

THE HOME OF MATTHEW TO SUPPORT A STATEMENT
THE HOME OF MATTHEW TO SUPPORT A STATEMENT (MARK 2:14-17)

"And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him. Follow me. And he arose and followed him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Capernaum was one of the most important centers in Galilee, for through the city went caravans of many nations. There were numerous offices along the highways where imported goods were examined, assessed, and dues paid to government representatives. Matthew the son of Alphaeus was one of those men. The approach of Jesus to his table aroused considerable interest, for the Lord had no luggage to be examined and nothing to declare. With speculative eyes, Matthew looked at his client and then heard the words, "Follow me." There could not have been a more electrifying moment, for unlike Zacchaeus, Matthew knew the identity of Jesus. The inspired preaching of the Evangelist from Nazareth had stirred the city, and the cleansing of a leper had amazed the entire community. Every person talked about Jesus, and possibly Matthew had attended one of the meetings.

Much was at stake that day, for Matthew was an employee of the government and was accountable to an overseer. He was a man of the pen and was required to keep accurate records. Leaving his post in the middle of a busy day would cause problems—His records would be mined, his employment lost, and his future threatened. As he continued to watch the Stranger with the fascinating smile and the laughing eyes, the Lord said to him, "Follow me." Suddenly the soul of the customs agent was deeply affected, and his obedience was instantaneous. Mark explained it was only the prelude to a banquet to which many publicans and sinners were invited. The Pharisees were outraged. but the Savior was aware of the consequences and decided to support His new friend.

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If the host were asked why he had forsaken everything, he probably replied, "Look at Jesus." If people inquired about his plans for the future, he replied, "I want to stay with Him forever." Matthew transformed a home into a sanctuary. Once again the great Physician had made a house call. The details of that spontaneous response to the call of Christ are extremely fascinating.

A Glorious Celebration... Expressing

Matthew and Mark were content to write, "Jesus sat at meat in his house," but Luke, who was a medical doctor accustomed to keen observation, wrote, "And Levi made him a great feast in his own house" (Luke 5:29). That statement might be paraphrased, "And Levi supplied a magnificent banquet at his own expense." It was not an ordinary feast—it was a great feast that fully satisfied the needs of a multitude of guests. It commemorated the most wonderful moment in Matthew's life. The customs officer, unlike other disciples mentioned in the New Testament, was not the usual tax collector. He received custom fees obtained from travelers who brought goods from distant lands. That fact might explain why the critics directed their accusations against the guests; no one spoke ill of the host. The ordinary tax officials took money from reluctant

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taxpayers, but Matthew received the duties imposed upon business men who were able to recoup their losses from profits made in transactions. The merchants knew beforehand they would be required to pay import duty and could make the necessary adjustments in prices to reimburse themselves.

The feast had a dual purpose; it enabled Matthew to share his happiness with friends, but it was also a way by which he could express his love for the Savior. Unfortunately, there were many people who received much from the Lord but gave nothing in return (see Luke 17:12-19). A river without an outlet inevitably becomes a Dead Sea!

A Glad Confession. . . Explaining

The events of that memorable day were to be followed by widespread repercussions. The decision to follow Christ led to serious problems. Luke mentions the fact that having heard and accepted the invitation to follow Jesus, Matthew "left all, rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:28). When the official closed his books and abandoned his lucrative occupation, his commitment to a new life was complete.

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The rich young ruler considered discipleship to be too costly. He loved his possessions and refused to leave them. Matthew was different; he left everything except his pen! Hitherto he had written about money; henceforth he would describe miracles!

It seems significant that he never became famous for anything except his memoirs of the Lord. Simon Peter earned a reputation as a forceful speaker, John as a beloved pastor, Andrew as an earnest soul-winner, and Thomas as a man often filled with doubt. Matthew wrote a book that became immortal. He probably knew beforehand if any problems occurred at the feast, the Savior would help to solve them. When he worked together with the Lord they became a winning team. That delighted host was thrilled to see the Master enjoying His meal. Jesus had solved spiritual problems, and in return Matthew tried to show his gratitude. It was his way of saying, "Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul." Matthew had probably said to himself, "He did so much for me; what can I do for Him?" The subsequent banquet indicated the disciple was a cheerful giver and deserved the commendation of the Lord (see 2 Cor. 9:7).

A Gracious Companion... Encouraging

When the Lord and His new friend sat at the table, each was able to look at the other and exclaim, "He is mine!" The testimony of the disciple was enriched by the presence of the Lord, and the influence of the Master was increased by the radiant customs officer. Paul expressed the same truth when he wrote to the Corinthians saying, "For we are laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9).

God often permits the future to be veiled in obscurity, yet Christians may be assured that His presence is abiding. When Paul was apprehended on the Damascus road, the Lord was there to deliver him. Many years later when the apostle was confronted by life threatening circumstances, the Lord again appeared to deliver His faithful servant (see Acts 22:17-18). During Paul's imprisonment "the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (see Acts 23:11). When Paul's ship was about to break into pieces, the apostle said, "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23). Throughout the long hazardous missionary journeys, the Savior revealed to His servant that he was indeed a laborer together with God; he was never alone.

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Occasionally God's servants believe they have been forsaken and often become despondent. Elijah, who ran from Jezebel, exclaimed, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14). The prophet was surprised when the Lord said, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). God's servants should remember that although clouds may fill the sky, the sun never ceases to shine; every night is followed by a sunrise. Matthew enjoyed his banquet and was delighted to be able to minister to his Guest. After that day he developed into one of the unsung heroes of the Christian church.

A Great Continuance... Endorsing

Matthew did not claim to be the author of the gospel which bore his name. Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome, began by saying, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.... To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1, 7). This introduction was used in the letters sent to various churches and friends. The absence of any claim to authorship has often been used to assert the first gospel was not written by Matthew. This objection is hardly valid since the fathers of the early church stated categorically he was its author. Origen wrote, 'The first gospel was written by Matthew, who was once a tax collector, but who was afterward an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts of Judaism, and published in the Hebrew tongue" (Ecclesiastical History 6.14.5). Ireneaus, Eusebius, Jerome, and Papias endorsed that conclusion (see The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 4, pp. 122-123).

The absence of Matthew's claim to authorship might be indicative of his humility. He never sought the limelight of publicity, preferring a desk to a pulpit. He was the quiet apostle; he did not aspire to the first three-Peter, James, and John, who were present at the most important occasions in the Lord's ministry. Probably

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when the other disciples were preaching to crowds of people, Matthew remained at home writing his memoirs which became immortal. It appears evident that throughout his life the former customs agent remained true to his convictions and was a faithful servant of the Savior. When other professing Christians faltered and fell, he remained one of the most dependable of all the followers of Christ. When finally he stood once again in the presence of his Master, even the angels would have applauded when Christ said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). This great author was never meant to be a profound preacher, but he did his utmost to extend the kingdom of Christ and left behind an example that every Christian should follow.

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