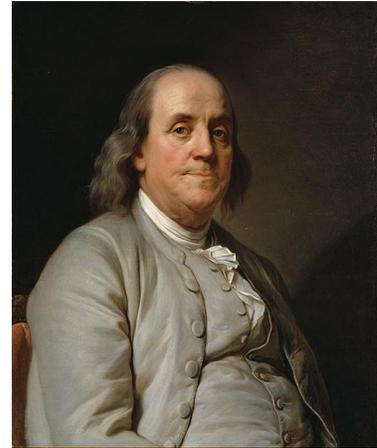


What Kind of Man Is This? Lord of our Lives, Part 3
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

In the year 1783, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to a friend. The friend had asked him how things were going in what was then the new country called “The United States of America”. Here’s how Franklin replied: “Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”



Benjamin Franklin

“Death and Taxes”. That went on to be one of the most popular quotes in the English language. Franklin, I’m sure, knew a lot about taxes. One of the things that’s often forgotten about the United States is that one of the reasons we broke away from Great Britain was taxes.

The people of Great Britain at the time had a law: No tax could be passed without the approval of the Parliament. Parliament was their governmental voting body. The thirteen British colonies of North America, had no representatives in parliament. And so came the protest, “No taxation without representation.” If a government called for taxes without giving the populace any say in how the money would be spent was considered oppressive. The King of England, according to the Americans, was a terrible oppressor.

This started out as a complaint, and then grew. Eventually, it led to open protest, some of which turned violent. One notable event was the Boston Tea party, where residents of the colonies wanted to protest a tax on tea. So, they boarded a British ship and threw its cargo into Boston Harbor. The British, of course, didn’t like this. So, they enacted some penalties. That only caused more protests by the Americans. And eventually you had the American Revolution.

Much of the conflict that led to the creation of United States of America centered on the idea of “Taxation without Representation.” If we understand all this, we have an idea, of how powerful it can be when governments aren’t careful in the way they gather taxes.

So, you can imagine how people felt back in the days of Jesus when he lived in ancient Israel. In that day, the Romans had marched through Israel. They were terrible oppressors. Anyone who didn’t obey the Romans suffered - And they suffered badly.

Now, why would the Romans do this? Raising an army is a lot of trouble. It's expensive. Why wouldn't the Romans just stay home and enjoy the nice weather in Italy? Italy has always been a nice place. It's like New Jersey, only with twice as many beaches. There are beaches on both the east and the west sides of the country with warm water from the Mediterranean Sea splashing on the shores. Why would anyone ever leave?

Answer: Because invading countries was a way to make money - Lots of money.

The way to make money is through taxation. The Romans had a very simple formula. "Pay us taxes, or we kill you." And believe me, this was NOT taxation *with* representation. The Romans simply took as much as they could.

Because of this, the Romans were hated. There was only one group that was more hated than the Romans. We're going to learn about them today.

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe." We're learning about the life of Jesus by working our way systematically through Matthew's book about him. It's a big book, so we're dividing it into some sub-series. We're calling the current one, "What Kind of Man Is This?" Today, we're going to learn that Jesus is worthy to be: Lord of our Life.

Why is Jesus worthy to be the Lord of our life? Let's find out why.

I. Who was Matthew?

We'll start by meeting Matthew. Who was he?

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. (Matthew 9:9)

So here we meet someone special: The author of the book we're studying. We don't know a lot about Matthew. In only two sentences though, we learn two very important things about this man.

A. He was a tax collector.

Matthew was a tax collector. Why did we spend so much time in our introduction talking about taxes? Because taxes have always been a source of problems in world history. They were a big problem in ancient Israel. Let's learn a little more.

Collecting taxes is and always has been complicated. People can be very clever - They have always found ways to get around paying taxes. Here's how the Romans handled that:

Whenever they conquered a territory, they divided it up into regions. Then, they held an auction. A group of wealthy people would bid on the territories. The bid was based on how much tax money they thought they could collect.

Let's say they were bidding on the region of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a big place with lots of people, and a center of commerce in Israel. So, there was a lot of potential tax money there. The first bidder says, "If you award me the territory of Jerusalem, I can raise 80 million shekels". The next says, "That's nothing! I can raise 90 million." A third says, "I can outdo the others – I'll raise 100 million shekels." The auctioneer says, "Sold to the man who commits to raising 100 million." From this point forward, the man who won Jerusalem was responsible to pay one hundred million shekels to Rome every year. Rome didn't care how it was done, as long as they got their money.

Why would people do this? Why would they offer large sums of money for a conquered territory? Because once they raised the money they owed to Rome, any money above that amount they could keep for themselves. So, if the man who offered a hundred million dollars could raise one hundred and ten, he got to keep the extra ten million. So, if you played this game the right way, you could make lots of money. Wealthy people who did this would become even more wealthy.

This is getting a little long but it's vitally important. Hang on for just a few more details of how this was done. The people who were allowed to participate in these auctions were either Roman citizens or people who were sympathetic to Rome. They all had one thing in common: They had no sympathy for the people in the conquered territories. In fact, they may not have seen the people in the conquered territories as people. They looked at a given region and didn't see the people living there: They didn't see human beings with dreams and aspirations. They certainly didn't see the pain of others. They only saw a pile of potential money. That was it.

This is important: ***There have always been people like this*** - Powerful people who view whole populations as a source of income and nothing more. They have been around for centuries and millennia. That's going to be important later in Matthew's book. Also, understanding this principle is an important part of developing a Biblical world view.

How did these people go about making their money in Jesus' day? In order for these people to get their money, they needed help. They knew that if they just went in and took money, they would meet resistance - Dangerous resistance. So, they needed help from local people - People who understood the language and culture of the region. In the case of territories in Israel, these helpers would be Jews.

So, here's the big problem: Again, there was no "taxation with representation". This was just money being taken from people and sent off to Rome. If you were a Jew, and you worked as a tax collector, you were helping the Romans to rob your fellow countrymen.

So, why would some Jews do this to their fellow countrymen? Again, because there was lots of money to be made. Jews who agreed to do this were paid a lot. This was a way to get rich.

There's one final detail: The higher up you were in this process, the less visible you were. The Roman citizens who controlled the territories were rarely seen by the people living in the territories. The owners created organizations and hired high-level people from the Jewish nation to run those organizations. These high-level people were seen more by the public, but still not often. There was one group of people who were very visible to everyone. Those were the people at the bottom of the organization who actually went out into the population to collect the money.

We said a few minutes ago that there was a group of people who the Jewish people hated even more than the Romans. Well, here they are. This brings us back to Matthew. Do you know what Matthew did for a living? He sat in the tax collector's booth. Of the whole corrupt system of taxation in the Roman world, Matthew was in the most visible part.

The Jewish people hated the Romans. They hated paying taxes to the Romans. But most of all, their hatred focused on the part of the system that they could see. And Matthew was it. Matthew, as a tax collector, was among the most hated people in Israel.

And let's understand something: Matthew was a tax collector because he chose to be. There was nothing keeping him from finding more honest work. Matthew chose to make his living robbing his countrymen **because he wanted the money**. So understand this: **Matthew was a very bad man**. He represented a form of lowlife that is despised in every culture that has ever existed.

Who was Mathew? Matthew was a tax collector in ancient Israel. And he was a very, very bad man.

We said a moment ago that we learned two things about him. What's the second?

B. Matthew left everything to follow Jesus.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and **Matthew got up and followed him**. (Matthew 9:9 emphasis mine)

We've been looking at some stories lately that are also told by the gospel writers Mark and Luke. Let's look at what Luke has to say:

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:27-28)

Many people in Jesus' day went by several names. In Luke's book, Matthew is referred to as "Levi". They're the same man.

Luke takes a detail that you might infer in Matthew's book, and he makes it blatant. Matthew didn't just leave for a little while, only to come back to his lifestyle later. He left everything. He gave up the ability to make large sums of money in order to follow Jesus. He knew that once he left, he could never be allowed to come back.

How much time did Matthew need to think about this? He made his decision the moment he was invited. Let's compare this to some others we met in our recent series.

A few sessions back in Matthew 8, we met a teacher of the law who declared that he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus had to warn this man that following him was not a job. There was no steady income, no permanent home, no benefits. Just the opposite – following Jesus in those days was a good way to become homeless and poor. After being warned by Jesus about this, we didn't hear any more from that man.

A little while later we met a man who was called by Jesus the same way Matthew was. Jesus invited the man to follow him. But the man answered, "First, let me go and bury my father." We learned that the phrase "bury a father" didn't mean physically put your dead father in the ground. It referred to a son staying home until the father died so that he could receive his inheritance. Jesus rebuked that man. Afterwards, we didn't hear any more from him, either.

But not Matthew.

Matthew was not imagining money that he could make in the future. He didn't need a job. He had a good one that made lots of money. He wasn't thinking about an inheritance that he would receive years down the road. He had the ability to make more money than a lot of his contemporaries - And he left it in an instant.

Why? Because when Matthew looked at Jesus, he saw someone who was worthy to be the Lord of his life.

Let's learn one more thing about Matthew. We're going to find that Matthew was very excited about following Jesus. Let's read.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. (Matthew 9:10)

How do we know that Matthew was excited about following Jesus? Because the first thing he did was throw a party and invite all his friends. Matthew didn't just disappear. He didn't quietly pack up and leave. He didn't leave all his friends wondering what happened to him. He threw a big dinner and invited all his friends. Why? So that they could meet Jesus, too. That's what

someone does when they're excited about something. They want all their friends to have it, too.

Who were Matthew's friends? Tax collectors and sinners. Think about this: Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated. So, none of the quote "good people" wanted them around. So, if a tax collector wanted company, he had to hang around with other tax collectors. Along the way, you pick up some other people who don't fit in. Perhaps criminals? Perhaps some "women of dubious character"? Matthew's friends were all people who might be called "undesirables." And they were all invited to the party.

II. Why did Jesus Call Matthew?

Now that we know some things about Matthew, let's ask a question: Why would Jesus want to hang around with "undesirables"? And why would he call Matthew to follow him? Let's read on and find out.

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11)

It seems the Pharisees had some questions about this. Now, the Pharisees had a number of faults. Among them was, shall we say, a certain lack of courage. They saw Jesus do something they didn't like. Instead of asking him, they asked some of his disciples.

Why did they do this? Let me suggest that the purpose wasn't to get an answer: In their minds, this was a rhetorical question. Remember, Jesus has criticized the Pharisees. Back in Matthew 5 he said: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20)

So, here the Pharisees think they can get Jesus back. They're saying, "If he thinks he's so righteous, then why does he hang around with such lowlife?" Maybe they can peel off a few of his disciples by insulting him behind his back?

Jesus was totally aware of what they were up to.

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:12-13)

In saying this, Jesus gives an answer in three parts. All three parts are addressed directly to the Pharisees.

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”

What would life be like if no one ever got sick? We wouldn't need doctors, right? But people do get sick, and that's why we need doctors. Imagine that someone trains to be a doctor, but only wants to hang around with healthy people? Life would be easy. They would never get their hands dirty. They would never have to do any real work. Those doctors could charge money to do very little. As I said, this is pointed directly at the Pharisees. Real doctors are happy to help sick people. Jesus is saying, “If you were all doing your jobs, you'd be in here - Not hiding outside.”

Then Jesus makes his second point:

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”

Jesus is quoting the prophet Hosea (For those who want to read more, Hosea 6). To understand this, you have to understand something: People are important to God. All people. Everywhere. Even those that we consider to be inconvenient.

The Pharisees believed that all God cared about was following the rules. That meant, you did things like tithing. That meant offering sacrifices in the temple at the proper times. That meant staying out of trouble. People who wanted to participate in that lifestyle were the “good people”. People who didn't were the “bad people.” To the Pharisees, the “bad people” were disposable - You avoided them.

To this, Jesus said, “no”. The point of a sacrifice is that it honors and please God. God thinks that people are important. So, what he prefers is compassion and mercy. If you want to honor him, you need to value people like he does. If someone doesn't want to follow a godly lifestyle, you need to be reaching out to those people rather than ignoring and avoiding them. You need to be involved in their healing - Not their rejection.

And then Jesus drives it home:

“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

If the whole world was full of perfect people, Jesus wouldn't have needed to come. But the world is full of sinful and broken people. That's why Jesus came. In fact, that's all there is in the world - Sinful and broken people. Let's be reminded again of the words of the Apostle Paul:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

Why did Jesus hang around with tax collectors and sinners? Because often times, people who live in obvious sin are aware of their sin. Previously, when Jesus called to a teacher of the law, the teacher could only think of the lifestyle he already had. Religious teaching was a job - A convenient job. A job with a salary, nice clothes, and a home. In his mind, the teacher didn't

have to hang around with troubled people. So Jesus had to remind that man that following him was not a job.

When Jesus asked another man to follow him, the man decided that getting an inheritance was more important. He figured he had all the time in the world. He could come back to Jesus later. He figured that because he had no idea of his own sin and the danger he was in.

But then we meet Matthew. He was a tax collector. He was a very bad man - And apparently, he knew it. So, when Jesus called to him, he knew what he was being offered: A chance to be free from his sin. When he heard that, he jumped right up.

And it turns out Matthew cared about people. He cared about his friends. So, he immediately invited them all to meet friend Jesus. Once again, we get an interesting detail when we read Mark's version of the story:

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, ***for there were many who followed him.***
(Mark 2:15, emphasis mine)

Among the Pharisees, there were many who rejected Jesus. That's because they saw themselves as wonderful people who didn't need any help from God. Among the tax gatherers and sinners were many who saw that they were sinners. And so, when Jesus invited them, they followed.

IV. What does this mean for us today?

Now that we've met Matthew, the author of the book we're studying, we can ask a question: What does this mean for us today? As it often does, it means lots of things.

Let's focus on just a few points: We'll ask: How do you view yourself? Who do you resemble more? A pharisee, or a tax collector?

Are you like the Pharisees? Are you someone who has it all together? Are you someone who has no need, or little need of Jesus? I mean hey, you follow the rules!

Or are you like Matthew? Are you someone who realizes that there are problems in your life? Sin. If you're like Matthew, then you need Jesus.

Now, some who are reading were like Matthew at one time. You understood your need for a Savior. So, at the time, you asked Jesus to forgive you. But, oh my, how easy it is to forget those days.

When Jesus said that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, he didn't mean he doesn't want sacrifice at all. Ideally, he wants both. But, when we choose to serve God, when we follow the rules, when we choose to sacrifice, we do so to honor and please him. He cares about people – all people. So, we need to remember those other people, even if they're inconvenient.

We started by talking about people in history who looked at groups of people as piles of money. It's easy to hate people who do that. But you know something? It's easy to fall into that kind of thinking on a smaller scale. It's easy to go through life choosing our relationships based only on those who give us things. It's easy to avoid the inconvenient people – the people who don't give anything back.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, a man came along named Paul. He started as a Pharisee, but he became a great church leader. Here's what he said to his young friend Timothy.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. (I Timothy 1:15)

People who think of themselves as sinners have something special: They understand why Jesus came. He didn't come into the world to save other people. He came into the world to save them. The more people understand this, the more of Jesus they have. Those people understand that they need to make Jesus the Lord of their lives.

As we draw to a close, let's give that some thought. If you don't think of yourself as a sinner who needs to be saved, ask Jesus to show you. Then ask him to forgive. Then follow him.

Why? Because he's worthy to be the Lord of Your life.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church:
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site:
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net