

Hindsight is 20/20 wk1: Matthew  
Jan. 5, 2020

Have you ever wondered, “how did I wind up here?” I really didn’t plan on this but here I am-how did that happen? Sometimes that happens in a conversation right? Just this week in a staff meeting we were getting ready to pray about something, and one of us used a word you don’t hear everyday...and 10 minutes later we are telling stories about things we’ve seen and done on a farm...how did that happen?

I had to look back over the course of the conversation and then I remembered the term –the term by the way was swath – and when I looked back I could totally tell how we ended up there but that’s not what the plan was by any means.

Sometimes we need to take some time to look back so we can understand how we got where we are. That can be a really useful tool. There’s an expression for the clarity that comes from the exercise – Hindsight is 20/20.

Sometimes we use that because at some point in time a decision seemed difficult or the consequences unknown, but now looking back on it, it is just so clear. Sometimes the clarity is that something just wasn’t going to work but for some reason at the time we couldn’t see it. Maybe it was a relationship – your parents warned you or your friends warned you-but you just couldn’t see it, and now on this side of it, it just seems so clear.

Maybe it was a career choice or an investment – that looking back; you can’t believe you made those choices.

The reason that hindsight is so clear – is that the outcomes are no longer a mystery. The question has been answered and here you are.

Hindsight can be both frustrating and helpful. It’s frustrating when there is nothing you can do about it and you just feel regret or shame...or kick yourself for your choices. But it is helpful when you can evaluate what brought you to that point to see if you need a course correction.

In 2017 we did a series called Road Signs –on the website still you can check it out – based on the book Principal of the Path by Andy Stanley. One of the main points

of the series is that we are all on certain paths and while maybe not 100% predictable – there are some things that we can look at to tell us if the paths we are on will take us where we want to be.

For the purposes of the series there are a couple of big ideas – one is that we want you to look over your last year or so, as we go into 2020 to see if the road you are on – the choices you are making, people you are doing life with – are taking you where you want to go, because this is a great time to make a course correction.

The other big idea – is over the course of this series we are going to be looking at and hopefully learning from some people who came to a particular crossroad or fork in the road – and the choices they make and why they do what they do for some of them has ripples that carry on to this day.

What I hope resonates with each of us is this idea that we will see that along with them- **Jesus redeems our pasts and changes our futures**. Those things that we see in hindsight have brought us to a place and given us an opportunity to let Jesus use them and us for his glory.

The first guy we are going to take a look at is one of the original 12 disciples – Matthew. While we have a gospel that has Matthew's name on it, we don't know a lot about him with the exception of the story of his calling which is referenced in 3 of the Gospels. In Mark and Luke he is called Levi, and in Matthew he is called Matthew.

There are a few possible reasons for the 2 names. One is simply a Greek version of his name while the other is Hebrew. It's possible that Jesus refers to him as Matthew –explaining the why when he is called to follow he's referenced as Levi but in the listing of the apostles he is called Matthew.

Church tradition believes that he was eventually martyred in Ethiopia or Northern Africa, but we don't know that for sure.

What we do know is that this man had a radical transformation when he met Jesus and no one-including Matthew saw it coming.

In Matthew's gospel, he doesn't show up until chapter 9. Jesus' ministry is relatively new, but he has called some of the first disciples to follow him and he has shared what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 9 begins with one of the strongest statements that Jesus made about his divinity. It's the story of at least 4 friends bringing a paralyzed man to see Jesus. Jesus tells the man that his sins are forgiven which upsets the religious leaders that are around. Who does Jesus think he is? Which is the question...and to prove who he is Jesus then heals the man and he gets up and walks away.

Right after this story, Matthew tells us how he meets Jesus.

**Matthew 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth...**

Matthew lets his readers in on his past. He had been a tax collector. As you will see in the rest of the details Matthew will give you in this story-being a tax collector was pretty scandalous – it's the kind of thing that might make people question the judgment and wisdom of the one who is telling this story. Maybe you've had this experience – as you grow up you think you have a pretty good handle on your parents-then you hear a story or see a picture, and you're like – "I don't even know these people!"

**My dad – bunkbead/shotgun story!**

This story with Matthew isn't funny. Most would have seen him as a disgrace at best – more likely as a traitor, making exorbitant amounts of money selling out his own people, for his own ends.

Matthew is sharing this story probably some 30 years after it happens. He might not even recognize who he used to be but this hindsight is really important for him and it's important for us to grasp...

**Paths are rarely straight** – but they have brought you to this moment.

Matthew could not have predicted that he would one day be in the inner circle of the Son of God. That he would get to share with the world about Jesus, but here

he is and maybe the reason that Jesus acceptance is so moving to him is because he knows exactly who he was.

Nicole and I like to watch “This is Us.” Love it and hate it because it messes with your emotions all the time. But in this last season there was a scene that just drove home this idea of a broken road, non-linear path and why we dare not forget it. The scene is about Uncle Nicky –he’s been an alcoholic for nearly 40 years, he’s a Vietnam vet – and in drunken frustration he throws a chair through a window at the VA. He’s arrested and put on a pretty strict diversion program for a few months before he faces a judge. During that time one of his nephews spends a ton of time with him, helping him see some things worth changing his life for... at the hearing in front of the judge the judge asks him if he regrets what he did... and he says, “not really...” as he goes on to talk about all of the things that have gone on since...he’s ashamed that his conduct caused harm – but that same conduct brought grace into his life.

I think that’s a bit of what Matthew would want you to know about your path. No matter how crooked or broken it has been if it brings you face to face with Jesus don’t try to pretend it’s not your story. Don’t celebrate the broken but celebrate that Jesus saw you even in the middle of that broken.

For Matthew, that’s when the amazing part happens.

**Matthew 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, 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.**

Jesus sees him –then he Offers the Same Call – the call he gave the other disciples.

If you go through all of the Gospels you see the same calling every time Jesus chooses one of his disciples – Come follow me. It’s true of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. These guys were fishermen – they weren’t the best or the brightest – but they certainly weren’t tax collectors. John tells us that when Jesus first meets Nathaniel in John 1 that he calls him a “true Israelite in whom nothing is false.” Yet Jesus gave Nathaniel and Matthew the same call.

That calling no doubt made some uncomfortable because Jesus goes to Matthew's house and Matthew invited some friends over. The friends of a tax collector weren't typically they religious type and it turned some heads –

**Matthew 9:10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"**

"Sinners" was meant as a derogatory term for people who just weren't up to the standards that the religious people held for everyone else—at least publicly. Jesus was repeatedly in trouble with Pharisees for who he chose to spend time with – those that were beneath them, they believed.

Whether we like to admit it or not, we all have some people that we act like are a special type of sinner-beneath the care of God. Maybe in our private moments we believe that about us... God would want nothing to do with me. But Jesus proves over and over again that not only does he want all people to repent-he wants to be with them-like he wanted to be with Matthew and his friends.

I think that first group of disciples were pretty uncomfortable – I think that's why the Pharisees talked to them, they were probably on the edges, not really ready to get all the way in with this crowd where Jesus was.

But Jesus has an answer that he wants everyone to know and in giving this answer he makes his mission clear, as well as the mission for those that will choose to follow him.

**Matthew 9:12-13 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."**

Jesus has come to call all of those who seem far off. He isn't saying that there are people he didn't come for-it's just an acknowledgement that there are those who think they don't need him. Which is why he quotes Hosea 6:6 – I desire mercy not sacrifice. Not only does he quote it-he tells them to go and learn it.

The Pharisees had reduced God's law to a system of boxes to check. If you make the sacrifices it doesn't matter what your heart is like, but mercy is always a condition of the heart. You can't be merciful if you don't realize your shared humanity-that compassion is what Jesus wanted of the religious leaders-it's what he still wants.

If you think like Matthew that your path has taken you in places incompatible with the love of God-understand that Jesus offers you the same call he gave all his disciples – Come, Follow Me.

Matthew got up-invited his friends and spent the rest of his life following Jesus. As part of his journey he wrote down for us what we call the Gospel of Matthew.

The winding path and his common calling placed Matthew in a **Unique Position to Reach an Audience.**

Matthew's Gospel has a distinct audience in mind. It is pretty clear that he was writing to his fellow Jews. We believe that because he quotes the most passages of what we call the Old Testament (Hebrew scriptures). He begins answering the question that Jews would want to know – **Matthew 1:1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:**

But even in the genealogy and his use of the Hebrew scriptures he left these little Easter Eggs if you will. That's a term that was coined many years ago by video game makers who left little surprises/personal touches in their games. Common in movies and shows today as well –things that the audience will see and some won't notice –but others will get excited about.

I think those first easter eggs are in the genealogy where Matthew mentions 4 women. They are the only 4 women mentioned – not even needed but he includes them. 3 of the women weren't Jewish. 3 of the women were major players in some scandalous, salacious story. 1 of them isn't even mentioned by name –only by her former husband's name. (who had been Uriah's wife).

I think he shares their names as well as the story of his calling because they are the point. That Jesus came for the most desperate of sinner-and he redeems their past; he changes their future.

Matthew was uniquely suited to reach Jews and to help bridge those divides that had made countrymen despise each other. Because of his past-he had the ability to write in Greek that most of the fisherman disciples would not have been able to. His experience translating between 2 worlds would be instrumental in his Gospel.

Which leads me to this –there is someone I believe that you are uniquely qualified to reach with the gospel. Whether it's because of your broken path and past or simply the skills you have been given/developed or the proximity you have to someone – there is someone you can share with.

We want to invite you to write a name on the chalkboard in the hallway – asking you to pray for someone you can work towards sharing.... Growing... (Pray for, Share with, Grow with)