

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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## “A MAN NAMED MATTHEW”

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A Sermon

Delivered by

**C. H. SPURGEON**

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington  
On Lord's Day Evening April 12<sup>th</sup> 1885

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*“As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom : and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him..”*

— Matthew ix.9

This is a little bit of autobiography. Matthew wrote this verse about himself. I can fancy him, with his pen in his hand, writing all the rest of this Gospel; but I can imagine that, when he came to this very personal passage, he laid the pen down a minute, and wiped his eyes. He was coming to a most memorable and pathetic incident in his own life, and he recorded it with tremulous emotion. “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew.” The Evangelist could not have said much less about himself than this. “He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.” I do not think there is any part of Matthew's Gospel that touched him more than this portion in which he was writing down the story of divine love to himself, and of how he himself was called to be a disciple of Christ.

I notice a very grave distinction between Matthew's way of recording his call, and the very general style of converts relating their experience nowadays.

The man seems to come boldly forth, with a springing step and a boastful air, and shouts out that he was the biggest blackguard who ever lived, and he tells with great gusto how he used to curse and to swear, and he talks as if there was something to be proud of in all that evil. Sit down, sir; sit down, and give us the story in this style, “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew,”—that is about as much as we care to know. Tell us as briefly as you can how the Lord called you, and enabled you to follow him. There is a modesty about this narrative,—not a mock modesty, by any means; there is no concealment of the facts of the case, there is no obscuration of the grace of Christ, but there is a concealment of Matthew himself. He mentions that he was a publican; in the list that he gives of the apostles he calls himself “Matthew the Publican.” The other Evangelists hardly ever call him a publican; they do not even call him “Matthew,” as a rule; they give his more respectable name, “Levi,” and they have more to say of him than he says of himself. It is always best for us, if there is anything to be said in our praise, not to say it ourselves, but to let somebody else say it. Brother, if your trumpeter is dead, put the trumpet away. When that trumpet needs to be blown, there will be a trumpeter found to use it; but you need never blow it yourself.

This verse reads to me so tenderly that I do not know how to communicate to you just how I feel about it. I have tried to imagine myself to be Matthew, and to have to write this story; and I am sure that, if I had not been inspired as Matthew was, I should never have done it so beautifully as he has done it, for it is so full of everything that is touching, tender, timid, true, and gracious: “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.”

Please notice—perhaps you did notice in our reading—whereabouts Matthew has put this story: it is placed immediately after a miracle. Some question has been raised, in a Harmony of the Gospels, as to the exact position of this fact; whether it did occur just where Matthew tells it or whether he rather studied effect than chronology. Sometimes the Evangelists seem to overlook the chronological position of a statement, and put it out of its proper place that it may be more in its place for some other purpose. Well, I do not know about the chronology of this event; but it seems to me very beautiful on Matthew’s part to record his call just here. “There,” said he, “I will tell them one miracle about the Saviour having made the palsied man take up his bed and walk, and then I will tell them of another miracle,—a greater miracle still,—how there was another man who was more than palsied, chained to his gains and to an injurious traffic, yet who, nevertheless, at the command of Christ,

quitted that occupation and all his gains, that he might follow his Divine Master.” Whenever you think about your own conversion, dear friend, regard it as a miracle, and always say within yourself, “It was a wonder of grace. If the conversion of anybody was ever a miracle of mercy, it was my conversion; it was extraordinary condescension on Christ’s part to look on such a sinner as I was, and nothing but a miracle of grace could have saved me.”

So Matthew tells his own story very tenderly, but he tells it very suggestively, putting it just after a most notable miracle; and I think that the Evangelist thought there was some similarity between the miracle and his own conversion, for there is nothing that palsies a man towards spiritual things like the lust of gold. Let a man be engaged in oppression and extortion, as the publicans were, and the conscience becomes seared as with a hot iron, and the extortioner is not likely to feel or desire that which is right. Yet here was a man, up to his neck in an evil occupation, but in a moment, at the divine call, he is made to part with all his hopes of gain that he may follow Christ. It was a miracle similar and equal to the raising of the palsied man who took up his bed and walked. You, too, dear friend, can trace a parallel, perhaps, between your conversion and some miracle of the Master. Was it, in your case, the casting out of devils? Was it the opening of the eyes of the blind? Was it the unstopping of deaf ears, and the loosing of a silent tongue? Was it the raising of the dead, or even more than that, was it the calling forth of corruption itself out of the grave, as when Jesus cried, “Lazarus, come forth,” and Lazarus came forth. In any case, I invite you who know the Lord, in the silence of your souls just to sit down, and think, not about Matthew, but about yourselves. *I shall think about “a man named Spurgeon,” and you can think about “a man named John Smith,” or “Thomas Jones,” or whatever your name may happen to be. If the Lord has looked upon you in love, you can just put your own name into the text, and say, “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named James,” or “John,” or “Thomas,” and you women may put in your names, too, you Maries and Janes, and so forth. Just sit and think how Jesus said to each one of you, “Follow me,” and how in that happy moment you did arise and follow him, and from that hour you could truly sing, as you have often sung since, —*

*“ ’Tis done! the great transaction’s done:*

*I am my Lord’s, and He is mine:*

*He drew me, and I followed on,*

*Charmed to confess the voice divine.*

*High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,*

*That vow renewed shall daily hear:*

*Till in life’s latest hour I bow,*

*And bless in death a bond so dear. ”*

With some degree of rapidity, I will try to conduct your thoughts to various points of this interesting and instructive narrative.

**I.** The first is, that THIS CALL OF THE MAN NAMED MATTHEW SEEMED ACCIDENTAL AND UNLIKELY.

“As Jesus passed forth from thence,” just as he was going about some work or other, going away from Capernaum, perhaps, or merely going down one of its streets, it was as he “passed forth” that this event happened. As he passed, “he saw a man, named Matthew.” That is the way we talk when we speak of things that, as we say, “happen” we scarcely know why. Now, dear friend, was that how you were converted? I do not know how long ago it was; but it did so happen, did it not? Yet it did not seem to you to be a very likely event ever to occur.

Looking back at the case of Matthew, it does seem now to have been a very unlikely thing that he should become a follower of Jesus. *Capernaum was Christ’s own city, so he had often been there, yet Matthew remained unsaved.* Christ had not seen that “man, named Matthew,” in the special way in which he saw him on this particular occasion; and you, dear friend, went to a place of worship a great many times before you were converted; perhaps you had been there regularly since you were a child. Yet it was not till that one particular day of grace that anything special happened to you, even as it was not till the time recorded in our text that something very special happened to the man named Matthew.

Further, at that time, *Jesus seemed as if he was about other business;* for, we read, “as Jesus passed forth from thence.” And perhaps it seemed to you that the preacher was aiming at something else when his word was blessed to you. He was, maybe, comforting believers, yet God sent the message home to you, a poor unconverted sinner. Strange, was it not, both in Matthew’s case, and your own?

At that time, also, *there are many other people in Capernaum, yet Christ did not call them.* He saw them, but not in the particular way in which he saw the man named Matthew. And; in like manner, on that day of mercy when you received the blessing of salvation, perhaps there was a crowded congregation, but, as far as you know, the blessing did not reach anybody but yourself. Why, then, did it come to you? You do not know, unless you have learnt to look behind the curtains in the holy place, and to see by the light of the lamp within the veil. If you have looked there, you know that, when Jesus Christ is passing

by, what men call his accidents are all intentional, the glances of his eye are all ordained from eternity; and when he looks upon anyone, he does it according to the everlasting purpose and the foreknowledge of God. The Lord had looked long before on that man named Matthew, so, in the fullness of time, Jesus Christ must needs pass that way, and he must look in love and mercy upon that man named Matthew. He saw him then because, long before, he foresaw him.

I cannot tell how you happen to be here, my dear friend,—a stranger in London, perhaps, and a total stranger to this Tabernacle; yet I believe you are brought here that my Lord and Master may see you,—*you*, “a man, named Matthew,” or “John,” or “James,” or “Thomas,” or whatever your name may be. And, oh! I pray that this may be the time when you shall see him, and hear him say, “Follow me,” and you shall feel a blessed constraint to follow him without question, or hesitancy, but at once leave whatever your sinful life may have been, and become a follower of Christ.

So, in the first place, this call of Matthew seemed accidental and unlikely, yet it was according to the purpose of God, and therefore it was duly given and answered.

**II.** In the second place, THIS CALL OF THE MAN NAMED MATTHEW WAS ALTOGETHER UNTHOUGHT OF AND UNSOUGHT.

Matthew was not engaged in prayer when Christ called him. *He was in a degrading business*: “sitting at the receipt of custom.” He was not listening to the Saviour’s preaching; he was taking from the people, against their will, the taxes for their Roman conqueror. As far as I can see, he had not even thought about Christ. I do not believe that he had been called before to be a disciple of Christ, and that he was on this occasion called to be an apostle; for I cannot imagine one who had been saved by Christ, returning to the publican business. It was an extortioner’s occupation all through, and he who is called to be Christ’s follower does not practice extortion from his fellow-men. If that is his employment before his conversion, he quits it when he comes to Christ.

Matthew was, further, *in an ensnaring business*. Nothing is more likely to hold a man fast than the love of gain. Sticky stuff is that gold and silver of which many are so fond; it has bird-limed many a soul for the great fowler, the devil, and many have been destroyed by it. The publicans usually made a personal profit by extorting more than was due; and, at this time, Matthew was not paying away money, but “sitting at the receipt of custom.”

I do not know that, *even if Matthew had wished to follow Christ, he would have dared to do so*. He must have thought that he was too unworthy to follow Christ; and if he had dared to attempt it, I should suppose that *he would have been repulsed by the other apostles*. They would have snubbed him, and asked, “Who are you, to come amongst us?” They dared not do so after Christ himself had said to Matthew, “Follow me,” but certainly there is no indication that this man named Matthew was seeking Christ, or even thinking about him; yet, while he sat taking his tolls and customs, Jesus came to him, and said, “Follow me.”

O my dear hearer, if you have been converted, it may be that something like this was true in your case! At any rate, this I know is true; you were not the first to seek Christ, but Christ was the first to seek you. You were a wandering sheep, and did not love the fold; but his sweet mercy went out after you. His grace made you thoughtful, and led you to pray; the Holy Spirit breathed in you your first breath of spiritual life, and so you came to Christ. It was so, I am sure; you did not first seek Christ, but he first sought you. Let us who are saved present the prayer to God now, that many here who have never sought the Lord may nevertheless find him; for it is written, “I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.” See, then, the freeness of the grace of God, the sovereignty of his choice. Admire it in the man named Matthew; admire it still more in yourself, whatever your name may be.

**III.** Thirdly, THIS CALL OF MATTHEW WAS GIVEN BY THE LORD JESUS WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF HIM.

It is not said that Matthew first saw the Lord; but, “as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew.” I like to dwell upon those words, “He saw a man, named Matthew,” because they seem to me to have a great deal of instruction in them.

Christ probably stopped opposite where Matthew was sitting, and looking at him, *He saw all the sin that had been in him, and all the evil that still remained in him*. “He saw a man, named Matthew.” Christ has a searching look, a discerning look, a detecting look. He looked Matthew up and down, and he saw all that was in him. All that was secret to others was manifest before his piercing eyes. “He saw a man, named Matthew,” and I believe that Jesus saw more in Matthew than was really in Matthew; I mean, that his love looked goodness into Matthew, and then saw it; his love looked grace into Matthew, and then saw it.

I do not know, but as far as I can see, Matthew had always been called “Levi” before. The Lord Jesus Christ did not see “a man named Levi.” That was his old name; but, *He saw Matthew as he was to be*: “He saw a man, named Matthew.” O beloved, when the Lord looked upon you even while you were a sinner, he saw a saint in you; though it was only his own eyes that could see so much as that. What he meant to make of you, he already saw in you, and he loved you as one who should yet be one of his redeemed servants.

I believe also that when the Lord Jesus Christ saw Matthew with the pen in his hand, he said to himself, “See what a nimble pen he has; *he is the man to write the first of the four Gospels.*” Jesus saw Matthew figuring away, as he put down the people’s names, and how much they paid, and he said to himself, “That is the man to write one of the most regular and orderly of the Gospels; there is a clerkly habit about him, he is a good account-keeper, that is the man for my service.”

I do not know, dear friend, what the Lord may happen to see in you. I do not know all that he saw when he looked upon me, I fear that he saw nothing in me but sin, and evil, and vanity; but I believe that he did say to himself concerning me, “I see one to whom I can teach my truth, and who, when he gets a hold of it, will grip it fast, and never let it go, and one who will not be afraid to speak it wherever he is.” So the Lord saw what use he could make of me, and I wonder what use he can make of you. Sit still, dear child of God, and wonder that the Lord should have made such use of you as he has made. And you who are just beginning to think of the Lord Jesus Christ, sit still, and each one of you say, “I wonder what use he can make of me.”

There is an adaptation in men, even while they are unconverted, which God has put into them for their future service. Luke, you know, was qualified to write his Gospel because he had been a physician; and Matthew was qualified to write the particular Gospel which he has left us, because he had been a publican. There may be a something about your habits of life, and about your constitution, and your condition, that will qualify you for some special niche in the Church of God in years to come. Oh, happy day, when Jesus shall look upon you, and call you to follow him! Happy day, when he did look upon some of us, and saw in us what his love meant to put there, that he might make of us vessels of mercy meet for the Master’s use!

**IV.** Pressing on a little further, I want you to notice, in the fourth place, that MATTHEW'S CALL WAS GRACIOUSLY CONDESCENDING: "As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me."

Christ had the choice of his followers, but *how came he to choose a publican?* The Roman yoke was so detestable to the free-born son of Abraham that he could not bear the fact that the Roman, the idolater, should be lord in the Holy Land; so, if the Romans wanted Jews to collect the taxes, they could only get persons who had lost all care about public repute. They might be no worse than other people; perhaps they were not, but they were esteemed as being the very off-scouring and pariahs of their race. But the Lord Jesus Christ sees this publican, and says to him, "Follow me." Not much of a credit will he be to his Master; so at least those around him will say. "See how this Man, Jesus Christ, goes about, and picks up the scum of the people, the residuum. He is taking a publican as his follower,—the man who has given himself up to be the servant of the oppressors, and who has been himself an oppressor, he is going to have *him*. Now, if the Nazarene had passed by, and seen a learned Rabbi, or a Pharisee with his phylacteries, one who had made broad the borders of his garment, if Jesus had called *him*, it would have given a respectability to the community." Yes, but it so happens that the Lord Jesus Christ does not care about that sort of respectability at all. He is so respectable himself, in the highest sense of being respected, that he has honour enough and to spare for all his people, and he can condescend, without hazard, to call into his immediate company, to be one of his personal followers, "a man, named Matthew," even though he is a collector of the Roman taxes.

"Oh!" says one, "but I cannot think that he will ever call me." Ay, but I can think that he will! You remember John Newton, who had been a slave-dealer, and more, who had been himself a slave, literally a slave, as well as a slave to the worst passions. Yet, let the church of St. Mary Woolnoth tell how from its pulpit there sounded through long years the glorious gospel of the blessed God from one who had been an African blasphemer, but who became a minister of Christ of the highest and noblest kind. Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ loves to look out for the *publicani*, the very lowest of the low, and to say to them, "Follow me. Come into my company. Walk behind me. Become my servant. Be entrusted with my gospel. I will make use of you." He still takes such as these to become the proclaimers of his Word; oh, that he may thus call some of you!

“Well,” say you, “it was great condescension when the Lord called Matthew, the publican.” Yes, but was it not equal condescension when he called you and me? O man or woman, whatever your name, sit, and wonder, and adore the condescending love that chose even you to be Christ’s follower!

V. Again, dear friends, — I hope I do not weary you while I try to bring this case of Matthew fully before you, wishing always that you may see yourself in it,—observe next, that THIS CALL OF MATTHEW WAS SUBLIMELY SIMPLE. Here it is in a nutshell: “*He saith.*”

It was not John who said it, or James, or any of the apostles; but, “*He saith.*” And it is not my preaching, or your preaching, or an archbishop’s preaching, that can save souls; it is, “*He saith,*” and it is when the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Divine Spirit, says to a man, “*Follow me,*” that then the decisive work is done. Did he not say to the primeval darkness, “Light be!” and light was; and God, the Omnipotent and Eternal, has but to speak to man, and a like result will follow. “He saith unto him, Follow me;” and then immediately, just as simply as possible, the record says, “*he arose, and followed him.*” There is no palaver, no priestcraft, no sacramentarianism. “He saith, Follow me; and he arose, and followed him.” That is the way of salvation; Christ bids thee, whilst thou art at thy sin, leave it, and thou leavest it. He bids thee trust him, and thou dost trust him; and trusting him, thou art saved, for “he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”

Is that how you were saved, dear friend? I know it is; yet you used to fuss, and fret, and fume, and say to yourself, “I want to feel I want to see, I want to experience.” Now you have got clear of all those mistakes, I hope. There is nothing more sublime than your conversion, but there is nothing more simple. And as for you, dear friends, who are looking for signs and wonders, or else you will not believe, I wish you would give up that foolish notion, for there is no sign and no wonder which is equal to this, that Christ should say to the dead heart, “Live,” and it lives; that he should say to the unbelieving heart, “Believe,” and it believes. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I say to thee, sinner, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;” and if he is really speaking by me, thou wilt believe in him, and thou wilt arise and follow him.

So, Matthew’s call to follow Christ was sublimely simple.

VI. Notice, also, that IT WAS IMMEDIATELY EFFECTUAL. The Lord Jesus Christ said to him, “Follow me,” and “he arose, and followed him.”

*Matthew followed at once.* Some might have waited, and put the coins away; but it does not appear that Matthew did so: “he arose and followed him.” He did not say to Christ, “I must enter the amounts to the end of this page; here is a lot of people with fish-baskets, I must just see how much I can get out of them, and so finish up my reckoning.” No, “he arose and followed him.” I believe that, when a man is converted, he is converted outright, and he will come right out from whatever wrong thing he has been doing. I have heard of a publican (I mean the other sort of publican, not a tax-gatherer) who was very fond of drink, and he had by means of the drink sent many to perdition; but, the day he was converted, he smashed his signboard, and had done with the evil traffic for ever. When there is anything else that is wrong, whatever it is, I like to see men smash it up, and have done with it. Clear every trace of it out of your house; do not try to keep even a little piece of it, or to do a wrong thing, and say, “I will give the profits to the Lord Jesus Christ.” He will not take the money that is stained with the blood of souls. Quit the evil trade, and have done with it. Every kind of sin, and every sort of evil, whatever it may be, will be left as soon as effectual grace comes to a man. I do not believe that anyone ever repents a little bit at a time; it is once for all that he does it, he turns straight round immediately, and obeys the Lord’s call, “Follow me.” Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me,” “and he arose and followed him.”

“Oh!” says one, “was it so?” Yes, it was; I am not talking about things that are matters of question, I am speaking about facts. “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom, and he saith unto him, Follow me; and he arose, and followed him.” I know another man, not named “Matthew,” but “Charles,” and the Lord said to him, “Follow me;” and he also arose, and followed him. If I were to ask all the Christian men here now—John, James, Samuel or whatever their names, who heard Jesus Christ say, “Follow me,” and who followed him,—to stand up, there would not be many of you left sitting, I hope. And you godly women, too, know that it was just the call of the Lord Jesus Christ to you that brought you to him there and then.

The call to Matthew was the call of effectual grace. “Where the word of a king is, there is power;” and Jesus Christ spoke to Matthew the word of *the* King. He said, “Follow me;” and Matthew did follow him. I have heard that when the Queen sends to anybody to come and see her, she does not “request the pleasure of his company,” but she sends her command to him to come. That is the way kings and queens talk; and that is just the way with the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He says, “Follow me.” And

preaching to you in his name, we do not say, “Dear friend, do be converted, if you will;” but we say, “Thus saith the Lord: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;” and with that command goes the power of the word of a King, and so sinners are saved. Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me; and he arose, and followed him.”

**VII.** Now, lastly, MATTHEW’S CALL WAS A DOOR OF HOPE FOR OTHER SINNERS.

I have been speaking mostly about personal conversion, and perhaps somebody says, “You know, sir, we are to think about other people as well as ourselves.” Precisely so, and there is never a man who is saved who wants to go to heaven alone. So, when the Lord Jesus Christ saw “a man, named Matthew,” and bade the publican follow him, *his salvation encouraged other publicans to come to Jesus*. Christ saw a great many other publicans and sinners whom he intended to draw to himself by means of that “man, named Matthew.” He was to become a decoy-duck for a great multitude of others like himself.

Next, *his open house gave opportunity to his friends to hear Jesus*. No sooner was Matthew called, and led to follow the Lord Jesus, than he said to himself, “Now, what can I do for my new Master? I have a good big room, where I have been accustomed to lock up the people’s goods till they have paid their dues, — the *douane*, the custom-house, where I put away their goods in bond. Here, John, Thomas, Mary, come and clean out this room! Put a long table right down the middle. I am going to have in all my old friends; they have known what kind of man I have been, I am going to invite them all to supper; and it will not be a mean supper, either; it shall be the best supper they have ever had.” Levi made a great feast in his own house, and he said to the Lord Jesus, “Thou hast bidden me follow thee, and I am trying to do so; and one way in which I am following thee is that I am going to have a great feast in my house tonight, and to fetch in all my old companions. Wilt thou, my Lord, be so good as to come and sit at the head of the table, and talk with them? They will be in a better humour for listening after I have fed them well. Wilt thou come; and when they are all happy around my table, wilt thou do for them what thou hast done for me? Mayhap, Lord, if thou wilt say that Matthew has become thy follower, they will say, ‘What! Matthew? Does he follow Christ? Well, then, who must this Christ be, that he will have such a follower as Matthew? Surely, he will have us, too, for we are like Matthew, and we will come to him as Matthew has come to him, if he will but speak the word of power to us as he did to Matthew?’ ” So the call of Matthew was Christ’s way

of bringing numbers of lost ones to a knowledge of the truth and to eternal salvation.

Now, has it been so with you, dear friend? Man, named John, Thomas, Samuel,—woman, named Mary, Jane, or whatever it may be,—have *you* brought any others to Jesus? Have you brought your children to Jesus? Have your prayers brought your husband to Jesus? Have your entreaties brought your brethren to Jesus? If not, you have failed as yet in accomplishing that which should be your life-work. Ask the Lord to help you now to begin with somebody or other of your own circle and your own standing, to whom you will be most likely to speak with the largest measure of influence and power of any man. The day you are converted, try to talk with those who were your schoolmates. Were you converted in a factory? Do not hesitate to speak to your fellow-workmen. Are you a person of position? Do you occupy a high station in the fashionable world? Do not be ashamed of your Master, but introduce Christ into the drawing-room, and let him have a footing among the highest of the land. Let each man, according to his calling, feel, “He who bade me follow him, has bidden me do so that others may, through my instrumentality, be led to follow him, too.” God bless you in this holy service!

I feel as if I must close my discourse by just saying that, as the Lord saw “a man, named Matthew,” and as he saw you, try now to return that look of love, and see him, consider how great this Man was; and, as Christ came to Matthew’s table, I now invite you who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to come to his table; and though you are not now numbered with publicans and sinners, but with his redeemed people, still it shall be your great joy to wonder as you sit here that your Master does still condescend to eat with publicans and sinners.

God bless you, and save the whole of this great company, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

