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## **JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, FOLLOW ME.**

– MARK 2:13-22. – MARCH 18. –

CAPERNAUM, where our Lord had been teaching and healing, was situated on the sea of Galilee, or, as we today should say, the Lake of Galilee. It was a city of considerable commercial importance, especially for the fish business, and undoubtedly the lake-shore in that vicinity was quite populous. The tense of the Greek would seem to indicate that our Lord kept going by the sea-shore, stopping here and there to discourse to the people, multitudes of whom flocked to hear him. It was during this journey that he passed Matthew, formerly known as Levi, a custom-house agent of the Roman government – a revenue collector, who was attending to his business, and whom our Lord addressed, saying, "Follow me," and who obeyed the call to discipleship.

Many get a very false thought from the brevity of the narrative, and infer that Levi (Matthew) had never heard of Jesus before, and that our Lord, as he passed him, cast upon him some kind of a spell which led him to instantly drop his business, as though bereft of his senses. On the contrary, we are to remember that [R2591 : page 77] the Lord and his disciples were well known in that vicinity for years, and that probably Matthew had not only knowledge of our Lord, but also faith in him, as the Messiah. Not until now, however, had Jesus invited him to become one of His immediate disciples; not until now, therefore, could Matthew essay to become such. There evidently were many who heard the Lord discourse time and again, and who were to be reckoned as amongst his friends, but who were by no means invited to become special followers, companions and associates in the ministry of the gospel, as were the Twelve.

Nor are we to suppose that Matthew left his money-drawer open, and his accounts with the Roman government unsettled, to immediately

follow the Master. Rather, we may assume that it may have taken days, or possibly weeks, to straighten his affairs and to enable him to respond to the Lord's call to apostleship. We should remember that the history of several years, and many discourses, conversations and incidents, are crowded in the gospel narrative into very brief space.

It would seem probable that as Simon's name was changed by the Lord to Peter, so Levi's name was changed to Matthew, which signifies "the gift of God." He was a publican – a person who farmed the taxes and the public revenue. The name "publican" and the profession were both extremely odious to the Jews, who very reluctantly submitted themselves to the tax regulations of the Romans. Publicans were counted unpatriotic, disloyal to their own nation, in that they accepted the service of an alien government, and made use of their knowledge of their country and people in assisting to collect revenues deemed unjust. The office, as will be readily seen, offered many opportunities for dishonesty and extortion, bribery, etc., but we cannot for a moment suppose that Levi was one of these dishonest publicans, for had he been so we may be sure he would not have been called to the apostleship and would not have responded to the call, for we are not to forget that it is written, "No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him." – John 6:44.

### **THE CONSECRATED HOME HONORED.**

Matthew was a man of influence, and as soon as he accepted the Lord's call, and responded by consecrating himself and his all, he set about to use his influence in drawing others to the Savior. He would announce his own devotion to the cause in such a manner and under such favorable circumstances as if possible would win some. To these ends he arranged a banquet for the Lord and his disciples at his house, and invited many of his friends and business associates. These in our lesson are called "Many publicans and sinners."

We have seen why the publicans were ostracised by the scribes and Pharisees – not because they were wicked, but because their

business was disesteemed: and being thus cut off socially from the ultra-religious, the publicans were forced to have most of their social intercourse with the non-religious, by way of contrast called "sinners." By the term sinners we are not necessarily to understand vile persons and evildoers, but rather persons who did not profess nor attempt the holiness claimed by the Pharisees – persons who did not claim to be absolute keepers of the divine Law – who did not profess to make the outside of the cup or platter absolutely clean, tho perhaps in many instances the inside was as clean or more clean than were the hearts of the Pharisees, who professed perfect holiness. This our Lord intimated on several occasions. When, therefore, we read that our Lord was the friend of publicans and sinners we are not to understand that he made companions of the rowdies or moral lepers of his time. We are rather to understand that in the usage of that time one class of Jews was designated the holy people (Pharisees), and another class designated as not professing absolute holiness (sinners).

Matthew's endeavor to bring his friends and associates into contact with the Master and his teachings is certainly commendable, and is a good illustration of **[R2591 : page 78]** what each one who enters the Lord's flock should do. Each should seek to exert his influence where it is greatest, amongst those with whom he is acquainted and who are acquainted with him, and upon whom either his past honesty and good character should have an influence, or else those to whom his radical change of life would be the most manifest. Another lesson for us is the propriety of using hospitality as a channel for the advancement of the truth – the homes of those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord should be consecrated homes, in which the first consideration should be the service of the Master; and its influence should be to draw out friends to the Lord, that they might be taught of him. Too frequently the consecration of the home is overlooked and antagonistic influences are permitted to dominate, with the result that neither the Lord nor the Lord's people are entertained, nor his cause served in them. Such a house and home loses a great blessing, and the head of such a house has serious reason to question whether or not he is overcoming, and

therefore an "overcomer," to whom only the prize is promised, – or whether he is being overcome by adverse influences.

The Lord desires a courageous people, a people so full of faith, and love to him and his, that they will conquer adverse influences in the interest of righteousness. What would we think of Matthew if he had said to the Lord: Master, I would much like to have a banquet at my home, and to invite there some of my friends, that I might introduce you to them, and that thus a favorable influence might be exerted on behalf of the truth; but I have no liberty in my own home – my wife would not hear of it for a moment, – or, my children are unruly, have no respect for me as a parent, and would create a great disturbance if I were to mention such a thing as a banquet in your honor, so greatly are they offended that I am giving up my lucrative business, and so fearful are they that they will not have the same social standing as before, or the same privileges of extravagance?

We would consider him a most unfit man to be an apostle, or to occupy even the position of elder or deacon in the Church, according to the terms laid down by the Apostle Paul. (1 Tim. 3:4,5.) We would esteem such an one unworthy of any responsible position in the Church, and so deficient in the qualities of an "overcomer" that he would be in great danger of losing the prize, unless he promptly instituted a reform of his character. It is only what we should expect, to find Matthew's case very different from this – to find that he had a strong character. Nor can we expect that the Master would have said to him, "Follow me," unless he had such character that would permit him to follow in the Master's footsteps, for surely our Lord Jesus, while gentle, kind and loving, was never weak or characterless.

And what would we have thought of Matthew's wife and family, had they objected to the banquet? We would have considered them rather hopeless as respects saintship, and that his wife had not learned even the first element of wifeness; – that she was a hinderer instead of

a helping mate. As it was we may be assured that with the Lord came a special blessing to that home.

### **SPIRITUAL FOOD AT THE BANQUET.**

It would seem from other narratives of this same banquet (which was probably several weeks after Matthew's call) that a large number of people were gathered at Matthew's house, aside from those who partook of the banquet (Luke 5:29), and from the connection of the narrative it is supposed that it was on one of the regular fast days of the Pharisees. These facts led to the two questions:

(1) Why does your Teacher associate with these people, who do not profess sanctification? The objection was not that our Lord should not teach the publicans and sinners, but that he should not eat with them, which implied a social equality, and the Pharisees evidently recognized that our Lord and his apostles were professing and living lives of entire consecration to God.

In answer to this query our Lord said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick"; the implication being that the physician had a right to go to and mingle with those whom he sought to relieve, and might mingle with them in whatever manner he saw to be expedient for their cure. This language does not imply that the Pharisees were not sick, and that they did not need our Lord's ministry, tho the fact was that not admitting that they were sin-sick they were not disposed to receive his good medicine of doctrine. The same thought is otherwise expressed by our Lord in the same connection, saying, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Anyone who considered himself to be righteous would be beyond the call of repentance. His first lesson would be to learn that he was not righteous, not perfect; hence our Lord went chiefly to those who admitted that they were not righteous, and whose hearts therefore were better soil for the truth than others. Our Lord intimated this in his parable of the publican's and the Pharisee's prayers, assuring us that in God's sight the

publican had the better standing, because of his acknowledgment of imperfections and his petition for mercy.

Another of the Evangelists adds others of our Lord's words – "Go ye and learn what that meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice." (Matt. 9:13.) Our Lord here evidently quoted from Hosea 6:6. The lesson the Pharisees should have learned from this was that in their particularity respecting sacrifices, self-denials, tithing of mint, anise, cummin, etc., the very things in which they boasted as evidences of their holiness were things which God did not appreciate nearly so much as he would have appreciated mercy. They should have had compassionate feelings toward their fellow Jews, the yearning compassion which would have delighted to have lifted them out of sin and brought them nearer to the Lord and nearer to righteous influences. Instead of having this spirit of mercy, which would have been very pleasing in God's sight, and would have prepared them to be recipients of his mercy, they had instead a loveless sentiment which despised others and boasted of self, – a self-satisfied and complacent condition of mind and heart, very reprehensible to the Lord – a condition of heart unready to be blessed with divine mercy. [R2592 : page 79]

### **FASTING AND FEASTING – TYPICAL AND ANTITYPICAL.**

(2) The next question was: Why is it that your Master and all who affiliate with him are banqueting and feasting and rejoicing, while we Pharisees "fast twice in the week," and the followers of John's teachings also fast? Is not this a sign that you and your Master are not so devout as we? – Luke 18:12.

The Lord's answer is very comprehensive and far-reaching, and requires considerable study to be appreciated. He explained: –

(a) That it would be inappropriate for his followers to be in sadness and mourning at a time when they were receiving such wonderful blessings – at a time when the Bridegroom himself was present, cheering their hearts, refreshing and strengthening them,

opening the eyes of their understanding, and giving them hearing ears to appreciate the divine favor that was coming unto them. Such would not be an appropriate time for fasting and mourning. By and by, when the Bridegroom would be away, there would be an abundance of perplexity and sorrow and then fasting would be in order. And so surely it has been: the Lord's people throughout the Gospel age have frequently felt called upon in times of darkness and adversity to seek a very close approach to the Lord by the humbling of the flesh, and have found fasting a valuable means to this end.

But fasting has a typical significance – it means self-denial. So long as the Master was with his people, and especially so long as he was honored by the multitudes, it required comparatively little self-denial to be one of his followers – it was in many respects an honor to be called to follow him, and an honor to sacrifice something of earthly interests to be a follower; and this made this kind of self-denial or fasting really a feast of pleasure. But later on trials came, when the Master got into the toils of his enemies, when his cause was unpopular, and the multitudes clamored for his death – then it required self-denial (antitypical fasting) to confess him and follow him; and so it has been all through the Gospel age – none can be a follower of the Lamb without self-denial, fasting, refusing the desires and appetites of the flesh – sacrificing some and mortifying others in the interest of the new creature and its spiritual development.

Now, in the Lord's Second Presence, we might say that the feast has begun again – that from a spiritual standpoint there are so many and so great blessings, so much and so dainty spiritual food, that to those who are invited into the Lord's banqueting house and whom he causes to sit down to meat, and to whom he brings forth things new and old, newly and refreshingly served, it almost appears as tho the fasting time has passed, and that the feasting and "joys of the Lord" have begun. Not that there are no trials and difficulties, according to the flesh, but that as new creatures his people are so refreshed and exhilarated with the meat in due season that the trials and difficulties

and self-denials (fastings) incidental to the way may now be esteemed so lightly as not to be worthy to be compared with the spiritual refreshments enjoyed, tho these be but foretastes of the great Marriage Feast soon to be enjoyed.

**(b)** In addition to the fact that our Lord's presence with his disciples would antidote sorrow, was another fact which the Pharisees did not comprehend, viz., that our Lord's work was not like that of John the Baptist – was not a work of reformation, seeking to patch up the Jewish system and arrangement. John had been commissioned to do that if he could, and had failed and been beheaded; and the work which Jesus was doing was a new work altogether: he was not attempting to patch and reform Judaism with his doctrines, but was making an entirely new institution, gathering out a Church, which would not be a Jewish Church nor a Reformed Jewish Church, but a wholly different institution, a Christian Church. This was the reason he was not attempting to discuss with the Pharisees the proprieties and improprieties of their methods, and to straighten them out. He would let alone the old garment, already worn out and ready to be laid aside; he would provide as a new garment, not the impossible righteousness required by the Law, but an imputed righteousness according to faith, based upon the merits of his own sacrifice for sins.

Had he attempted to combine Christianity with Judaism the result would have been disastrous to both, for they are opposites – the one demanding absoluteness of righteousness, which was impossible to sinners; the other demanding that the impossibility of personal righteousness should be acknowledged, and that faith should be the only condition of forgiveness and mercy.

**(c)** The same lesson was illustrated by the custom of that time in the use of skins of animals as instead of the barrels and bottles of today – indeed, such skins are used to the present time in various parts of the world, and called bottles. New wine put into such skins in fermenting would stretch them to almost bursting point, and such skins could never



be used again for new wine, because the elasticity having gone out of them the new wine in fermenting would surely burst them. The lesson which our Lord taught here is that Judaism having had its day, had accomplished its purpose; and that it was not the divine intention that it should be reformed, as his hearers expected. The system had become effete, and to have attempted to put into Judaism the new doctrines, the new wine of the Gospel, would have meant that not only the Jewish nation would have been convulsed and wrecked by the spirit of the new teachings, but also that the doctrines themselves would have gone down with the wreck of the nation. Consequently it was the divine plan that a new Israel should be started, "a holy nation, a peculiar people," and that it should be the receptacle of the new grace and truth then due.

Similarly now in the end of the Gospel age we perceive the impossibility of putting the new wine which the Master is now providing into the old wineskins of sectarianism, and all sectarians realize this too – they realize that to receive what is now being presented as present truth into their denominations would unquestionably mean the utter wreck of the denominations. God is therefore now, as in the end of the Jewish age, calling out of the whole system such as are Israelites indeed, that they may receive at his hands the wine (doctrine) of the new dispensation just [R2592 : page 80] at hand. As for the old institutions, they have served a purpose, partly good and partly bad. Their work, so far as the divine plan is concerned, is at an end. "The voice of the Bridegroom and of the Bride shall no more be heard" in Babylon at all. (Rev. 18:23.) Babylon will not permit them to be heard. The voice, the teaching of present truth is consequently outside her walls; and whoever has an ear for the truth, whoever desires to be filled with present truth, must come outside of sectarianism before he can be thus filled and blessed and used as a vessel in bearing the blessing to others. – Rev. 18:4,23.

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