

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 11, Chapters 4 and 5

Our previous lesson in Matthew chapter 4 left off at a time when Christ was gathering His first disciples. Teachers and Holy Men gathering disciples was nothing new; in fact John's Gospel says that Andrew was John the Baptist's disciple before he became one of Yeshua's first two disciples.

An interesting feature about disciples and their Masters in the 1st century was that it was always the disciples that chose their Masters. There were many teachers and Holy Men to choose from if a Jewish man wanted to go that route and choose the lifestyle or cause that one of these many Masters advocated. That was the case with the disciples of John the Baptist as well. But as we see, Yeshua (the Master) chose His disciples; they didn't choose Him.

Since it seems apparent from the writings of the New Testament that the Jews believed they were living in the End Times, then the belief of Elijah reappearing and playing a significant role in those turbulent times was ever present. Thus we see that many hundreds of years earlier, in other turbulent times, that it was Elijah who spotted and then chose Elishah (the Master chose the disciple) and not the other way around as it normally was. In 1st Kings we read:

**CJB 1 Kings 19:19-21 <sup>19</sup> So he (Elijah) left and found Elisha the son of Shafat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he himself was behind the twelfth. Eliyahu went over to him and threw his cloak on him. <sup>20</sup> He left the oxen, ran after Eliyahu and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother good-bye; then I will follow you." He answered, "Go; but return, because of what I did to you." <sup>21</sup> Elisha stopped following him. Then he took the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them, cooked their meat over the wooden**

***yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people to eat. Then he got up, went after Eliyahu and became his servant.***

In his Gospel, the Apostle John reiterates the same principle about who does the choosing when he writes of Yeshua saying to His disciples:

***CJB John 15:16 <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, I chose you; and I have commissioned you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that whatever you ask from the Father in my name he may give you.***

Let's pause and re-read a section of Matthew 4.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 4:18 - end**

Before we talk about some other men that Jesus recruited, notice that the candidates are not recorded as asking "why" they should follow Him. The wording makes it as though there was immediate acceptance and they just stood up and left with Him. In fact, what Jesus offered was not an invitation but rather it was a command. The logical question is: why would these men obey and follow Him?

The answer to this question centers around just who these soon to be 12 disciples, and the many other Jews who would seek after Him, thought He was or what it was that He represented to them. In order to try and shed light on this issue let's take what I think you'll find to be an interesting detour.

In Yeshua's day there was a kind of Jewish man called a ***Tzadik***. While literally it means "righteous one" or "righteous man", to the Jews of that time it more indicated a "Holy Man". These Holy Men were miracle workers who, among other things, healed sicknesses, disabilities and wounds in the name of the God of Israel. Professor David Flusser has done some excellent research about the important place of these Holy Men in ancient Jewish society and he points out Rabbinic literature that says that a few years prior to 70 A.D., before the destruction of the Temple by Rome, 4 of these Holy Men were well known and respected in the Holy Land. Interestingly 2 of them were from the Galilee. One was named Hilkia and the other was Hanina Ben Dosa. It was believed by the Jewish community that these ***Tzadikim*** were divinely gifted and much closer to God than the average man.

Recall that in Christ's day the belief of Jews was that the era of prophets (of the Old Testament variety) was over. Prophets were the miracle workers of that bygone era and now around the beginning of the 1st century the miracle workers were these **Tzadikkim** (Holy Men). There doesn't seem to have been very many of them. It is difficult to know, exactly, when this era of the **Tzadik** arose, but it must have been at least as early as 65 B.C., because the legend of Honi the Circle Drawer is from that time. The Babylonian Talmud tells the story of Honi sleeping for 70 years and then dying soon after he awoke. The story refers to him as a **Tzadik**... literally a righteous man; but to the Jews that meant Honi held the honored position as a Holy Man. While the story itself is highly unlikely, the point is that Honi did actually exist at that time and was indeed considered a miracle working Holy Man.

Scribes being the chiefs and main authorities of the Synagogue system (the elite of the Pharisees), they were highly revered. As such they had egos and so tended to see an itinerant Holy Man as competition because the common folks flocked to a **Tzadik** in hopes of being healing of their various ailments (something the Scribes certainly couldn't do); so there was a natural tension between the two.

It is further known of these few Holy Men that they practiced poverty. This was a refreshing difference between them and the aristocratic Sadducees or the well to do Scribes; so of course the common Jew (who was generally anything but rich) felt more of a connection to these Holy Men who had no possessions and held no pretenses. It was also more or less the norm that these **Tzadikkim** would perform their healing miracles in private, and often in secret, in order not to glorify themselves. I ask you now to think; who might this sound like in the New Testament? Of course: it sounds like Christ. We see Him characterized in the Gospels as a Jewish Holy Man (acknowledging that He was far more than that in reality). We read of Yeshua constantly healing the sick, exorcizing demons, and generally hanging out with the ordinary, the poor, and the lame. In fact, it was His deeds of miracle working that attracted people to Him by the hundreds and that gained Him such a following among the common folk. But it also brought Him the ire of the religious authorities who couldn't do what He could do and therefore they saw Him as a threat.

These miracle workers are described by later Rabbis as being viewed as "sons of God". Not "son of God" in the Christian sense that we think of Jesus Christ as a literal God-on-earth Son of God, but more in the Jewish cultural sense of this rare

person having a mysterious closeness to God that the average Jew could never hope to attain. It is not unlike how some will refer to pastors or priests as "men of God". We don't mean that they are part human and part God; we merely mean that they have devoted their lives to God and He has responded by giving them a special relationship, ability and position to do God's work on earth. So the term "sons of God" was a sort of honorary title meant to explain the otherwise inexplicable about how and why they were able to perform the miraculous healings that they did.

Only in the later part of the 20th century did we discover that these enigmatic **Tzadikkim** of Jesus's day and earlier had a personal awareness that the extraordinary powers of healing they had been gifted with were because for some unknown reason God had chosen them and made them "sons of God".

We read Jesus saying this in Matthew 11:

**CJB Matthew 11:25-27** <sup>25</sup> *It was at that time that Yeshua said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you concealed these things from the sophisticated and educated and revealed them to ordinary folks.* <sup>26</sup> *Yes, Father, I thank you that it pleased you to do this.* <sup>27</sup> *"My Father has handed over everything to me. Indeed, no one fully knows the Son except the Father, and no one fully knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.*

This seems to us like an extraordinary proclamation by Yeshua who here announces His self-awareness of just who He is and because of that He has been given revelations concerning the mysteries of God, some of which He passes along to ordinary folks. And yet, upon the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find that the underlying premise of an especially righteous man, a Holy Man, being given a glimpse into the mysteries and power of The Father was not new. So Christ's pronouncement had the effect upon most Jews of confirming their view of Him that he was a Holy Man. Found among the several so-named Thanksgiving Hymns of that incredible treasure trove of scrolls we find several Essene hymns. The preface to this particular hymn says: "his message will be prudence to the simple". That is, the message of this hymn speaks of a **Tzadik** saying something profound, but it is meant for the ears of the ordinary person and not the elite. Listen closely, because it very nearly sounds like the passage I just quoted to you from Matthew 11 that came from the mouth of Our Messiah. I'll repeat: what I'm about to recite to you comes **not** from Scripture, Old

or New Testaments, but rather from an anonymous writer of the Dead Sea Scrolls who can only be writing from the position of being a Holy Man.

***Through me Thou has illuminated the face of many, and has shown Thy infinite power. For Thou has given me knowledge of Thy marvelous mysteries, and hast shown Thyself mighty with me through Thy marvels. Thou has done wonders before many for the sake of Thy glory, that they may make known Thy mighty deeds to all the living.***

Here is the point: this Essene hymn speaks of the attribute of God working wonders (miracles) through this especially righteous man, a Holy Man, a son of God. And this Holy Man is giving thanks to God and glorifying Him for the divine knowledge of heavenly mysteries, and for the gift of wielding the ability to do mighty deeds that comes from God's power and not his own. To the Jewish mind and culture Yeshua fit the identity of an authentic **Tzadik** like a glove; He was a Holy Man who worked miracles. The phenomenon of a Holy Man was not new, but rather something wonderful that seemed to come around only occasionally, unexpectedly, at God's will. And when a Holy Man appeared, people of course understood that the proof of his credentials was his miracle powers of healing. The news of the advent of a Holy Man would spread quickly and Jews would come clamoring to him for relief of every kind of malady. Holy Men were men of the common people, not men of the elite. The Gospels paint Jesus in exactly this role; but of course the Gospel writers also extol the joy that He was so much more than this: He was also the long awaited Deliverer. He was God's promised Messiah. So even Yeshua's claims to being the Son of God were not denied by the people at large, nor did those claims seem strange, because it was believed that every Holy Man who came and went was a son of God. It's only that they didn't understand that for Christ, being the Son of God was unique and fully literal as opposed to being an honorary title.

Now back to the question I posed before we started this detour: why would these fishermen and later others (who don't seem to have had any prior contact with Him) just jump up and follow Yeshua because He commanded them to? It was because they recognized Him as a **Tzadik**; a miracle worker; a son of God. A Holy Man whose persona and attributes were known, welcome and understood within Jewish society. They had probably heard of Him because Luke's Gospel says that after the 3 temptations Yeshua returned to the Galilee, began teaching in synagogues and His reputation began to spread BEFORE He started appointing disciples. Notice how in our Essene Hymn, this Holy Man would pass

on the mysteries of Heaven that He learned by teaching them to the ordinary folk. I suspect that the people sensed He was something more than a typical Holy Man but even if He wasn't, being a Holy Man was exciting enough. They weren't about to question this **Tzadik's** motives for wanting them as His followers. So it would be an indescribable honor to be in His inner circle and it would probably bring them some kind of benefit or higher status. Understand: as of this time these disciples had little idea who Yeshua really was and what their discipleship would eventually mean or lead to.

After choosing Andrew and Peter, Yeshua also found another pair of fisherman brothers, and chose them. So the first 4 disciples were fishermen. Let's pause for a second: how far should we spiritualize or make application about the first 4 disciples being fishermen? I say not as far as it is often taken. Remember: Yeshua was now living in Capernaum, a seaside town. Fishing was one of the main, if not the main, industries for the residents of Capernaum. And we find Yeshua walking along the seashore so He was bound to run into some fishermen.

Fishermen, despite what you might have heard, were not uneducated and illiterate. Fishing was not an occupation of last resort. Fishing was what today we'd call a blue collar job. These were generally happy family men making a simple but sufficient living. They could read and write, and probably speak and understand at least two languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. Some also had a working knowledge of Greek (even if they weren't fluent), because Capernaum lay on the important Via Maris trade route and knowing some Greek was necessary to do business. They and their families ate some of their catch but sold most of it at the local markets. They attended synagogues, made the journey to Jerusalem for some of the biblical festivals, and had a modest level of Scriptural knowledge. But.... and this is important..... like all of the non-elite Jews the main religious knowledge and understanding that they possessed came from Tradition because their place of learning was the synagogue where Pharisee-driven Tradition flourished. Yeshua was known to have been raised and lived in the same environment, went to the same synagogues, and had not received any formal religious training. So His ability to teach the Torah and the Prophets at an astounding level merely added to His reputation and mystique as a Holy Man par excellence.

That second pair of brothers that Yeshua commanded to become His disciples were Ya'akov and Yochanan, sons of Zavdai. Our English Bibles will call these

two men James and John. James is a terrible translation because Ya'akov translates to Jacob, not James (although to eliminate confusion, I'll use his traditional Christian name). It is widely held that this odd translation came about in honor of King James who had ordered and sponsored the creation of the King James Bible. John, decades later, became the writer of Revelation, the Gospel of John, and the three epistles 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John (not bad for a former fisherman!). Just as Andrew and Peter immediately left their nets and boats at Messiah's command so did James and John. So does this mean that they literally abandoned their valuable nets and fishing boats and walked off with Yeshua? Even more, does this mean that they also left their wives and children (assuming they weren't single men) to fend for themselves, meaning these women and children would have become impoverished and mere survival would have become challenging? While I can't answer those questions with any definitive evidence, I think I can give you an educated guess. And my guess is that the boats and nets were retained and taken over by family members. And for those new disciples who had immediate families they would not have done such a thing as to simply walk off and leave them helpless. Yeshua would not have expected them to because it would have violated the most basic of commandments to love your fellow man as you do yourself.

Since these disciples would operate almost completely within the Holy Land for the next several years, they wouldn't have been listened to or respected if they had done such a thing as to make homeless beggars of their wives and children in order to gain the prestige of following a Holy Man. So the statement that they left nets and boats at once must be taken as a very general and abbreviated statement about their instant connection with Yeshua and their immediate obedience to His command. It more indicates that without hesitation or reservation they put their occupation and their life second to following Christ. No doubt even this would have had serious consequences and put a great strain on their families, if for no other reason than they would soon be traveling on a regular basis. But this matter is never directly addressed in the Gospels so we really don't know the details or anything about their families.

Nevertheless I want to take this opportunity to comment about this because I get regular emails, usually from men who feel a call to serve in full time ministry; and yet they have wives and children and good jobs and to make this change would involve sacrifice and acceptance on the part of his entire family. There is no perfect, one-size-fits-all answer to this dilemma. But my advice is this: remember that this is not the 1st century. Our modern society is not ancient Jewish society

and so the consequences and challenges are different now than then. Ideally a man or woman will be open to God's call to service in full time ministry before they are married and start a family. Or perhaps a man and women will marry with the understanding that full time ministry is their shared destiny and so organize their lives to fulfill it at some point. It could be that a man has already started a family, and hears the calling later in life, but his wife is willing to whole-heartedly support his calling, join him, and accept the necessary sacrifices to achieve it. No one's story will be identical to another's.

However in cases where a man has a wife and family, with all its obligations, and the wife is firmly not on board with such a profound change, then it should not be done. If a person has a debt load that would not permit him or her to pay their debts on the likely lesser amount of income ministry work would generate, then it should not be done until the debts are paid. We can serve God in ministry in so very many important and indispensable ways without completely abandoning our jobs, turning our backs on our bills and debts, and uprooting an unwilling and unhappy family.

The calling that Christ has for us to be His disciples is, just like with the first 12, about committing our lives to Him just as we are. For many if not most of us that is a radical change in and of itself and requires a time of learning and adapting. Our new found faith in Him also means that we must follow Him even if our spouses, parents, children, friends, and bosses don't accept it. Does this mean that our spouses might leave us simply because we change, repent, and become disciples of Christ and worshippers of the God of Israel? Might it be that we can lose our jobs over it? Yes it does, and I personally know of cases that it has happened. Especially if one is a Jew in our time, it very likely will mean that your family will shun you and you'll be considered a traitor to them and to Judaism. But as Yeshua said:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Luke 14:26 <sup>26</sup> "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid."**

So many people hear what they want to hear in this verse, and too often they overlook the key phrase "and his own life besides". They think of this verse as a severe Jesus actually suggesting that a new Believer ought to be ready to turn against his family and despise them for Messiah's sake. That is in no way what is being commanded. This is about understanding the cost of following Yeshua

and that you may face tremendous opposition. It is about giving up one's own life such that nothing is to rank higher than love for God and His Son, and obedience to them. Loyalty to God comes first; all else necessarily is secondary. Paul has much to say about marriage and family for the person who comes to faith and now has some of these dilemmas to deal with. But in every case he suggests that before forsaking all to enter full time ministry that one is to fulfill their obligations, marital and otherwise, and to carefully count the cost. You can read some of his comments on this in 1Corinthian 7 for starters.

One final note on this matter. Verse 22 says that the two brothers "left their boat **and their father**" and went with Yeshua. This does not mean that they broke their relationship with their father. It means that the father was fishing with his 2 sons on their family owned boat when Yeshua approached them and commanded his sons to become disciples. It is simply that their father was there at the time; we're not told what the father's reaction was to this sudden turn of events.

Verse 23 adds so much context to Yeshua's ministry if we'll just accept it. It says that Yeshua went around speaking in synagogues because that's where common Jews met for worship, learning, fellowship and information. We're told that He proclaimed the Good News (or Gospel) of the Kingdom. And what is that Good News? Typically a Christian's mind says that preaching the Good News must mean that Jesus told them that He was the Messiah and that they should put their trust in Him; but that is not the case at this point in His ministry. We must think back to what John the Baptist proclaimed, and then the same message that Jesus also proclaimed as the Good News just a few verses earlier. It is not that He is the Messiah and can Himself provide for forgiveness of sins, but rather that it was time for people to repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near. To the Jews of that era, the meaning of Jesus's message was that the culmination of the End Times with all its horrors and deprivations was about to happen, and the arrival of the joyful, promised restoration was imminent. God was about to kick the Romans out of the Holy Land and to establish His rule on earth as it is in Heaven.

Now notice the next part of verse 23: Christ went about healing people from disease. That is, He continued to live and project the persona of a **Tzadik**.... a Holy Man. For the moment that is how the Jewish people were permitted to perceive Him. Because (hallelujah) a Holy Man had appeared, news of Him began spreading all over Syria and people began streaming to Him even from

there with every imaginable kind of ailment and lameness including those who were held under the power of demons. Why the mention of Syria? Syria at this time had a huge Jewish population. Syria was on the Galilee's northern border and the point of mentioning it is to show how far and wide news of this miracle worker spread even to the not-too-distant Jewish Diaspora. It also highlights what I told you earlier; the appearance of a Holy Man was rare and when one did appear, news of him spread like wildfire so the opportunity to be made well might not be missed.

But what we must also notice is what is **not** said by Matthew. In verse 25 we're told that all these people were coming from places like the Galilee, the Ten Towns (the Decapolis), the capital city of Jerusalem, the province of Judea to the south, and even areas to the east of the Jordan River. Galilee is mentioned in the list as is Judea; but why not Samaria that lay in between them? Why no mention of the prominent Tyre and Sidon? It is because Samaria was a mostly gentile and mixed blood province, as were the major cities of Tyre and Sidon. The gentiles living there wouldn't have understood the nature and importance of a **Tzadik**, which was a purely Hebrew construct. Besides: Yeshua said that He only came for the lost sheep of Israel and Matthew seems intent on making that point by using the list of places these thousands of Jews came from. Gentiles were beyond Yeshua's scope for the time being. Thus those multitudes who came to be healed and to hear a message of hope consisted almost entirely of Jews.

What we have been reading in the last couple of verses about the huge crowds coming to Yeshua for healing and hope are the preface for what comes next: The Sermon on the Mount. Who did they think they were coming to see and for what purpose did they come? They came to see the miracle working **Tzadik**. Some came for physical healing, others came because of His message that tells them of hope in the End Times, and (so very importantly) the only way to get right with God in preparation for it.

Let's move on to Matthew chapter 5.

### **READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 5 all**

This chapter is but the beginning of Matthew's 3 chapter long treatise on what happened and what Christ said in His seminal speech atop a hill in the Galilee, addressed to a wide spectrum of His people, the Jews. Why is this so important to Matthew that he'd spend so much time with it? It is because for the Jewish

Believer Matthew everything that Yeshua speaks has to do with the Torah and the Law of Moses.

The first 10 verses are, in Christian tradition, called the Beatitudes. I find it interesting that while they are but the first few verses of the extensive Sermon on the Mount, Christianity has them separated away as though they are an unrelated matter from what follows. It is not unlike what Christian Tradition has also done with the 10 Commandments that, even though they are but the first of hundreds of other commandments that God gave through Moses, Christianity has also separated them away as though they have no connection to what follows. Clearly such a separation and distinction was not God's, Moses's, Christ's or Matthew's intent, nor should Believers take it that way. Rather, these first verses of chapter 5 represent Yeshua's opening words... a sort of preamble.... which like any good leader or speaker does, gives recognition to exactly who His audience is. No doubt if He was speaking to the elite among the Jews, to the Temple Sadducees and to the synagogue Scribes for instance, that these would not have been the descriptive words He would have chosen.

We'll start peeling back the layers of this Sermon on the Mount next week.