



*And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, **Follow me**. And he arose, and followed him. (Matt 9:9)*

Our first Gospel, that recorded by Matthew, is the longest of the four Gospels. It is the conjunction that conjoins the Old Testament Church and Record to the New Testament Church. Though Andrew and John were the first to follow Jesus, it was Andrew and Peter who were first formally called by Christ. (see John 1:37-42) John did not mention his own name as was his custom, but we do know that two disciples followed Christ even before Peter was brought by Andrew to see Christ. Matthew did not enjoy that preeminence, but he was used of God to give us a full and complete Gospel by his hand. Quoting from the Introduction to the Book of Matthew found in the Biblical Illustrator: "Christianity cannot be separated from the past. It was not an accident or an afterthought, but foreknown before the foundation of the world. The Incarnation as it is seen now is the central point of all history The Gospel was no sudden or solitary message. Christianity is in one sense as ancient as the Creation, resting on a foundation wide as the world and old as time. Step by step the groundwork of the Church was laid in the silent depths, and at last, when all was now ready, it rose above the earth, that all men might consciously combine to rear the spiritual temple of the living God. What is true of the subject of the Gospel is true in a less complete degree of the record. The writings of the New Testament are not a separate and exceptional growth, but the ripe fruit of minds which had been matured through long ages of various fortunes and manifold influences."

The New Testament is, in a capsule, the Old Testament fulfilled and perfected in Christ. When we read the very first line of the Gospel of Matthew, we discover that it takes the single cloth of the Old Testament and joins it to the whole cloth of the New: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* (Matt 1:1) Unlike the genealogy of Luke which begins with Christ and proceeds BACK all the way to Adam

(Luke gives the genealogy of humanity), Matthew begins with Abraham - recipient of the Promise of Messiah - and goes DOWN to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the DIVINE genealogy of our Lord based on the Promised Seed.

Unlike John who never makes reference to himself by name, Matthew as well delays making mention of himself until it comes to the particular mode of his calling as a disciple. The reference could even be considered unflattering since the tax collectors (publicans) were considered a disgrace and treasonous class among the Jews.

Please observe the manner and nature of the calling of Matthew: *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.* (Matt 9:9) What salient points emerge before our eyes in reading of this occasion?

First of all, Matthew apparently had no idea who Jesus was. Many are called before they know the Author of their calling which will come later. Matthew was simply going about his business of collecting customs when Jesus (not by happenstance) passed by.

Secondly, our Lord calls those who are busy at life. Heaven needs no sluggards for the work of the Kingdom is of too vital an importance. Christ formally called Andrew and Peter while they were busy at their fishing enterprise on the Sea of Galilee. Now, He calls Matthew at the seat of customs. Busy men in life, make profitable servants in Heaven.

Thirdly, note the immediate response in obeying the call of the Lord. Peter and Andrew were called while 'casting their nets into the sea;' but they immediately and without question dropped their human labors to follow Christ to become fishers of men. The same is true here of Matthew. Not a word of question or excuse - Matthew immediately arose and followed. If you know Christ as Lord and Savior, there needs to have been a time when He called you; and there needs to be a time when you arose and followed. Have you done so. *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.* (Matt 20:16) What a depravity of soul to have been called but not finally chosen (as was the reprobate, Judas). Well, Matthew was called, and he KNEW it! So have you been called, and answered that call, if you are a Christian disciple. Are you? Or perhaps some tragic soul is reading this devotion who chose other priorities. That soul may have desired to answer the call, but not immediately - perhaps he had something that was more important at the moment than following Christ.

Many are much like a certain Scribe who expressed a desire to follow Jesus:

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. (Matt 8:19-22)

I hope the reader will ascribe a heavy meaning to this passage just quoted. Read it again and please tell us what it means? If we are willing to go whithersoever Jesus leads, we would also be willing to drop all personal business and follow Him NOW, not later! The most important consideration in the heart of every person born of woman is the security and eternal destiny of one's soul. Jesus has the keys to that destiny. He knows the way, and paid our fare at Calvary Mountain. Is out-classing the Joneses next door more important than providing missionaries to the lost; or of feeding a starving child; or of visiting those in hospital who are unable to move about freely? These are the

places that we follow Christ and behold His face. See how Jesus describes that Latter Day of the Lord:

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matt 25:31-46)¹

Here is an expression that baffled me when a very young child - I could not decipher the meaning, but my father explained it to me: "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." If we read the Bible in context and with a thirst for truth, the Holy Ghost will illumine the meaning to us. Who are the dead to which Jesus refers? When Lazarus was dead, Jesus referred to him as sleeping, but here He refers to the actual DEAD! Who are they? The DEAD are all who have more important business to attend than to follow Jesus. All who are unwashed by the Blood of the Lamb are dead in trespasses and sins! *1 And you hath he quickened (made ALIVE), who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened(made us ALIVE) us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)* (Eph 2:1-5)

The first Gospel (Matthew) is remarkable for its beauty and the abundance of mysteries revealed to our searching eyes. It is historical and genealogical: It tells us of the wise men who searched out Jesus by following a Bright Star; it teaches us how to pray: it presents us with the Beatitudes; He reveals hidden mysteries by Parables; and a thousand other wonderful truths. Knowing the Book of Matthew and all of its prose will lead to a better and more complete understanding of all that follows in the other three Gospels and the Epistles, as well.

¹ Forgive me for shamelessly plagiarizing Holy Scripture, but I checked and the KJV has no copyright - it belongs only to God