sin, their inability to measure up, or do you see their potential? Do you see the person God intends them to be? Do you see a person Jesus came to die for in the homeless person on the street?

May you this day rejoice in the unmerited Grace that is yours in Jesus. And may you extend that grace to others.

**PRAY**

Jesus, thank You for accepting me as I am. Thank You for not leaving me as I am. Help me extend the same grace to others. Lord, give me Your eyes, and Your heart, that I might see others and love others as You do. Amen

**READ**

Mark 2:13-17

Psalm 37

**REFLECT**

Today's passage is almost word for word the same as yesterday's. Matthew, Mark and Luke are often called the Synoptic (common) Gospels because they have large portions that are word for word the same. Remember that the various parts of the New Testament did not begin to be written until at least 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. This was mainly because people were expecting Jesus' imminent return. When the disciples began to realize Jesus' return might be delayed and that the church was growing throughout the Roman empire necessitating the discipling of many converts, they began to write. Many surmise that one of the earliest transcripts was something that is referred to as "Q" source. When Matthew wrote his Gospel, he probably had this source in front of him, along with Mark's Gospel, copying various parts of both into his work. Mark and Luke also had the "Q" source in front of them and Luke probably also had Mark's Gospel.

Each writer wrote from a different perspective and to a different audience. "Mark is the Gospel for evangelists, Matthew for teachers, Luke for deacons or social workers and John for elders or spiritual leaders. Mark sees Jesus from beneath, historically, in all his rich humanity, transparent to the mystery of deity. Matthew sees Jesus in profile, doctrinally, highlighting Jesus' head so that we especially see His powerful thinking and teaching. Luke is a study of Jesus' hands and, behind the hands, a study of the heart that moved the hands into a ministry to all kinds of people, but especially to outsiders, the marginal, and the disdained. John is a portrait of Jesus from above, revealing Jesus to us in all His majestic preexistent deity, visible now palpably in human flesh. In Ancient tradition Mark is pictured as a man, Matthew as a lion, Luke as an ox and John as an eagle" (F. Dale Bruner).

In this passage, what stands out is that Matthew's name is different; it appears as Levi. It is most likely that Levi was his original name. Matthew means "gift of Yahweh." Mark and Luke use both of Matthew's names in their Gospels. Matthew only refers to himself by his new name. Did Jesus give him this name as he gave Peter a new name? We do not know, but we do know that Matthew was transformed from being an untouchable social outcast to a gift of God. In Revelation 2:17 we are promised a new name if we overcome. The work that God wants to do in us, transforming us into one of His children, is so complete that it includes our being given a new name. In Jesus Matthew found a whole new character and a new life.

Having said this, it is of interest to note that Matthew's skills as a tax collector, his abilities as a record keeper, his abilities to write, were put to a better use as he becomes the author of this first Gospel.

God is in the business of transforming us, but there is nothing in our lives that is wasted. He is able to use our past to further His work in our futures. What great news! God is creating something new in me, but He is also redeeming and using all I have been into something of significance for His Kingdom.

**RESPOND**

Are you allowing God to change you? Is there something you need to let go of? Is there something in your past that God wants to use, but you keep hidden, fearing what others might think? Do you see yourself from God's perspective as Matthew did, or do you see that old name that God has long since forgotten? Celebrate today that you are God's gift; God's gift to you, to your family, to your friends, to your co-workers, to the world and most especially to God.

**PRAY**

Lord, thank You for giving me a new name. Forgive me for the times I hold on to my past identity. Help me be secure enough in Your forgiveness that I can use my past to help others. Help me be secure enough in how You see me, that I live in light of my new name and in the joyful freedom that new names brings. Amen

- B.S.

**READ**

Matthew 1:22-23; 3:13-15; 4:12-16; 5:17-20; 8:16-17; 12:15-23; 21:4-6  
Psalm 28

**REFLECT**

Yesterday we talked a little about the distinctives of the various Gospels. Each Gospel was written with a different purpose in mind, and emphasizing different aspects of who Jesus is and why He came. Where the Synoptic Gospels stress that human side of the God-man Jesus, John stresses the God side of the God-man Jesus. Mark's Gospel is pragmatic and written for the Roman mind; Luke's is more idealistic, written from a more Greek perspective. John's is the universal Gospel, more theological, and written last. Matthew is written to the Jews in Palestine from a very Jewish perspective.

I have mentioned that we do not know much about Matthew.

According to early church tradition he preached for 15 years in Palestine, after which he preached to the Ethiopians, Macedonians, Syrians, Persians, Parthians and Medea. He is said to have died a natural death either in Ethiopia or in Macedonia.

For Matthew it was important that his Jewish readers understand that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Thus one of the key words or phrases in Matthew is "fulfill" or "all this took place to fulfill what was said through the prophets." Matthew wanted his readers to know that God was not doing something new and different; He was fulfilling the plan He had from before the beginning of time. Nothing had changed; the law still stood; God's methods and ways had not changed; maybe most importantly, He had not changed. God can be counted on to fulfill what He says, what He promises, and what He warns.

This is a truth we need today maybe even more than Matthew's readers. In the midst of the pain in our own lives, in the midst of the

ourselves in, we need to know that God has not left us, that He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We need to know that we can have hope. God is a God who heals, releases, and is working everything together for His good purposes. God is a God who will fulfill His promises. God is a God who reaches out in love to us. His character has not changed.

We also need to be mindful that God's ways have not changed, His law has not changed. Jesus came in humility, sacrificing His life for us, and He calls us to take up our own cross. We too are to live lives of sacrificial humility, thinking of others more highly than ourselves. When God calls us to not covet, not commit fornication or adultery, to not lie, to not gossip, to love and pray for our enemies, to forgive others, He means it. His law has not changed.

Finally, we need to be aware that God's plan has not changed. Jesus has come, but He is also coming back. This life is about preparing not for heaven, but for the Kingdom of God on earth. God has given us a stewardship and one day He will hold us accountable for the work we have or have not done.

**RESPOND**

The Jews of Matthew's day were asleep. They had their own ideas of what God was like, picking and choosing from His word. They missed His coming. Are we awake or asleep? What will His response be to us when He comes? In your life, where is the fact that God has not changed needed Good News? What difference does it make to you that God will fulfill His promises to you? Is there a promise you are holding on to?

**PRAY**

Father, what great news: You do not change. Thank You for Your promise \_\_\_\_\_ (*fill in the blank*) that I can depend on. Forgive me for trying to compromise and change Your ways. Show me the areas of my life that need to be brought in line with Your unchangeable ways. Amen

- B.S.

**READ**

Matthew 1:1-17

Psalm 39

**REFLECT**

The first verse of Matthew is an essential bridge between the Old and New Testament. It sets up the purpose of Matthew's Gospel to document Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. Matthew will show how Jesus possesses the credentials of the Messiah, He ministers in the predicted pattern of the Messiah, He preaches the messages only the Messiah can preach, and He dies the death only the Messiah could die. Jesus came at just the right time, with just the right lineage. We see here the orderly pattern of God, we see here a God who is over history, often working in some unseen ways, but nevertheless working all things to His good pleasure.

When we talk of Jesus coming to "fulfill" what was promised, we are also celebrating the fact that God has the authority and power to do what He promises. Along these same lines, Jesus came in the "fullness of time." He came at a unique time in world history, during the PAX ROMANA – the peace of Rome. The known/civilized world was almost entirely under Roman rule. This meant that there were communication systems (there was one official language) and roads in place for an easy spread of the gospel. Economically, taxation was high, as was poverty and slavery, keeping people in a state of need. Spiritually, Judaism had lost its vitality and the Roman gods were dead or dying.

Have you ever heard someone say (maybe you have said it yourself): "at just the right time . . . happened" – the job came through, the prayer was answered. In many of these cases we would have liked to see God show up earlier, but somehow His timing was better than we could ever predict.

Looking back, we celebrate these times of God breaking into our lives with His power and authority, reminding us that He really is behind the scenes holding everything together, "sustaining all things by the power of His word." "In Jesus we live and move and have our being."

Isaiah 46:4 says: Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

What a great affirmation! I do not understand a lot that happens in this world. I do not understand wars, holocausts, genocide, death, loss, my actions that hurt others and the actions of others that hurt me. How good it is to know that in it all Jesus is working, sustaining, bringing each of our lives and all of human history together for His glorious purposes.

The cross teaches us that nothing can get in the way of God fulfilling his purposes – not even the sin of the world. Talk about a big detour: Adam and Eve eating the fruit; Abraham offering his wife Sarah to local kings; the Jews virtually turning their backs on God, creating the need for the exile; the temple destroyed; the Romans in town; Nero killing Christians – every detour the world, Satan and we throw at God – He is able to get around and get back on track. He is even able to enable a child to be born of a virgin. God is able to create out of nothing.

**RESPOND**

Are you wondering if the silence in your life means God has left, maybe the time is not right yet? Are you wondering if the need you are facing is too big for God? Do you feel that maybe you have somehow disqualified yourself from God's plan? Think again. In the fullness of time, at just the right moment, God is going to break in with His miraculous power. Having said that, don't forget that God often uses our obedience to create these miracles in the lives of others. Thus He has given many gifts to me, so that in the fullness of time, I can help that child in Africa get to school and thus break the cycle of disease and poverty in his or her life.

**PRAY**

Lord, help! There are areas of my life where I do not see how You are working. Help me be patient. Help me trust. Help me be obedient. Help resist the temptation to take things into my own hands. Thank You for the ways that You have come through in the past. Give me the opportunity to share with someone today out of Your abundant gifts to me. Amen

- B.S.

**READ**

Matthew 9:9-13

Psalm 40

**REFLECT**

We return to these verses one last time to make some concluding remarks. First, what is the first thing that Matthew does as he begins his journey of following Jesus? He throws a party and he invites all his friends. Some people today call this a “Matthew party”. A Matthew party is a gathering of your non-Christian, non-churched friends together with some of your Christian, church friends. This is a great way to help your non-Christian friends meet Jesus. Why not try it. Get out the calendar right now and decide on a date to have a party and then get on the phone. It can be a big party, a small dinner party, a trip to your favorite “fun zone.” The idea is to allow the two groups to get to know each other in order that your non-Christian friends might meet Jesus by seeing Him in your Christian friends.

The second thing to notice is the simplicity of the words “follow me.” Often we think being a disciple is complicated, that it takes years of study, lots of Bible knowledge and decades of spiritual maturity to really be a “fully devoted follower of Jesus.” But it doesn’t. Being a disciple is actually very simple; it means to “follow Jesus.” It means we do the things He did, love the people He loved, pray the prayers He prayed (“not my will but Your will” and simple prayers for healing). Jesus does not call us to know everything, just to follow in everything. A simple prayer each morning of “Lord, I want to follow You this day, show me how” is enough. Such a simple prayer that is honest will result in your hearing the still small voice of the Spirit saying “do this; don’t do that”, “say this; don’t say that.” Being a fully devoted follower is not about what you know; it is about following.

But beware – such following is also risky. Once Matthew got up from that table there was no going back. Jesus wants us to make that same decision. Have you made as completely a break with your past as Matthew did, cutting all ties with your old way of life, or is there something you are holding on to? Peter held on to fishing and went back to it right after the cross. Jesus had to go find him and call him all over again. Jesus will do that; He is patient, He will keep calling us to let go and follow, but we need to be the ones to respond. Have you?

Finally it is of note that where Matthew begins with the Jews he ends with the call to take Jesus to the rest of the world. Jesus did not come for those who are well; He came for those who need a doctor. Another way to say it is that Jesus is not coming to those who are in church today; He is going out to those in the non-churched world, calling them, healing them. If we look for Jesus in church we will probably miss Him. If we get out into the world, we will most likely find Him.

**RESPOND**

Where are you looking for Jesus? What do you need to break free from, what of your past are you holding on to rather than letting go completely to follow Jesus? When is your next “Matthew party”? Who are you going to invite?

**PRAY**

Lord, show me what I am still holding on to. Help me trust You with \_\_\_\_\_ (*fill in the blank*). And Lord, here are the five people I am going to pray that I have an opportunity to tell about You:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_. Thank You for the person who shared You with me.

Amen.

- Betsy Straeter

