

Monday, July 11, 2011: Tax Collector Daily reading: Matthew 9:10-13

Born a Jew, Matthew works as a tax collector at the toll booth in Capernaum. At this time, Rome is an occupying military power. The Jews despise the Romans, and the feeling is mutual. The Roman government taxes the people to fund the empire, angering the Jews. Tax collectors extort additional money for their own pockets. Consider the implications for Matthew. He has a great job. He is probably wealthy. But his own people despise him for ripping them off and working in cahoots with the Romans. The Romans despise him for being a Jew. Tax collectors are in a category of sinners all by themselves. The phrase “tax collectors and other notorious sinners” is used more than once in the New Testament. Who do you think is a modern-day tax collector? Ask God to soften your heart to see the very best in all people.

Tuesday, July 12, 2011: Follow Me Daily reading: Matthew 9:9

Knowing what a social outcast Matthew is gives you a hint about what Matthew must be thinking and feeling the day Jesus walks up to his toll booth, looks him square in the eye, and says, “Follow me.” Jesus isn’t just asking Matthew to play a game of follow the leader; he’s inviting Matthew to be his disciple. This is an incredible honor normally bestowed only upon the best of the best in society. Can you imagine the impact of Jesus’ invitation on Matthew? Suddenly the outcast is an insider, the one who belonged nowhere belongs to Jesus, the unlovable is loved. Rubbing shoulders with Jesus and the other disciples, Matthew becomes a believer. Matthew catches the faith. What do you think Jesus noticed in Matthew? Ask God to help you be a more faithful follower today.

Wednesday, July 13, 2011: Kingship Daily reading: Matthew 21:5, 22:7, 25:34, 27:11, 27:42

One of Matthew’s core themes is the Kingship of Jesus. Matthew is interested in showing his audience that Jesus is Lord, a divine power and authority over all things. The Jews believe that the Messiah would be a king, like David. Matthew tells us that the good news that Jesus comes to proclaim is that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. With Jesus’ arrival, the reign of God, which has always been in heaven, has broken into this world. These verses emphasize Matthew’s connection between King David and Jesus (see Matthew 1:17). In fact, this Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus, tracking three sets of 14 generations with King David at the center. Do you see Jesus as a new King with divine power and authority? Ask God to help you see the Kingship of Jesus more clearly today.

Thursday, July 14, 2011: Old Testament Daily reading: Matthew 4:15-16

Matthew is a Jew with a deep passion for his own people. Because so many Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew wants to give them another opportunity to consider Jesus’ claims in light of the Old Testament. If you thumb through Matthew, you’ll discover that he often quotes the Old Testament, usually illustrating that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah. Matthew quotes the Old Testament 53 times, alluding to it 76 more times. Matthew draws Old Testament themes into the new story to plant seeds of faith into his Jewish friends. Do you see Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies? Ask God to make you willing to go to great lengths to connect with new friends in order to plant seeds of faith.

Friday, July 15, 2011: Sowing Seeds Daily reading: Matthew 13:1-9

This brings us to a critical question. How is it possible that God sent the long-awaited Messiah into the world but only some people (and the least expected people, at that) respond with faith? How is it possible that his own people “knew him not”? The primary purpose of this parable is to respond to that question. We may grant the important point that different people respond to the same message differently, but why is the devil successful with one person and unsuccessful with another? What are the root differences between those who sprout up and quickly fade, and those who stay the course? Why are some people not overcome by worldly cares, and others get lost in making money? The mystery of human response to the Gospel is described by Jesus, but not resolved. What caused faith to spring up in you? Ask God to grow faith in you today.

Saturday, July 16, 2011: Caught, Not Taught Daily reading: Matthew 4:18-22

The most important things in life are caught, not taught. Most of the values we hold dear were learned by watching our parents, not from a book. You might like to play tennis or golf, not because you took a class, but because someone asked you to play. You might be a Vikings fan, not because you “learned” football, but because you watch it with your friends and family. The most important things in life are caught, not taught. That’s also true of the Christian faith. It’s like the flu; if you are around people who have it, you might get infected. The difference is that when you’re around people who are truly committed to Christ, you really *want* what they have! That’s how most of us become Christians. Our friends or family didn’t lecture us; they lived their faith alongside us and it rubbed off. Who did you catch your faith from? Ask God to give you a thankful heart for their influence in your life.

Sunday, July 17, 2011: Party Daily reading: Luke 5:27-32

Matthew throws a party. What are you doing? How are you sowing seeds of faith and God’s love, expressing the good news of Jesus in how you live? It isn’t difficult or intimidating or confrontational or offensive. It isn’t about having all the answers or acting especially religious. It’s about sowing seeds of faith and love, being Jesus on two feet for someone else so that they might catch the faith. People won’t dare to believe that Jesus loves them until they experience how much Jesus’ followers love them. We trust that as we seek to love God and neighbor, seeds of faith might be sown, and God might grow something beautiful out of it. Like Matthew, our encounter with Jesus changes our life. How has Jesus changed your life? Ask God to help you “throw a party” for the sake of planting seeds of faith.