

"THEY THAT BE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN."

– FEB. 13. – "*FOLLOW ME!*" – MATT. 9:9-17. –

HERE we have Matthew's own account of his acceptance to the apostleship. He had undoubtedly been acquainted with the Lord and his work, and the Lord acquainted with him, prior to this call. The Lord had evidently seen in his heart an honesty of intention that made him worthy, not only of the truth, but of this great favor – the apostleship. It is worthy of note that Matthew tells us of himself that he was a publican (Matt. 10:3), while none of the other evangelists make this comment, doubtless because the occupation of a publican was considered a very dishonorable one – unpatriotic. Publicans were usually men of some ability as business men, sharp, shrewd, quick at accounts and discerning. Their occupation was that of collecting taxes for the Roman government, and it must be said that, while there may have been honest publicans who collected their taxes with justice, both to the Roman government and to the tax-payers, yet the class as a whole had the name of being tricky, unscrupulous, dishonest. It was claimed on the part of the taxpayers that they were frequently oppressed and made subjects of extortion by the tax-collectors who thus accumulated wealth not only as foreign emissaries, but as leeches and parasites upon their own suffering countrymen.

Hence, for Matthew to tell us of his previous occupation as a publican may be esteemed an evidence of his humility, and his desire not to represent himself more honorably than was truthful. On the other hand, our Lord's choice of a publican to be one of the favored apostles indicates the impartiality of his selections; and implies that Matthew could not have been one of the dishonest publicans. It shows us also that our Lord passed by no Israelite indeed merely because there was prejudice amongst the people against him or his class. As an evidence of the detestation in which the publicans were held by their Jewish brethren, we note the fact that they were classed with sinners

and harlots in New Testament usage, and that the Hebrew Talmud classes them with murderers and thieves, and regards their repentance as impossible.

Matthew was known by the name of Levi, while he was the publican (Luke 5:27), but his name was changed when he changed his occupation and became a member of the Lord's company. His new name, Matthew, signified "the gift of God," just as Simon, the son of Jonas, had a new name given to him, namely, Peter, "a rock." But how great a change the gospel of the Kingdom produced upon Matthew, to lead him to forsake all – the profitable income of his occupation, leaving it to others – and to become a follower of the despised Nazarene!

The influence of the fact that our Lord would accept a publican to be his disciple, was far-reaching, and no doubt inspired an interest in our Lord amongst the degraded and outcast classes. We are not surprised, therefore, when we are told shortly afterward, that many publicans and sinners resorted to our Lord, and gave ear to his teachings. Nor did he treat them after the manner of the scribes and Pharisees, but on the contrary received them as the children of Abraham – as some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This breach of the rules of etiquette amongst the Jews was a great surprise to the scribes and Pharisees who, however much they opposed the Lord, recognized him as a great teacher; hence, they did not think of him as demeaning himself or degrading himself by receiving sinners, but asked the question, Why he did this, and promptly received the answer that the more sick a man is, the more need he has of a physician. They were ready to admit that the publicans and sinners were in need of a physician, but many of them did not realize their own need of a physician: hence, Jesus was certainly giving his services where they were needed. This furnished our Lord with an opportunity to preach a very short sermon from a text in Hosea (6:6) to the effect that his message was not a message of destruction, but a message of

mercy, and [R2260 : page 45] that his call to the Kingdom was not a call of the righteous, but of those who realized themselves to be imperfect. And herein lay the distinction between the two classes and the reason why publicans and sinners were more attracted than the self-satisfied Pharisees: the latter trusted in themselves that they were righteous and spurned to ask or accept mercy; the former admitted that they were unrighteous and had need of mercy. Humility and a realization of the need of a Savior, and a great one, are essential to all who would come unto the Father through Christ and his atonement.

The influence of Jesus' ministry was beginning to be recognized; it was increasing while John's work had for some time been decreasing, and comparisons were naturally instituted. One of these was respecting the fact that Jesus had given his disciples no specific directions respecting fasting; and the inquiry as to why this was so. Did our Lord disapprove of fasting? The answer came promptly to the effect that fasting is a concomitant of mourning and sorrow, and that our Lord's disciples could not consistently fast and be troubled at this time; – because the Bridegroom was with them and their joy was at its full. He pointed out, however, that, later on, times of trial and sorrow and fasting would come to his disciples.

Fasting is proper enough when intelligently done and from a right motive, but it is certainly worse than useless when done as a formality or ceremony, or to be seen of men, that they might think us holy. Fasting is specially commendable to the Lord's people at times when they find themselves lacking in spirituality and exposed to severe temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil; for by impoverishing the physical force and vitality, it may assist the full blooded and impulsive to self control, in every direction. We believe that a majority of Christians would be helped by occasional fasting, – a very plain diet for a season, if not total abstinence. But fastings, to be seen and known of men or to be conjured up by our own minds as marks of piety on our part, would be injurious indeed, and lead to

spiritual pride and hypocrisy which would far outweigh their advantages to us in the way of self-restraints.

The Lord wished his disciples to recognize the difference between the work he was doing in starting a new dispensation, and the work that John the Baptist and the Pharisees had been doing in attempting to reform the Jewish nation. He illustrated this under the figure of patching an old garment with a piece of new cloth, or putting new wine that had not yet fermented into old wine-skins whose strength and elasticity were gone and which would be sure to burst under the pressure of the fermentation. This was perhaps the first intimation our Lord had given of the fact that Israel as a nation would not be found worthy of the Kingdom and would be rejected. Likewise, it was the first intimation that the class which he was gathering was not being gathered with a view to reforming the nation or readjusting its affairs, but with a view to constituting the nucleus of a new nation, "a holy nation, a peculiar people," which, when fully developed, would be fit to be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom and to engage with him as his bride in inviting all the families of the earth to receive divine favor, symbolized as "water of life," which will be offered free. – Rev. 22:1,17.
