

**Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)**

**Mark 2:13-17**

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Let's continue reading Mark 2:13-17.

Yesterday, we read about Jesus demonstrating His authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic. While the title of this passage often focuses on Jesus healing the paralytic, we must remember that the real emphasis is on the forgiveness of sins, not just physical healing. Healing serves as a means to show people that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, leading them to believe in Him and follow Him. Today's passage goes even further by illustrating Jesus dining with sinners who have received grace. Parallel passages can be found in Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32, and we will read them together with today's passage.

**Verse 13: "Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them."**

After healing the paralytic at Peter's house, Jesus went out by the sea. Peter's house was near the Sea of Galilee, and as Jesus arrived at the seashore, a crowd gathered around Him, and He began teaching them. Jesus's purpose on earth was to preach, calling people to repentance and belief, offering forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Healing diseases and casting out demons were just means to open people's hearts to the gospel message. Jesus understood that while many in the crowd might have gathered for material benefits, it didn't matter. As long as people were willing to come and listen, Jesus seized the opportunity to proclaim the message of life. Similarly, in today's church life, some churches hold love feasts after every Sunday service, where believers faithfully serve, providing warmth to every gospel friend who comes. What's wrong if some come for the feast? We should follow Jesus's example, faithfully serving, for if even one or two come to know the Lord through the feast, it is valuable.

**Verse 14: "As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him."**

Here, Levi, the son of Alphaeus, is mentioned. In fact, this Levi is Matthew, the author of the Gospel of Matthew, but from now on, we will use the name Matthew instead of Levi. Matthew's experience of grace, salvation, and calling all happened simultaneously, recorded very briefly in just this verse. In the parallel passage in Matthew 9:9, it says, "As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him." This verse also briefly records the event, but here, the name used is Matthew. In Luke's Gospel, the account is slightly longer, spanning two verses in Luke 5:27-28, "After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him." Luke's account also uses the name Levi and adds a sentence emphasizing that Matthew left everything and followed Jesus.

The accounts in these three Gospels are extremely brief, which is actually quite remarkable, almost unbelievable. According to the direct account in the scriptures, when Jesus saw Matthew sitting at the tax office and said to him, "Follow Me," what happened next? Matthew immediately left everything and followed Jesus. How is that possible? I hope today we can take some time to slowly reconstruct the possible circumstances at that time, as the scriptural record is very short, and much of it is my speculation. I hope believers can follow my line of thought as we explore why Matthew immediately followed Jesus after just one word from Him.

Levi is Matthew's Hebrew name, which means "joined" or "united." In the Old Testament, Leah gave birth to Jacob's third son, and she hoped that through this son, she could be united with Jacob. Typically, Jewish parents gave their children Hebrew names with expectations for their entire lives. They hoped that their children, when grown, would be united with the Lord. However, Matthew, when grown, became a tax collector. At that time, Israel was under Roman rule, and the Romans were known for their politics. They had a special method of governing their vast territories, and in Israel, they allowed Jews to govern Jews.

Tax revenue was most important to Rome, so the Romans publicly tendered taxes. Each area had a base price based on population and the prosperity of the city. Bids were publicly invited, and the highest bidder won. The winning bidder only needed to pay the bid price to the Roman government on time. As for how the winning bidder collected taxes, what the tax rates were, and which taxes were collected, the Roman government didn't ask. Therefore, tax collectors at that time often invented various ways to increase tax burdens on their own people, and after paying the bid price, the remaining was their profit. Therefore, tax collectors at that time were often very wealthy. They had good relationships with Roman officials and relied on Roman power to oppress their own people. Therefore, the Jews at that time looked down on tax collectors, considering them sinners, and equated them with prostitutes.

Matthew was probably in charge of the tax office in Capernaum. The name Matthew means "gift of Jehovah" or "God's gift," perhaps a name given to him by Jesus after his calling. Matthew was a tax collector in Capernaum, and he must have heard about the miracles Jesus performed in Capernaum, especially hearing that Jesus not only healed the paralytic but also said to him, "Your sins are forgiven." Matthew had no physical illness, but the burden of sin weighed heavily on his heart, preventing him from finding release and freedom. He was a clever tax collector who set up a tax booth by the seashore, perhaps near the South Gate pier, not far from Peter's house, making it convenient to collect trade taxes from incoming ships.

On this day, Jesus came from Peter's house to the seashore, perhaps near the South Gate pier. At this time, the crowd gathered around Jesus, and Jesus began to preach to the crowd. Perhaps this sermon was intended for Matthew. Although the scripture does not record what Jesus said, after Jesus finished speaking, He went to Matthew's tax booth. Although Jesus was preaching to the crowd, what Jesus really cared about were those one or two who were seeking Him with all their hearts. Jesus approached Matthew, and Jesus did not speak but simply fixed His gaze on Matthew. The word "saw" in this verse, in Greek, is "horao," translated into English as "look upon," meaning "to see with the mind." Jesus fixed His gaze on Matthew, and His eyes penetrated Matthew's splendid clothing, penetrated the facade built

up by material possessions, and directly struck the depths of his heart, piercing his conscience, burdened by his own sin, his sorrow for failing to meet his parents' expectations, and his love diminished by betraying his compatriots.

Jesus's piercing gaze almost overwhelmed him. Just as he was about to collapse, he saw in Jesus's eyes an abundance of acceptance and tolerance, as if telling him, "Son, I know you don't like your life right now." This look of acceptance and tolerance gave Matthew courage. He carefully examined the person who stood before him. He saw not only a carpenter from Nazareth, not only a powerful healer and exorcist, not only a prophet who could preach the word of God but also the glory of God. This shocked him, made him envious, and filled him with an unprecedented sense of extraordinary peace and joy.

In the midst of these complex emotions, he heard Jesus softly saying to him, "Come, follow me." It was the most beautiful and stirring invitation he had ever heard in his life. What else was there to consider? He didn't need a verbal response; he immediately showed his commitment through action, standing up and following Jesus. He willingly left everything behind to follow Jesus. Though it's my speculation, I firmly believe that when Jesus looked at Matthew and Matthew looked at Jesus, many untold stories were born from their eye contact, stories that words cannot express. Therefore, the biblical account simply states that Jesus looked at Matthew and said to him, "Follow Me," and as a result, Matthew left everything to follow Jesus. This is undoubtedly the most effective call in the entire Bible.

**Verse 15: "Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him."**

Here, we see that immediately after Matthew followed Jesus, his life underwent a complete transformation. He opened his home and invited Jesus and His disciples to dine. Additionally, he invited many of his friends to join them. As a Jewish tax collector, this was a profession looked down upon by other Jews, so his Jewish friends were few, naturally comprising mostly tax collectors. Matthew must have

been wealthy, with a spacious home, hence the large number of guests. Moreover, the food and drink he prepared must have been of the finest quality and abundant, creating a joyful feast.

The Bible does not record Jesus preaching; such a scene did not require preaching. Being in the presence of the Lord, enjoying both earthly and heavenly abundance, far surpasses what words can describe. They were together, enjoying the presence of God, eating and drinking. This immediately reminds us of Exodus 24:9-11, where Moses records taking seventy-four elders of Israel up the mountain, seeing the God of Israel. They observed God, and they ate and drank. Moses and the elders were at a distance, observing God, yet they still ate and drank, filled with joy. But at Matthew's feast, they took it a step further; they were not observing God from a distance but were sitting at the table with Jesus Himself, experiencing immense joy. We see that as soon as Matthew was saved, he brought the gospel to his friends, who were all tax collectors and looked down upon by others. It was through sitting at the table with Jesus, experiencing His acceptance and love, that these tax collectors were moved, and as a result, they all followed Jesus. They not only believed in Jesus but also became His disciples, following Him. Here, we truly see the promise of Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

**Verse 16: "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?'"**

What was originally a scene of great joy and glory, sinners saved by grace following Jesus, angered another group, the scribes and Pharisees. These people were the elite of Jewish society, proud of Moses' law, which they themselves couldn't fully uphold yet forced others to do so, displaying hypocrisy. They came and questioned Jesus' disciples, not daring to speak directly to Jesus because they observed that Jesus' words and actions fully aligned with the moral law of Moses, something they themselves couldn't achieve. Therefore, they could only complain to Jesus' disciples

using ceremonial law. They came to the disciples and asked, "Why does He eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" They considered tax collectors and sinners unclean and impure, thus using ceremonial law to question Jesus' disciples why Jesus would dine with such people.

**Verse 17: "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'"**

Though they didn't dare to speak directly to Jesus, Jesus seized the opportunity to approach them directly and speak to them. We see that indeed, God loves the world, even those who oppose Him or resist Him. Whenever there's an opportunity, Jesus is willing to preach the gospel to them and answer their questions. Jesus truly desires that all people be saved and none perish. Therefore, Jesus directly tells them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Jesus directly reveals to them that He came to earth as a physician to heal the sick.

We know that those who come before a doctor are aware of their sickness and hope for healing. Jesus is reminding them to first examine themselves, to know their true condition. If they find themselves sick, they need to come before the doctor, and Jesus is the best physician. We know that Jesus here is speaking metaphorically about the doctor. After finishing the metaphor, Jesus directly tells them, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Here, Jesus directly reminds the scribes and Pharisees to ask themselves whether they are righteous or sinners. If they consider themselves righteous, they naturally don't need Jesus. But if they acknowledge themselves as sinners, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, and He came for that purpose.

If these scribes and Pharisees are willing to face themselves truthfully, they will admit that they are not righteous but sinners. Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." This is a quote from the Scriptures, specifically Psalm 14:3, which says, "They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one." These scribes and Pharisees were well-versed

in the Old Testament and should be familiar with what Psalm 14 says. They should also recognize their true condition. Therefore, Jesus specifically comes to preach the gospel to them. As long as they are willing to admit they are sinners, salvation will also come to them in the same way.

Dear brothers and sisters, in today's passage, two groups of people are vividly presented before us. One group consists of tax collectors, acknowledged sinners, yet they joyfully sit with Jesus in Matthew's house, and as a result, they all follow Jesus, repent, receive grace, believe, are saved, and follow Jesus. The other group considers themselves superior, tightly holding onto Moses' law. When Jesus comes to them, they don't recognize Him but instead come to condemn Him. Jesus, out of love, deliberately comes to preach the gospel to them, yet they are unwilling to accept it. These two groups naturally lead to two completely different outcomes. Let us pray for God's grace upon us.

Let's pray together: Lord, we thank You for giving us the wisdom of salvation, enabling us to acknowledge that we are sinners and completely unable to save ourselves. Thank You for giving us full salvation, allowing us to receive forgiveness of sins through belief and granting us eternal life through belief. Thank You also for presenting the example of Matthew's calling before us, showing us a person truly saved by grace who can experience such a quick transformation and immediately leave everything to follow Jesus. Please grant us such faith, especially grant us the same vision, to see our true condition and to see the glorious outcome of following Jesus, helping us to choose what is good. Bless my life today, I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.