

# **“THE CALLING OF MATTHEW... ANDERSON”**

**Rev. Matt Anderson**

**God’s Word: Psalm 139:1-18; 23-24**

**Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13**

If you could identify as one biblical character, who would it be, and the Sunday school answer here doesn’t really apply. You can’t just say Jesus because we’re not perfect. Would it be someone from the Old Testament or New Testament? Would it be a man or woman? Often, we ask people if they are a Mary or a Martha? For me I would identify with my namesake in the Bible. I identify with Matthew because our calls into ministry mirror each other.

My call to ministry happened while I was working at Rent-a-center, one of the rent to own places. People came into the store to pay on their rented items and often these were people who could not afford to purchase a tv, furniture, couch, etc. in one fell swoop or didn’t have the credit to finance such items. And so, most of the time they ended up paying up to 6x the price of a product. And so, I identify with Matthew the tax collector. As tax collectors were notorious for overcharging folks as they collected their taxes. (Think Zacchaeus, the wee little man)

Yet, I identify with Matthew as well because he was called out of that career to follow Jesus wherever he took him. That moment for me didn’t happen sitting in Rent-a-Center but on a mission trip to Mobile, Alabama. Which happens to be the state I grew up in. We were working with people recovering from Hurricane Katrina and our group had traveled there from Eastern Pennsylvania. (More on why I was there later) In the evenings we would gather to have devotions and sing some worship songs, and on that final night of worship the Pastor, my

own Pastor Matt, gathered us around to lay hands on one another and pray for one another. It was during that prayer time; I felt a sudden rush of the Holy Spirit fall over me like a waterfall. All the guilt and shame that I felt was holding me back for so many years was lifted, and I felt washed clean. At that moment God showed me a vision of preaching in front of a great crowd of people. This was my call to trust God and follow him and his call upon my life.

Looking back, I can see that God had guided my life to this moment.

I was born on a late July day in 1982 in Cocoa Beach, Florida to my mom Cynthia. (If you ever go to Ron Jon's Surf Shop in Cocoa Beach you pass my birthplace, right on the Banana River). My biological dad was not there as he had left my mom pregnant. My sister, Michelle, was 2 and a half when I was born. The three of us lived with my grandparents until my mom married the man I call my dad, I was two. He was a Wesleyan Lay Pastor at the church we attended. So, at my earliest, I was blessed by the wondrous theology of John Wesley.

When I was entering elementary school my family moved to Huntsville, Alabama. However, my mom and dad's relationship was very rocky and ended in a divorce when I was in sixth grade. Yet amid the turmoil in their relationship my mom, sister and I began attending a local Baptist church. I was heavily involved in the youth group and enjoyed serving on mission trips, singing in the youth choir, and helping with the puppet team. I wore Christian t-shirts and lived a genuinely Christian way of life. Yet had not made a firm decision on my own.

My moment of salvation or justification came when I was twelve years old. It was at a Jars of Clay concert in Gatlinburg, Tennessee that I accepted the Christian faith as my own. I had prayed some prayers in church before, but this time was different. I was genuinely accepting of God's grace and mercy for myself. I felt that Christ was for me, no longer was it my family's faith, or what I was supposed to do, but Christ was for me. That God's grace was for me a sinner, and that Jesus Christ was my personal Lord and Savior. From that moment on I lived a life of Christian not out of obligation but out of love for my God and Savior.

Just two years later, my faith was shaken when my mom died, I was 14 and would be turning 15 that summer, in between my freshman and sophomore year of high school. My questions about why my mom had died abounded. Then midway through my sophomore year of high school, my sister and I moved from Huntsville, Alabama to Athens, Pennsylvania to live with my Aunt Linda. My mom had always said if anything should happen to her, that we should go and live with my Aunt Linda. So, we left and moved to Athens. When, we moved I found it easy to invest in sports as an outlet for my pain and anger over my mom's death. I jumped headfirst into baseball, football, and helping with the basketball team, because being busy with those things made it easy not to deal with the emotions I had over her death.

Slowly, my priorities became out of whack, and I became invested in other things besides my relationship to God. I played the game of doing what I wanted to do but going to church on Sunday and asking for forgiveness. Throughout high school this became the pattern, it continued into college where my own skepticism grew as I attended a Christian college, Eastern University. I was a leader as a Resident Advisor on a hall and worked on the Student Activities board yet, I felt hollow because I was playing the game of busyness to avoid my true self. I graduated from college and decided to join the AmeriCorps\*NCCC. Where I continued to cultivate my love of service/missions. After that year, I moved to New Berlinville, Pennsylvania to live with a friend.

That friend, Adam is a youth pastor of small St. Andrew United Methodist church. He invited me to help with the youth group since I was his roommate and friend. I obliged and helped with youth group and many other things at the church. I began to really hear and do what my faith had always taught me. I felt the avoidance of my problems melt away as I focused on Christ. The pastor of that church Matt Heckman became a mentor for me; he saw gifts and graces for ministry in me before I did. He and the church gave me opportunities to lead in worship, teach bible studies, serve, and lead committees, go on mission trips, and preach. The church, Adam, and Pastor Matt were driving forces that encouraged me to attend

seminary and pursue full-time ministry. It was during this time that I had my “Matthew” call to ministry moment.

I attended Asbury seminary where I met my wife Pamela, and we got married in October of 2010. In December of 2010 she found out she was pregnant with our first son, Justus so we decided we should move close to family for support. So, I searched for jobs I could do while finishing seminary online and secured a job as a youth pastor at Salem First United Methodist Church in Salem, Ohio. Three years at North Royalton UMC where Silas was born and the last six at West Lafayette UMC where Thad was born and Olyvia was adopted. While being the solo pastor there, I was involved in many different community ministries, worked in the school system through FCA, helped our town through a derecho flood in which our church became a clearing house for volunteers and financial help. I worked closely with the daycare at WLUMC providing chapel for the students there, I also help have the first immersion baptisms in the church in which I was able to baptize Olyvia and three others.

Throughout that time, I have been reaffirmed that God has called me Matthew Anderson to be a pastor and partner with God in his work here on earth. Jesus says in our passage this morning that his work is to call not the righteous but the sinners. My passion is to reach people who have never heard or have fallen away with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ, but in the same way my passion is to equip you the saints for this work as well. So, as we get acquainted and begin this journey, I look forward to hearing each of your stories as I have shared today. Remember, we all have a story to tell and there is always someone that needs to hear it. Our call is to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and sometimes that begins with you sharing how God has changed your life when he called out to you, “follow me.”

Amen.