

One of the most profound Gospel statements from the Lord Jesus Christ was spoken to self-righteous unbelieving Pharisees. It is recorded in *Matthew 9:13* - "*For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" This is the sovereign, powerful, irresistible, and invincible calling of Christ by the Holy Spirit under the preaching of the Gospel to bring God's chosen people, sinners saved by grace, to a saving knowledge of and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation (John 6:37-45; 1 Cor. 1:23-31; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). It is the calling that leads to God-given repentance of dead works and idolatry. Christ works providentially to find His lost sheep and to bring them under His truth in the Gospel whereby He sends the Holy Spirit to give them spiritual life (regeneration) and call them by God-given faith to Him (conversion). This is the necessary spiritual aspect of salvation that is the fruit and effect of Christ's righteousness (the merit of His obedience unto death as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer) imputed to His people. In this lesson, we see God's sovereign providence in calling one of His elect, Matthew, to follow and learn of his Savior (Matt. 11:28-29).

**(Matt. 9:9)** - As the Lord passed from Capernaum to the sea side, His "**SAW A MAN, NAMED MATTHEW.**" Mark and Luke identify him by his name "Levi," and Mark adds "*the son of Alphaeus*" (Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). It could be that his first name was "Matthew" (gift of God) and his last name was "Levi" (united, joined). Matthew was "**SITTING AT THE RECEIPT OF CUSTOM,**" meaning that he was a tax collector (Publican) employed by the Roman government to collect unfair taxes from the Jewish people. Publicans were known to be scoundrels who accepted bribes from the rich and extorted vast sums of money from the poor. The people generally considered them to be traitors and thieves, and they despised them. Christ "**SAW**" this man which indicates that He focused intently upon this one particular man. As we have seen before, the Lord was seeking His sheep whom He knew by name (John 10:27). He said to Matthew, "**FOLLOW ME. AND HE AROSE, AND FOLLOWED HIM.**" This is the sovereign call of Christ to Matthew in the realm of God's providence to bring His sheep to follow and be taught of God concerning the things of salvation (John 6:44-45). Luke added that Matthew "*left all, rose up, and followed Him*" (Luke 5:28).

How do we account for a sinner who made his living getting rich off of other people's misery simply hearing two words, "*follow Me,*" and leaving all of his ill-gotten gain to follow Jesus? Some say that all that Christ said to Matthew is not recorded here, but we can truly mark this incident as coming about by the sovereign providence of God. Matthew was one of God's elect, given to Christ by the Father in the covenant of grace to be saved, justified, redeemed, called, preserved, and glorified by the Son of God (John 6:37-39; 10:29; 17:2,3,6,9,11,12,24; 18:8-9). Matthew was an object of God's electing love and grace, and this was the appointed time of his calling to Christ and to be converted to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry.

**(Matt. 9:10)** - Luke tells us that this feast at the house of Matthew was held specifically for Jesus as the guest of honor (Luke 5:29). Matthew invited his friends and colleagues to meet the Savior, and, of course, the only ones who associated with him were other publicans and notorious sinners, people that were despised and shunned by most Israelites. To sit down and have a meal with such people was a great disgrace and scandal, especially to the self-righteous Pharisees.

**(Matt. 9:11)** - "**AND WHEN THE PHARISEES SAW IT, THEY SAID UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, WHY EATETH YOUR MASTER WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS?**" Because of their spiritual blindness and self-righteousness, they could not understand how a true man of God could consort with

publicans and sinners. The Pharisees did not consider themselves to be sinners. The Lord dealt with this in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:9-14. He showed how that those who exalt themselves, thinking that they are righteous because of their heritage and/or their works and despise others give no evidence of being justified (forgiven of their sins and declared righteous) before God. But the publican who was convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sinfulness and depravity, and who beat upon his chest crying, *“God be merciful to me a sinner”* (Luke 18:13), went away justified by God’s grace based on the blood, the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:4-8; 2 Cor. 5:19-21).

**(Matt. 9:12)** - The Lord’s response to these unbelievers who considered themselves righteous is so profound, and it is something we all should seek to know its true meaning - *“THEY THAT BE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN, BUT THEY THAT ARE SICK.”* Christ used the metaphor of sick people who need a doctor and well people who need no doctor. *“They that be whole”* would be righteous people. *“They that are sick”* would be sinful people. In reality, among fallen human beings there are none who are “whole,” meaning to be righteous or good in God’s sight (Rom. 3:9-12,23). But by nature, sinful people judge themselves to be righteous (or righteous enough) and good (or good enough) to be accepted with God. But if any were truly righteous and good in God’s sight, they would have no need of a savior to redeem them from their sins and to work out a righteousness for them. But God’s Word is clear - WE ARE ALL SIN-SICK, WRETCHED, AND EVEN DEPRAVED PEOPLE WHO NEED THE GREAT PHYSICIAN. Jesus Christ is the Great Physician Who can and does heal the sin-sickness of His chosen people, given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world. He cures His people by His grace through the redemption He accomplished on the cross as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. On the cross, Christ established the cure for sin - His righteousness which God has imputed to all His people and from which He gives them spiritual and eternal life that can never fade away or vanish. Christ is *“the Lord our righteousness”* for His people (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16). Christ is the eternal health and life for His people (John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-13).

**(Matt. 9:13)** - *“BUT GO YE AND LEARN WHAT THAT MEANETH”* - These words of our Lord are certainly worth our time and effort to find out exactly what they mean. As we are all sinners, and as we are all in need of a righteousness we cannot produce, our only hope is to seek Christ and His righteousness wherein we find salvation and eternal life (Matt. 6:33). We know from God’s Word that if any of us truly seek Him, it is God Who chose and sought us first, and we know we will find Him (John 6:37). *“I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE: FOR I AM NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT SINNERS TO REPENTANCE”* - The Lord made it clear that salvation, even the forgiveness of sins is a matter of pure mercy and not works such as sinners offering animal sacrifices. It takes the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, to pay our sin-debt and establish righteousness by which we are forgiven of all our sins (Heb. 10:4-14). This is the lesson that sinners need to learn, and they can only learn it as the Holy Spirit reveals the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus to them (John 6:44-45; Rom. 1:16-17). When the Spirit reveals this glorious truth to God’s people, He brings us to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry. This is when we turn to Christ, trust Him alone, and turn away from our self-righteous works and efforts.