

Mark 3 13-19 Nathanael and Matthew

[Mar 3:13-19 NKJV] 13 And He went up on the mountain and called to [Him] those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. 14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: 16 Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; 17 James the [son] of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"; 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the [son] of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; 19 and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

I have just a few observations about Nathanael before we move on to Matthew. Remember that Nathanael is also called Bartholemew. Nathanael means “God has given”. And Nathanael’s surname means son of Tolmai.

Nathanael came from the small town of Cana. Cana was close to Nazareth.

Phillip and Nathanael appear to be good friends. Remember that Nathanael was without guile, while at the same time, not perfect. He had a problem with some prejudices. But truth overcame them for him.

Now we will move on to Matthew.

Matthew was also called Levi. He was the son of Alphaeus. James was also the son of Alphaeus. So it is possible they were brothers. It is also possible that their fathers simply had the same names. That would not be unusual.

We have already talked about Matthew some in our study of Mark. He was the tax collector. We need to consider this to capture just what kind of man he was.

Matthew chose a way of life that was despicable to all his countrymen. Now we need to keep in mind that this is something he chose for himself. We can think of many other people who may have been abused as children, and as a result they kick into a lifestyle based on a view of themselves they gained growing up. Even later in life we may have some compassion for their plight.

But that was not true for a tax collector. A person who chose this endeavor did so with purpose and great effort. It wasn’t the course of least resistance. You weren’t selected as a tax collector at some job fair. No. You had to essentially purchase a territory at a great price. In order to be a tax collector, you had to want to be a tax collector very badly. It would kind of be like purchasing a McDonalds franchise so you could open a McDonalds store. Except a tax collector was also purchasing the use of the Roman soldiers as his collection agency. Remember that we learned that tax collectors could name their price. They had a set fee that the Roman government demanded. Then the tax collector could tack their portion on top of that.

The primary motivation for this position is to make money. In fact, that is probably the only motivation. Everything else about this position is going to put you at odds with all your countrymen. No God fearing Jew would choose this occupation. Our system in the US is completely different. I have an aunt who is a tax collector for a little town and it is an honorable job. But in the Roman /Jewish environment, things were different. You had to willingly give up everything but a pursuit of money to be a tax collector.

So the fact that Matthew was a tax collector says a lot. He was immediately on everyone's list of sinners and , maybe worse yet to a Jew, nationalist traitors. Everything about this person would be perceived as being bad. It would be much like the person who makes his living selling drugs to kids. We would feel the same kind of distain.

Now there are two things that are very important with Matthew. The first is, without a doubt, the fact that Christ chose Him. We already looked at this in Mark. Had Christ not chosen Matthew, Matthew would have never chosen Christ. But then we see how Matthew responded to Christ's call on his life. He did not hesitate at all. He dropped his tax collectors franchise, a franchise worth a lot of money, and followed Christ.

Then we read about how Matthew threw a party for Christ. Again, what we see, is that Matthew invited all of his associates to come meet Christ. That seems to be a common response by the disciples. When one of them comes to Christ, they also invite everyone they know to meet Christ too.

So Matthew is the **least likely candidate** for a position with **any meaningful ministry** team according to **any Jewish estimate**.

But Matthew has a few surprises. If you look at the book of Matthew, he quotes the Old Testament more than any other Gospel writer. He shows a deep understanding of the Old Testament. One would get the impression that he must have studied the Old Testament for a long time. He was likely studying the Old Testament even when no one would have believed he had any heart for spiritual things.

And let's take a look at something else. Let's look at what Christ said and did about tax collectors.

[Luk 19:2-10 NKJV] 2 Now behold, [there was] a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that [way]. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 But when they saw [it], they all complained, saying, "He has

gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." 8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

There were evidently 3 kinds of tax collectors.

- 1- **Gabbai**- General tax collectors. They collected property tax, income tax, and poll tax. These taxes were based on actual assessments, so the tax collector didn't have nearly the same opportunity to pad their pockets. These people would have been traitors, but not to the degree as the next infuriating type.
- 2- **Little Mokhes**- These collectors collected a tax on imports and exports, goods for domestic trade, and anything that was transported on the roads. So these people set up booths and you stopped and paid whatever the collector said, on whatever they said was taxable. You can see why this would be so infuriating. It would be like stopping at a toll booth and the person in the booth made up the fee. And there was nothing predictable about it.
- 3- **Great Mokhes**- Now these people were the ones who were up the chain of command. They were collecting taxes from the tax collectors. They were calling the shots behind the scenes.

Now the Great Mokhes were the ones raking in the most loot. But the little Mokhes were the ones that were most hated. Because they were the face of taxes to the public. They actually **collected** the taxes.

Based on what we see of Matthew, he was a little Mokhe. But Zacchaeus was a Great Mokhes. Zacchaeus was a big level tax collector.

Now Zacchaeus wanted to see Christ. But he had a problem. He was short. So he could not see Christ. So he ran ahead and climbed a tree. Now this would have been a humiliation in that culture for a grown man, especially a rich grown man to do such a thing. But tax collectors did not get where they got by worrying about public opinion. So he probably didn't care much here.

But what is amazing in this text is not what **Zacchaeus** did. The amazing thing is what **Jesus** did.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

Look at that. Of all the people Jesus could have called to himself, of all the people he could have chosen to fellowship with, Jesus picks out this wealthy tax collecting big shot. And choosing to go to his house would have been a sign of

great honor. For someone like Christ going to **Zacchaeus's** house would have been an endorsement of **Zacchaeus**.

I doubt that Zacchaeus would have ever thought that Christ would do such a thing. He was probably used to being slighted and singled out for venom by the religious leaders of the time. And there is a sense that these tax collectors would have known they had it coming. They chose it by the occupation they picked. There was no virtue in their choice.

But Christ didn't single him out for abuse, He singled him out for blessing. That had to be a shock to every bystander, and not the least, Zacchaeus himself.

So how does Zacchaeus respond?

6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

This was probably an amazing huge day for Zacchaeus. He responded accordingly. But look at what those in the crowd say.

7 But when they saw [it], they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

This was the typical response for any good Jew. They could not fathom grace extended to a tax collector. But think about this. Why would they all feel this way? I think it is pretty simple. It is because everyone in the crowd viewed themselves as being better than the tax collectors. But there is an odd similarity between all the tax collectors. They never saw themselves as being better than anyone else. They had an accurate view of themselves. They knew they were sinners. They recognized they had nothing to offer God.

Maybe that is why Jesus had a very successful ministry to tax collectors. And Jesus knew that the greatest obstacle to ministry **to those who were complaining** about the tax collectors was that the complainers did not understand that they were **not one bit more righteous** before God as the tax collectors were.

You see the greatest opportunity for salvation comes in the realization of our absolute sinfulness. When we realize we have nothing to offer God but our sinful self, we are closest to salvation. If we think ourselves morally superior to any other human, we are not yet understanding salvation.

8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Oh I hope that every single one of us gets this point this morning. Jesus in verse 10 is essentially saying these are exactly the kind of people I came to save. This tax collector is perfectly ready for the kingdom of God. I came to save this one.

Why? Because Zacchaeus knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he was absolutely and totally lost. He had no illusion. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Zacchaeus saw himself as being someone completely unworthy of salvation. And praise God, that is all that salvation requires. Once we recognize our absolute need of God, and that we have nothing at all in any way to recommend ourselves to God, that is the point that we are most prepared for God to save us.

Now what we also see is that Zacchaeus was repentant of his sin. He wasn't trying to pull a fast one on Christ. He did not say that he did not wrong anyone. But he did say that the ones he wronged he was willing to make right.

Paul tells us that a sign of repentance is a willingness to see justice done. It is a willingness to make things right that we have done wrong.

I never trust confession that does not come with a willingness to make what is wrong right, no matter what the price. Because that is the work God does. Is there a sin you are confessing? Are you willing to make it right? Are you willing to do what you can to remove the consequences of your sin to that other person? That is what repentance does.

Notice too that Zacchaeus did not deal with his sin lightly. He was not petty. This was no surface confession. The wrongs he did to others concerned property, and it was going to take the sacrifice of his property to make it right. When we confess our sin, if we are truly repentant, we will have the same attitude. Repentance brings about a willingness to do whatever work we must do and whatever sacrifice we must make to restore the situation to where it was prior to our sin. If we confess our sin to another but refuse to make efforts of restoration, we have not yet repented.

If we have committed sins that result in a loss of trust, to restore that trust is our obligation. If it has resulted in physical or emotional harm, to restore that person is our obligation. True repentance does more than rejoice over the fact that we can be forgiven. It does that, but it does more. It looks to undo as much of the harm our sin has done as is possible. Sometimes it is not possible. But many times it is. And it will often take as long to restore the harm as it did to create it.

Now let's look at another tax collector.

[Luk 18:10-14 NKJV] 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise [his] eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down

to his house justified [rather] than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Are you getting the point yet? Look at this. The Pharisee waltzes right into the places of most spiritual priority. They go close to the holy of holies. And they pray. And everyone looking on is impressed. They sound pious. They sound holy. They sound impressive and informed. And they thank God for the sin **they have not done**. They come to God telling God **what they have** to recommend themselves to God. They come saying, God, look at my goodness. Look at my righteousness. Look at my superiority to others. Look at my virtues. Look at why I am worthy for your fellowship.

Do you see this? The things that we think are human virtues, the things that we think are good about ourselves, the ways that we think we can impress God, are without doubt **the most spiritually dangerous things to us**. They are the most damning things. Because we will allow those things, in our pride, to convince ourselves that we are good. We will allow those things to convince ourselves that God is lucky to have us. And that is horrifying. That is evil. And that is damning. But look at the tax collectors. First they stand far off. Why? Because they aren't even allowed to go into the most precious places of the temple. They have disqualified themselves with their sin. They are the spiritually castaways.

And what do these people think of themselves? They see themselves as despicable sinners. And they don't blame it on anyone else. They know, without a doubt, what they are made of. They know their own hideousness. They know how they place their own benefit over the needs of those around them. The evidence is stark in their minds. They have nowhere to hide. They don't even propose to lift their eyes to heaven. They don't have the heart for it. They want to hide their eyes and their faces in shame. They know their evil. And they know that God knows their evil. There are no games here.

And what do they say?

'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

If you are not a Christian this morning. If you have never understood salvation this morning. Understand it now. See it now. Here it is. This is what you need to say to God. You simply need to see yourself as this tax collector. You have to tell the truth that you have nothing at all to offer to God. You are not good. You come to him as nothing but a sinner. And you call upon Him for mercy. You claim that you understand that Christ came to save someone just like you. You aren't good. And you know it. And **He is good**. And you know it. And you are claiming that what Christ did by dying on the cross is the only thing that will remove your sin and save you from it. That is all you need to do. You are essentially claiming God's mercy to you, God's grace to you.

Isn't it just wonderful that this is what salvation is all about? Isn't it just wonderful that Christ saves people just like us?

It isn't at all difficult to understand that Christ enjoys saving tax collectors. They, of all people, know they need it. We never see a tax collector come to Christ that Christ does not save.

Now let's look at one more reference to tax collectors.

[Luk 15:1-7 NKJV] 1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 "And when he has found [it], he lays [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together [his] friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

Do you see what this is saying? Tax collectors gravitated toward Christ. They drew near to hear him. Those who assumed that there was no hope for themselves found hope. Those who were desperate for hope looked to Christ for hope. The **worst of the worst** were drawn to the **best of the best**. That is absolutely amazing. Those that the Pharisees hoped to keep out of the kingdom of heaven were finding their way in through Christ. But the Pharisees themselves, were being lost.

And look at what these lost people are saying. They are essentially saying, the tax collectors are not as good as us. They do not belong to enter your kingdom. But we do. Do you see the theme here? It is all through the New Testament. If you think you deserve heaven, you will never have it. If you know you never deserve to have it, you can have it today.

Oh the depths of God's grace. Oh the beauty of His salvation plan.

That is when Christ spoke these words:

3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

The Pharisees at this point would be given something they could understand. They didn't understand how to take care of their spiritual sheep. They had no heart for that. But they understood money. They understood that if one of their sheep was lost, that had a tangible dollar value that they would protect. So what would they do if a sheep was missing? They would prioritize it above all the other safe sheep. They would go after it.

That is what Christ was doing. He was going after lost sheep. He was going after those tax collectors and sinners who have strayed. Who wouldn't do that for a valued sheep? is essentially what Christ is asking.

But the Pharisees didn't see it that way. They did not see these people as being lost sheep. They saw them as being no sheep at all. They saw them as goats.

They saw them as being worth no effort. Because they saw themselves so superior to the tax collectors.

But Christ goes on and He tells them just how important these lost sheep really are.

5 "And when he has found [it], he lays [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together [his] friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

What Christ is saying to these Pharisees, if they believed it, would turn their world around. God has a heart for those that the Pharisees despise. Christ loves those that the Pharisees hate. Christ would save those that the Pharisees damn.

Do we really believe this verse? Do we really believe that Christ really takes this much pleasure in the salvation of a soul, in the finding of a lost sheep? Scripture tells us the He does. We can trust this. It is true.

So back to Matthew. He is chosen as a disciple, as an Apostle. And he is nothing but a tax collector. Isn't that just wonderful. There stands Christ with the twelve every day as He ministers. And there, as one of his chosen 12, day after day, is this man that no one would have chosen for anything spiritual. But Christ did.

And this tax collector was eventually used by Christ to write one of the gospels of the Bible. And he will one day have his name written on one of the 12 columns of the new Jerusalem.

But wasn't he a tax collector? Yes. Wasn't he a traitor of the people of God?

Yes. Wasn't he a self serving profiteer? Yes.

But he responded to the call of Jesus Christ on His life. And that makes all the difference.

Tradition doesn't tell us much about Matthews life and death. The earliest traditions say that he was burned at the stake for Christ.