

## **Free: Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So**

*We're set free to free others.*

“Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!”  
(Psalm 107)

## **Matthew (the agent formerly known as Levi) and His Story of Healing**

In the previous series “FREE”, we saw how Jesus is the true and better Moses. Jesus fulfilled all that Israel and its legal system was about, leading the whole world out of slavery in a New Exodus of Love (Matthew 5:17-19; 13:16-17). *When law reached its limit, love made a way.*

The clearest account of this comes from the ***Gospel of Matthew***. Matthew was a Jew who found his own freedom in Christ as one of the twelve disciples. So whilst Moses gave us the first five books of the Bible, Jesus is depicted as delivering five blocks of teaching, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount—speaking with the authority of God Himself in the flesh.

Clearly Matthew had a grip on how good God is: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

This week we begin ***Connect One***. It's an invitation for free people to free others, to regularly

***pray for, care for, and share with someone outside the church, pointing them to Jesus.***

Maybe the best way into *Connect One* is to hear the story of how Jesus transformed Matthew. As Matt penned his stunning account of Jesus, how did he tell his own tale of freedom? Where was Matthew when he met Jesus?

Brace yourself. Here it is in the third person, from Matthew 9:9:

“As Jesus went on from Capernaum, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him. And Matthew got up and followed him.”

Disappointed? ... Or perhaps encouraged? If your story is simple, and Matthew's conversion is worth casting in Scripture, then maybe you've got something worth sharing too.

But let's scratch deeper. For Matthew's story holds out hope for every single one of us. It's not a dramatic conversion on the surface, but it's no less true that this guy needs God.

We need some background, though, for as a first century accountant, conservative Matt is precise and understated. Three points:

### **First, Matt was walking alone.**

- ✚ A despised tax collector and a socially isolated turn-coat
- ✚ Avoiding the temple as an unclean outsider
- ✚ Financially secure but a slave to the system

### **Second, Matt experienced a miracle.**

- ✚ A miraculous calling amidst ten miracles (chapters 8-9)
- ✚ As lame as the paralytic, as dead as the little girl, Matthew “rose up”
- ✚ Jesus wants to work through you; He’s planned a resurrection

### **Third, Matt had watched Jesus.**

- ✚ Calculating tax agents take time to commit
- ✚ Matthew heard the stories around Galilee and took note
- ✚ When Jesus dropped in unexpectedly and said “Follow me,” Matt was ready to rise
- ✚ We’re all on a journey with Jesus, one link in a long chain ... how will we respond?

So, Matthew’s brief testimony is starting to make sense. We’ve got a socially-outcast, money-driven, anxious penny-pincher; he’s dead inside and desperately needs a resurrection. But something about this Jesus guy and what He taught catches him off guard.

He’s drawn like a moth to the flame. *But what is it?* The only clues we have are in Matthew’s biography of Jesus. Matthew’s story is wrapped up in Jesus’ story. *But what draws him in?*

I think we find a clue in Matthew’s name. For Matthew wasn’t always Matthew. Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul, and when *Levi* came to life, he became *Matthew*.

*Levi*. From Hebrew, *lavah* (לָוִי), meaning to bind together in a contract of obligation such as a lender and a borrower (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 28:44; Nehemiah 5:4; Psalm 37:21).

He *was* Levi. It’s the perfect Jewish name for an accountant. It was all about obligation.

“The rich rule over the poor, and the

**borrower** (*Lavah*) becomes the **lender’s slave** (*Lavah `ebed*)”—Proverbs 22:7.

*This was Levi’s world*. Debt. Merit. Earning your way. You scratch my back and I scratch yours. Life ran by a schedule of repayment. *Levi was all about the ledger*.

But this bookkeeper was broke, indebted to God, and isolated from others. He needed forgiveness. Enter Jesus, and Levi is born again as Matthew.

*Matthew*. From Hebrew, *Mattithyâh* (מַתִּיתְיָהוּ), meaning “gift of Yahweh.” Freedom was *free*.

## Bewildered Bookkeepers and the New Math of Grace

Levi was all about the ledger. But Matthew was all about the *New Math of God's grace*. Unmerited favour. God's riches at Christ's expense. It didn't add up, but it's what he needed.

No wonder Jesus' teaching caught Matthew's attention, for it bamboozled the bookkeeper. As Philip Yancey pointed out, there is "*an atrocious mathematics of the Gospel.*"

More than any other account, Matthew has his eye on the money. It's like he's telling his testimony of radical grace through Jesus' stories of unexpected provision and undeserved favour. It's the total opposite of his pre-conversion life as Levi.

- ✚ Matthew 4: God's Word for bread when Jesus is tempted and starving in the wilderness
- ✚ Matthew 6: Heavenly investments and relaxing over getting to respond to God's giving
- ✚ Matthew 14-16: Without a budget, Jesus multiples fish and loaves to feed thousands
- ✚ Matthew 17: Paying for the temple tax by casting a line—coins courtesy of the fish
- ✚ Chapter 18: The books are destroyed as a million dollar debt is written off, courtesy of the forgiving King. Now, go and free those who owe you  
*(It's mathematically suspect, but Levi needs this kind of radical grace to cover His own debt to God—to restore relationships with His family and friends—to deal with his anxiety and start investing his life into loving others. Levi's ledger is slowly converting.)*
- ✚ Chapter 19: Like a camel through a needle's eye, the rich can't enter the Kingdom ... unless God prises your fingers off the cash and you cling to love
- ✚ Chapter 20: The landowner hires the losers last, but pays them the same. ... Can't God do with His funds of grace what He wants? No insiders or outsiders here—it's a free gift from start to finish. Your choice: enjoy me and a drink on the house, or go it yourself.

"Bookkeeping is the only punishable offense in the kingdom of Heaven. For in that happy state, the *books* are ignored forever, and there is only the *Book* of life. And in that book, there are no debit entries that can keep you out of the clutches of the Love that will not let you go. ... If the world could have been saved by bookkeeping, it would have been saved by Moses, not Jesus."

But Jesus paid for our debt of sin on the cross, so that God closes the books and says "It is finished." It only remains for us to seek forgiveness and choose to follow Him. That way,

"... the kingdom of heaven is for everybody; hell is reserved only for the idiots who insist on keeping nonexistent records in their heads."<sup>1</sup>

The solution to Levi's anxiety was to become Matthew ... to receive the gift of God direct from Jesus' nail pierced hands. The heart of Jesus' teaching was the Kingdom of God—where God's way is the way, God's rule is the rule, and life works as it should. This was the pearl of great price Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13, worth selling everything he had to purchase, purely out of joy. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and be about His mission, and you will be free." Everything else will take care of itself.

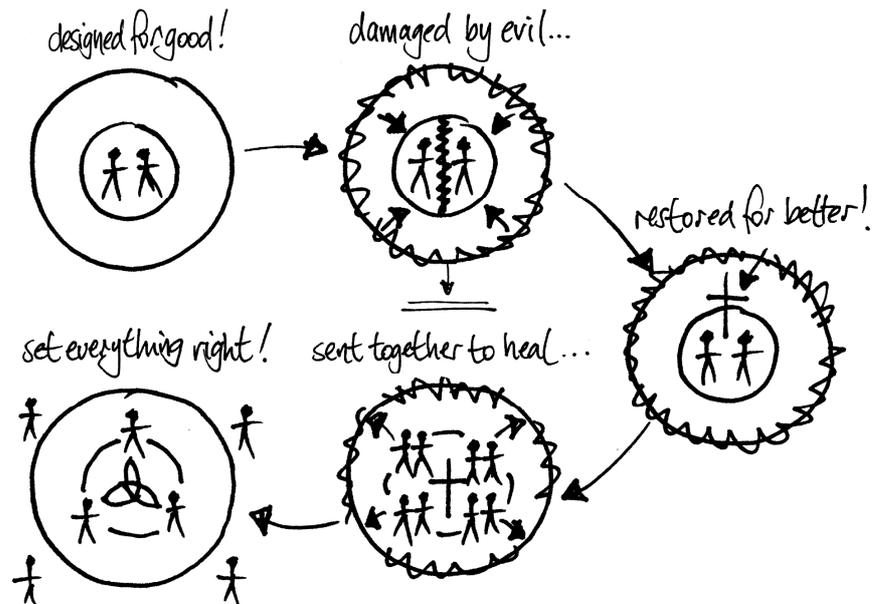
*Levi had to die so Matthew could live.*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, pp. 393-97.

## The Gift of God: Set Free to Tell the Story

This is the Epic Story  
Matthew found himself in >>



... This is a story to share.

## Party People: Extending the Gift to Those Outside the Temple (Matthew 9:10-13)

If Jesus made this difference for Matthew, he couldn't help but tell others. Jesus could set them free too. *"If God has cancelled my debt, as a despised tax collector—so we can party together for all eternity—then what's better than throwing a party right now for all the misfits and outcasts I can ring in!"* ... The same goes for us, escaping the cliques to reach the crowds.

## Still Partying Today: A Story

### An Invitation to Connect One

*Freed people free others. It's not an obligation. It's an invitation.*

**Who is your *Connect One*? Who has God put on your heart, to regularly Pray for, Care for, and Share with ... pointing them to Jesus.**

- ✦ **"Connect One" Growth Group Study**
- ✦ **Bookmark**      ✦ **"Yes We Care" (Saturday 28 May)**
- ✦ **Reminder Ribbon on the Prayer Wall**

### Activities for Discussion

1. How has God redeemed you? Why is Jesus 'good news' to you? Share as a group.
2. What aspects of Levi's life connect with your own? How has God's new math of grace—seen in Matthew's life—challenged your bookkeeping practices and lending ledger?
3. In pairs, practice sharing the gospel of the Kingdom using the five circles ("Epic Story") as a guide. How might you extend this gift to those "outside the temple"?
4. Use the **"Connect One" Growth Group Study** provided to help you consider how you will regularly pray and care for, and share with, the person God has laid on your heart. Be sure to **take a ribbon as a reminder**, and insert their name in the **prayer wall** in the KBC Sanctuary.