

9.21.2025 St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist (Matthew 9:9-13)

In the year 1878, less than 25 years after this church was built, Dr. James Robinson and his wife Dr. Ella Ford Robinson moved to Jacksonville and opened a drug store that was connected to his medical practice. Back in those days, in this pioneer town, doctors like the Robinsons treated every type of illness and injury. These doctors were general practitioners by necessity. They did it all, from delivering a newborn baby, to caring for a person as they drew their last breath. They even made house calls, sometimes traveling more than 100 miles on bad roads in all kinds of weather to set broken bones, pull teeth, and provide care for all sorts of wounds and diseases.

So much has changed since those days. An appointment with your family doctor today is often scheduled only to receive a referral to one of the more than 120 different types of specialists. We live in a day of pediatric doctors and geriatric doctors, doctors who treat brains and others who fix hearts. We have specialists for every type of person and every part of our body. This is our experience with physicians today, but let me ask you, what are your thoughts about the Great Physician? What about Jesus? Was He a specialist, or would the many, varied, and miraculous ways He healed the sick lead you to think otherwise?

Our Lord reached out to the leper and said, *“Be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed”* (Matthew 8:3), to a Centurion whose servant was paralyzed and in terrible agony, Jesus said, *“I will go and heal him”* (Matthew 8:7), and when He came to Peter’s house and saw Peter’s mother-in-law sick in bed with a fever, *“He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve them”* (Matthew 8:15). Jesus made the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear. He cleansed lepers and raised the dead. Our Lord is not a specialist, because His focus is not on one type of person, one part of our body, or one aspect of human suffering. The healing He provides to the sick is without any limits, and it is absolute.

The many different historical accounts of Jesus healing all types of disease and illness reveal that our Lord is no specialist, and when we contemplate our New Testament reading today, we learn that the Great Physician provides compassionate care and healing for both the body and the soul. In the passage

we read this morning, we see this picture of Matthew sitting at his tax collector's table. Matthew is a publican, a tax collector, a man despised and hated by his own people because tax collectors were not only working for the enemy by collecting taxes for the Romans, many of them were thieves. Tax collectors made their living at the expense of their own people by overcharging them and then pocketing the surplus. For these reasons the Gospel writers often use the terms *tax collectors* and *sinner*s as though they mean the same thing.

When you picture Matthew sitting at his tax collector's table, remember, this is the life he lived. If you or I were there that day, we would've seen a man despised and rejected by others, a sinner who was not being true to his faith, an Israelite viewed by his own people as an enemy of God. If you or I were there that day that's the Matthew we would've seen, but it's not who Jesus saw, because as you know "*man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7). Isn't it true that a doctor is often able to see what a layman cannot, and Jesus, the Great Physician, is able to see what we cannot. When He looked at Matthew that day, He didn't see a man to despise and reject. He saw someone who was sick and suffering, a child of God in desperate need of a Physician.

So, the Great Physician went to work. He began treating His patient with living words that pierced his heart. Jesus spoke directly to Matthew and said, "*Follow Me...*" (Matthew 9:9). *Follow Me...* At this point, it's important to remember that Matthew is the inspired human author of the Scripture we're reading today. This passage is Matthew sharing his own story, and we need to recognize that instead of describing himself as a saint from the beginning, he makes it perfectly clear that he was a sinner saved by the grace of God. From the beginning of his story, St. Matthew wants us to understand the truth that the most powerful revelation of God's unconditional love for us is found in the knowledge "*that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8).

In the same way that a physician doesn't wait for a patient to show signs of recovery before beginning the treatment, the Great Physician doesn't wait for us to begin to recover on our own. We can't. Jesus came to Matthew, and to you, and to me, when we were sick and suffering and unable to even ask for

help apart from the grace of God. We were completely unable to reach out to Him, the Great Physician had to reach out to us, and thanks be to God that He made that house call, thanks be to God that Jesus meets us all where we are - that the Great Physician was, and is, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He is the One True God who sees us when we're sitting at our own tax collector's table, meets us there, and begins His healing work by calling out, "*Come, Follow Me*" (Matthew 4:19).

Physicians guide their patients on the road to recovery, and our Lord's call to repentance, His call to turn away from this world and to follow Him is a prescription for healing. Yet, like any prescription, healing begins only when we use our free-will to follow the doctor's orders and take the remedy. Matthew communicates that truth in his own conversion story by telling us that when Jesus, the Great Physician, said to him, "*Follow Me,*" Matthew "*arose, and followed Him*" (Matthew 9:9).

St. Matthew's freely-given, faithful response to the grace found in Jesus' call to get up from that table, to turn away from sin and to follow Him, is an example for us. In his example we learn that the Son of God died to save us, not in our sins, but from our sins. The Great Physician "*heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*" (Psalm 147:3) by prescribing a remedy that calls us out of a place of sin and rejection, and into a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. St. Matthew found healing when he came to Christ, when he "*arose, and followed Him,*" and as an Apostle of our Lord he invites us to do the same, to follow Jesus moment by moment, day by day, on this great exodus that leads to the kingdom of God.

Today, there are more than 120 different types of physicians who specialize in every different part of the human body, but Holy Scripture tells us that there is only one Great Physician, only "*one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5). There is only one Physician who can heal the wound that separates us from intimacy with God. In this case there are no referrals, no second opinions, no one to save us but Christ - and Christ alone.