

February 4

Scriptures: Read Matthew 9

Key Verse: “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matthew 9:11)

Overview

Matthew, as we all know, was one of Jesus’ disciples. In fact, he is the writer of the book we’re now studying. But Matthew was one of the undesirables in Israelite society. He was a Jew, yes, but he was a tax collector for the Romans. In this position, he could demand whatever he thought a person was capable of paying, give the Romans whatever percentage they wanted, and keep the rest for himself.

A tax collector was seen as getting rich from the sorrow and oppression of his own people. To say he was despised was an understatement. He was down there with the prostitutes, drunks and criminals, the down-and-outers. So you would think it a bit of a public relations disaster that Jesus would call a tax collector to be one of His key followers, one of the twelve disciples. Yet that’s exactly what He did. Jesus called this despised person to be one of His men. He goes to his house to have dinner to seal the bargain, and many of Matthew’s friends are there – tax collectors and sinners – eating with Him and His disciples. Of course this was the stuff the teachers of the law and Pharisees loved to see to further emphasize their hatred of this teacher from Galilee. So they asked a question of His disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus’ response was, “It’s not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.”

It’s reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus came to those who recognized their spiritual poverty. Self-righteousness and pride are always the effective blocks in any work of the kingdom of heaven in our lives.

Prayer

Thank you, God, that You meet us where we are. Help us to be extensions of Yourself to those that the world despises.