

Meeting Jesus

Matthew

Foundation

Bible passage : Matthew 9.9-13

Matthew is named in all four of the lists of the 12 apostles in the New Testament. Mark and Luke also refer to him as Levi (there are many examples in the Bible of people being known by different names). He was a tax-collector and such people at that time were despised by most of their fellow Israelites. They were notoriously corrupt, and when some asked John the Baptist about repentance he told them about repentance John the Baptist told them to “collect no more than you are authorised to do” (Lk 3.12). The example of Zacchaeus shows that some could become very rich. In addition, they were collecting taxes for the Romans who ruled Israel. Most Israelites did not want to be ruled by Rome and so saw tax collectors as enemies of the people.

We see in the Bible, through history, and today, how people come to faith in Jesus in different ways.

Matthew was called to follow Jesus in a sudden and dramatic way. One day he was sitting in his tax booth, suggesting that he taxed people bringing goods in or out of a town or region. Then Jesus came by and simply said “follow me”. We can imagine that Matthew had already heard things about Jesus because of the stir that had been created by his teaching and miracles. Nevertheless, it was mazing that Matthew simply got up and followed.

Although he was disliked by many people he would also have had a comfortable lifestyle compared to others, but over the next three years he spent most of his time with Jesus and the other disciples, travelling around and often sleeping rough (Mtt 8.20). As Peter later remarked, they

Illustration from the 9th century Ebbo Gospels of Matthew writing his gospel.



had “left everything and followed Jesus” (Mtt 19.24). We see that it was not easy because some of those who followed Jesus turned away after a time, some of whom found his teaching too hard to live up to.

Because Matthew became well known and wrote one of the gospels it is easy to forget how shocking it was to others that Jesus should call someone like him. Having called him Jesus went to eat at Matthew’s house but the Pharisees were scandalised by this, and all the more so because other tax collectors, and “sinners”, presumably encouraged by the openness of Jesus, had also gone to eat and apparently been welcomed by Matthew.

All this prompted Jesus to criticise the Pharisees, and to declare “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners, to repentance”. It reminds us that neither Jesus nor John the Baptist condoned people for the sins but called them to repent. But it also shows that Jesus calls all people to repent and believe the gospel (Mk 1.15). It doesn’t matter what a person’s background, or how badly others may think of them, they can be forgiven through Jesus and begin a new life with him.

“Follow Me.”

Jesus calls everyone, regardless of their background, to repent, believe and follow Him.

