TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Bobby Rader / Opening Prayer by: Daniel Balch
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Bobby Rader

#286 Wonderful Story of Love
#144 O Worship the King

Scripture Reading by: Rock Cary
#349 Ten Thousand Angels

Communion Devotional by: Craig Girard
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#611 Heavenly Sunlight
Sermon "Living with Peace"
Philippians 4:1-7

#354 I Gave My Life for Thee
#452 Standing on the Promises
Closing Prayer by: David Smith

Our Small Groups will meet tonight.
Don Taylor's group will meet at the
building at 5:00 p.m.

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Apr. 21, 2024

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

The Tax Man

The deadline to file your income tax return—or, if you prefer to put it off as long as possible, your extension—passed this week. Some of us might have received a refund (of the interest-free loan we made to the government over the past year); others might be smarting from having to write a check. In either case, no one is really fond of paying taxes.

It is remarkable, then, that the most noteworthy fact about the apostle Matthew, the author of one of the four gospel accounts, is that he was a tax collector. That is about the last credential we might expect. Tax collectors were hated in 1st-century Judea, far beyond any resentment we might feel for the IRS. Judea was an imperial province, under direct rule of the emperor. Procurators—governors—were placed in charge who collected all direct taxes, specifically the poll-tax and ground-tax; these were essentially taxes on income and property, collected by officials in the empire, that went straight into the imperial treasury.

By this time, Judea had been under foreign control for centuries; with the exception of the brief interlude under the Maccabees, they had been paying taxes to a foreign overlord since the Persian period. They did not care for that, and there was festering resentment in some quarters due to a school of thought that advocated paying tribute to God alone—but on the whole, it was nothing new.

What they really hated, however, were the tax farmers: the publicans. These were the collectors of the indirect taxes levied by the Romans. They collected duties on imports and exports, on trade goods—virtually anything moved by road—on animals, on axles on wagons, they even collected tolls on roads and bridges. Basically, they taxed anything and everything you can imagine; there was no comprehensive list, because it was made up. They constantly harassed people on their journeys in an inquisitorial process: you had to unload your pack animals, open every package, even personal correspondence could be read. All of this was arbitrary and tyrannical, with no real oversight or regulations; whatever they could extract, they did. And as you might imagine, the system was ripe for abuse; extortion was rampant, because they could keep whatever was over and above what the Romans demanded.

You can see why such men would have been hated in general. Yet it goes even further than that at the lowest level. The *publicanus* was the head tax farmer of a province. He would contract out to "chief tax collectors" who would then contract lesser collectors to do the dirty work. Zacchaeus, for instance, seems to be one of the former; Matthew, at his toll booth, was one of the latter. And these, like Matthew, were particularly hated: they were the daily face of this legalized scam. He probably interacted regularly with people he knew! He defrauded his own friends and neighbors for a living! And he collaborated with the oppressors to do it! The tax collector is traitor, thief, and apostate all at once.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Gayle Coleman will be having a procedure on May 15th.

Blanca Sanchez, Claudia Girard's mother, had a stroke and is in Memorial Hermann in Kingwood.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Kelly McCain, Wayne Noonkester, Oscar Cantu, Rickey Lucas, Jennifer Stelly, Kevin Coleman, Cathy Stifflemire, Ken Coleman, Dr. Hugo Thomas

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis, Debbie Merritt

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific, Mani Pagidopali in India

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, April 22nd at 5:30 p.m..

We are working a new Friend and Family directory. A copy of the old one has been placed on the bulletin board. Please check your name, address, phone number and email to make sure it is correct.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, May 7th at 8:00 a.m.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

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This perception is reinforced by the way Jesus speaks of them. He uses them to ironically illustrate a low standard of love and forgiveness: *If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* **(Mt 5:46)** He uses them to demonstrate how to deal with those excluded from church: *If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*. **(Mt 18:17).** He accepts as a title of rebuke that he is *the friend of tax collectors and sinners* **(Mt 11:19).**

This is the sort of man Jesus called to be one of his apostles! And he dropped everything at once and followed him. Why? We assume Matthew was at least at one point a materialist; you likely don't get into his line of work if you're not. So why walk away from that and follow Jesus?

Perhaps the best answer is that whatever Matthew had chosen to do, deep down, he was a Jew who knew and loved the OT. He was spiritually hungry. He was dissatisfied with his life and his choices. We know he knew the OT well because his gospel quotes it 99 times—that is more than the other 3 gospel accounts combined! And he references all sections, the Law, Psalms, Prophets. This is knowledge that he must have acquired through his own personal study—he wasn't welcome in the synagogue, after all. In his quest to fill the void, he had turned to Scripture.

And he must have seen something in Jesus to fulfill what he read. We should not assume that when Jesus called him to follow it was their first encounter; Jesus knew these men before they were called, as we see explicitly in some stories. They were followers before they were full-time disciples, and of that latter he group, he chose the 12. At the very least, he had heard about Jesus. In his job, he would have come in contact with travelers; his miracles, his claims, his teachings would be widely known. Maybe he had even heard Jesus teach himself. And so, he left his old life to follow Jesus.

What can we learn from Matthew's life? First, he reminds us that no one is beyond the grace of God. In every account, he is described as *the publican, the tax collector.* He was an outcast, socially ostracized, hated and despised by Jewish leaders of his day. Yet Jesus saw something in him worthy of being his apostle. This is a powerful reminder: do not write anyone off! No one is incapable of being saved. Jesus came specifically to call those who were lost like this! Let's not shun people the way the Pharisees did, but follow Jesus' example and be a friend of tax collectors and sinners

Secondly, Matthew demonstrates that following Jesus is costly. Of all Jesus' followers, he had the most to lose. You could go back to your fishing nets; he could never go back to tax collecting. His financial situation was drastically altered forever. Matthew paid a heavy price to follow Jesus, but he didn't hesitate for a moment when Jesus said, *Follow me.* What about us? Have we counted the cost? Are we willing to make sacrifices to follow him? What have we had to give up for Jesus? If we don't find it costly, maybe we aren't following as we ought

Finally, Matthew reminds us that God can use anyone. Leaving his old life, all Matthew had was a pen and record keeping skills. Jesus put those to use in keeping a record of his life (as "The Chosen" so vividly illustrates!). His gospel is the fruit of that. We come to Jesus with unique talents, skills, experiences. He can employ those in his kingdom—let's freely give ourselves to be used by him.

Bryant Perkins