

The Gospel today gives us three encounters with Jesus—three very different people, in three very different situations, all met by the same Savior: A tax collector sitting at his desk. A desperate father kneeling in grief. A suffering woman reaching out in hope.

Matthew weaves these stories together not by accident, but to show us the heart of Christ. A heart that sees us. A heart that calls us. A heart that restores us.

The story begins simply: “***As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth.***”¹ As Jesus travels throughout all of Galilee, he does so intending to move toward the margins, toward the outcast, toward the one everyone else has written off. The kingdom He brings does not hover around the respectable or the religious—it steps deliberately into the places where grace seems least likely. And it is there, in that unlikely place, that Jesus stops, looks, and calls.

Matthew is not looking for Jesus. He is not praying, not repenting, not seeking spiritual renewal. He is working—doing a job that has made him wealthy, isolated, and despised. Tax collectors were considered traitors to their people and collaborators with Rome. They were the last people anyone would suspect a Jewish rabbi like Jesus to notice. But Jesus sees him. And then Jesus speaks two words that change everything: “*Follow me.*”

Matthew’s response is immediate and astonishing: “***He rose and followed him.***”² The verb “rose” is the same verb used for the

¹ Matthew 9:9

² Matthew 9:9b

resurrection. Something new, something life-giving, something miraculous is happening in him. But it comes at a cost. To leave the tax booth is to leave it forever—no turning back, no returning to the old life. The man who once loved gain now loves souls. The one who spent his days collecting money now sits at the feet of the Savior, doing everything he can to bring others under the sound of His voice.

But when the religious leaders objected to Jesus' fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners, Jesus answered them, ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”*** Then he added, ***“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’”*** They knew the Scriptures, but they did not understand the heart of God. And so Jesus gives His mission statement plainly: **“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

He came for those who know they need saving. He came to restore, not to congratulate the already-convinced. The mercy he shows is never exclusion—it is always invitation. And Mathew proves it in the very next scene, where he shows us what that mercy looks like in motion. A desperate synagogue ruler breaks through the crowd, falls at Jesus' feet, and pleads for his daughter who has just died. Faith drives him to Jesus when every earthly reason for hope is gone. And as Jesus rises to go with him, another story unfolds along the way—a woman who has suffered for twelve long years reaches out in trembling faith just to touch the fringe of His garment. For twelve years, she has lived with pain, weakness, and shame. Her condition has drained not only her body of strength but her entire life. She is ceremonially unclean,

socially isolated, and financially exhausted. No one has been able to help her. But she has heard of Jesus, and hope—fragile but real—stirs again. She says within herself, ***“If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.”***

She reaches out in trembling faith, hoping to remain unseen, but Jesus will not let her slip away unnoticed. He turns, He sees her, and He speaks the words her soul has ached to hear: ***“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”*** And Matthew tells us, ***“Instantly the woman was made well.”*** In a moment, twelve years of suffering bow before the authority of Christ. She comes to Him hidden and afraid, but she walks away seen, restored, and called ***“daughter”*** by the Lord of life.

And so Jesus continues to the ruler’s house, where the sound of mourning fills the air. The flute players are gathered; the crowd is wailing—death has settled in, and everyone believes the story is over. But Jesus steps into that atmosphere of despair and is undeterred. He sends the crowd outside, takes the girl by the hand, and with the quiet authority of the Lord of life, He raises her up. Death yields. Hope returns. And the news spreads through all the district. In this moment, Matthew shows us that the same Jesus who calls sinners, heals the broken, and restores the forgotten is also the One who stands sovereign over death itself. Where He enters, despair is never the final word.

Two very different people, one public and one hidden, one powerful and one powerless, both brought to the end of themselves. And Jesus meets them both with the same compassion. He restores the woman with a word, and He takes the little girl by the hand and raises her to life. In these intertwined

stories, Matthew shows us that the mercy Jesus shows is not theoretical—it is embodied, personal, and powerful. He is the Savior who responds to desperate faith, who brings life where death has entered, and is ever ready to heal the brokenhearted.

When we step back from these stories, we see a single thread running through them all: **faith looks to Jesus when every earthly reason for hope is gone.** And this is exactly the kind of faith Paul holds before us in Romans chapter 4. Abraham was given a promise that seemed impossible. His body was *“as good as dead,”* and Sarah’s womb was barren, yet *“in hope he believed against hope.”* He did not deny the reality of his circumstances; he believed that God’s promise was even more real. He was *“fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.”*

This conviction is the faith Jesus awakens in every heart He touches. The ruler believed even when death had already entered his home. The woman believed when twelve years of suffering had drained her strength. Matthew believed when he had nothing to offer but a broken, compromised life. And Abraham believed when nature itself said the promise was impossible.

This confidence is the faith to which we are called—faith that rests not on what we see, but on the God who “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist”.

And Paul tells us that Abraham’s story was written: *“not for his sake alone, but for ours also.”* The same Savior who took the little girl by the hand, who restored the forgotten woman, who called Matthew from his old life, now calls us to trust Him with a faith that hopes against hope.

So we end where Matthew and Paul both lead us: **Fix your eyes on the God who keeps His promises. Trust the Savior who never turns away the brokenhearted. And believe—truly believe—that nothing is beyond His power to redeem.**

Pastoral Prayer:

Gracious and merciful God, You are the One who sees us in our need, who calls us from our old ways, who heals our hidden wounds, and who brings life where death has entered.

Give us that same faith revealed in the Gospel today:

- Where we feel the weight of our failures, bring your mercy.
- Where we carry long years of suffering, stretch out your healing hand.
- Where death or despair has touched our homes, breathe your resurrection life.
- Where our hope has grown thin, strengthen us to believe that you are able to do what you have promised.

Make us a people who trust you not because circumstances are easy, but because you are faithful. Make us a church that welcomes sinners, lifts the brokenhearted, and always points to Jesus—the Savior, who does not turn away from those who come to Him in faith.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.