

**OUR ROCKY MT. DISTRICT HAS FINANCIAL HELP TO FILL IN GAPS WHERE JESUS IS MISSING. THIS GOSPEL GAP PROJECT HAS SUPPORTED REV. BENNETT AS HE HELPS US REACH OUT TO LDS PEOPLE WITH THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE.**

**MOSES KNEW THERE WERE GAPS. WHEN JOSHUA WAS PERTURBED THAT UNAUTHORIZED MEN WERE PROPHECYING, MOSES THANKED JOSHUA FOR CARING ABOUT HIS OFFICE OF PROPHET, BUT THAT IT WOULD BE WONDERFUL IF ALL THE LORD'S PEOPLE WERE SPIRIT-LED PROPHETS.**

**JAMES POINTS TO GAPS THAT ARE MET BY PRAYER, INCLUDING PRAYERS FOR HEALING, FAITH, AND FOR GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE. BRINGING JESUS TO SINNERS IS TERRIFIC; BUT THERE ARE EVEN GAPS IN THE CHURCH.**

**JESUS POINTS TO THIS GOSPEL GAP. WHEN JOHN IS WORRIED ABOUT UNAUTHORIZED DISCIPLES CASTING OUT DEMONS, JESUS CLEARLY TELLS HIM THAT IT'S OKAY FOR THE GOSPEL TO MAKE ITS WAY INTO PLACES WITHOUT THEM. GOD CAN WORK HIS SPIRIT WHEREVER HE DESIRES; HE CAN EVEN USE A CUP OF WATER.**

**TODAY, ON THIS FEAST OF ST. MATTHEW, WE SEE ANOTHER GAP FILLED. MATTHEW WAS A TAX COLLECTOR, CALLED TO FOLLOW JESUS. HE ENDED UP WRITING ABOUT THE LIFE, DEATH, RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS. HE PERSONALLY TOOK THAT GOSPEL TO PLACES NEEDING JESUS. IT BEGAN WITH A GAP FILLED IN HIM. MAYBE, I SHOULD LET HIM SPEAK FOR HIMSELF.**

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**...TAX COLLECTION WAS NEVER MY AMBITION; IT JUST FELL INTO MY LAP. I GUESS I GOT ALONG BETTER WITH REBELS THAN WITH CHURCH FOLK. I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ON THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY, SO I FIGURED TAKING A JOB WHERE YOU'RE HATED BY TAX PAYERS AND THE GOVERNMENT WOULDN'T MATTER. I CHEATED EVERYONE A BIT AND TOOK CARE OF MYSELF. IT GOT ME A NICE HOME WITH ROMAN DÉCOR AND A FULL PANTRY.**

**I TRIED TO CONVINCING MYSELF THAT I WAS HAPPY, BUT HOW CAN YOU BE HAPPY WHEN EVERYONE'S AN ENEMY...EXCEPT FOR OTHER THIEVES AND THERE IS NO HONOR AMONG THIEVES! MY WEALTH DIDN'T RELIEVE THE LONELINESS.**

**I HATED MY LIFE, HATED THE WAY THE PHARISEES LOOKED DOWN THEIR NOSES AT ME, HATED THE WAY MY OLD SCHOOL MATES CROSSED THE ROAD TO AVOID ME! IF I'M HONEST, I HATED ME. I FELT EMPTY INSIDE; THERE WAS A GAP I COULDN'T FILL WITHOUT SWALLOWING MY PRIDE...AND PRIDE WAS ALL I HAD.**

**THAT WAS ME THIS MORNING; ANOTHER DAY WEIGHING SHEKELS, ENDURING SAD STORIES, HIDING COINS IN MY LOIN CLOTH, SMILING AT THE ROMAN PUBLICAN AS I HAND OFF MOST OF THE DAY'S TAKE AND BACK HOME TO AN EMPTY HOUSE.**

**BUT, IT ALL CHANGED! I HEARD LOUD VOICES, EXCITED VOICES - A CROWD COMING MY WAY. IT WAS THAT WANDERING PREACHER AND HIS PATHETIC PARADE OF GROUPIES. THE PROPHET FROM NAZARETH - JESUS! I THOUGHT ABOUT LOOKING INTO HIS RACKET; HE HAD TO BE RAKING IN SOME SERIOUS SILVER.**

2 THE MOB CAME AROUND ME, PUSHING AGAINST MY TABLE. I WAS WORRIED THEY'D KNOCK IT OVER AND I'D LOSE PRECIOUS COINS. NO-ONE WAS INTERESTED IN TELLING ME WHAT WAS GOING ON. NOBODY CARED ABOUT ME. I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN INVISIBLE...UNTIL JESUS SPOKE - JUST TWO WORDS, *FOLLOW ME*.

AT FIRST, I LOOKED BEHIND ME, TO SEE WHO HE WAS TALKING TO. BUT, NO ONE WAS BEHIND ME. AND, THOSE EYES OF HIS PIERCED MY SOUL. IT WAS AS IF I WAS THE ONLY PERSON THERE. IT WAS AS IF I WAS WORTHWHILE. *FOLLOW ME*.

ALL THOSE PEOPLE WANTING HIS ATTENTION AND HE WANTED MINE. WHAT ELSE COULD I DO? I FOLLOWED! I LEFT THE BOOTH UNDER THE TREE WITH ITS TIDY PILES OF COINS! NO GOING BACK, EH! I WOULD BE A DISCIPLE – CHURCH FOLK!

AS WE WALKED, JESUS TOLD ME THAT I WAS HIS CHOICE AND THAT HE HAD MORE THAN ENOUGH LOVE TO FILL MY EMPTINESS AND REMOVE MY GUILT – THAT GOD ACTUALLY LOVED ME! WHEN THE PHARISEES CRITICIZED ME - I SAVORED THAT BIT! JESUS TOLD THEM: *IT'S NOT THE HEALTHY, BUT THE SICK THAT NEED A DOCTOR*. THEY COULDN'T MUSTER AN ARGUMENT FOR THAT, COULD THEY?

HE ASKED THEM IF THEY UNDERSTOOD THE WORDS, *I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE!* I COULD SEE ON THEIR FACES THEY DIDN'T GET IT. I HATED THOSE SELF-RIGHTEOUS MONSTERS MY WHOLE LIFE; NOW, I FEEL SORRY FOR THEM.

THE WORDS STARTED BUZZING IN MY HEAD; *MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE. THE SICK NEED A DOCTOR*. I'M NOT SURE I TOTALLY COMPREHEND, BUT I'M SURE IT MEANS THAT THINGS ARE OKAY BETWEEN ME AND GOD. HE'S HEALING MY BROKEN LIFE AND I HAVE NOTHING TO PROVE. GOD IS LIKE JESUS, NOT THE PHARISEES.

WHEN JESUS WAS NEAR, I COULD ALMOST SEE MYSELF AS HE SEES ME. THERE'S NO NEED TO CONDEMN MYSELF FOR THE PAST. MAYBE, ONE DAY I'LL LEARN TO FORGIVE MYSELF...AND THE PHARISEES!

MEANWHILE, I LOVE HEARING HIM PREACH AND WHEN I LOOK INTO HIS FACE, I'M CERTAIN THAT I'M SEEING THE FACE OF GOD...AND HE'S SMILING UPON ME...

JESUS FILLED THE GAP IN MATTHEW AND MATTHEW DISCOVERED THE JOY OF GIVING AWAY HIS LIFE INSTEAD OF CHOKING ON IT. HIS EMPTY SOUL WAS FILLED WITH GOD'S GRACE. HE FOLLOWED JESUS AND IT CHANGED EVERYTHING.

YOU PROBABLY HAVE A GAP THAT CHRIST CAN WORK INTO. OPEN YOURSELF TO HIM – HE'S QUITE GOOD AT PUTTING HIS SPIRIT ON PEOPLE AND HE'S QUITE GOOD AT HEALING WOUNDED HEARTS. FOLLOW JESUS AND LET HIM LOOK INTO YOUR FACE WITH HIS PIERCING EYES AND FORGIVING, INSPIRING SMILE.

IT TAKES COURAGE TO SWALLOW YOUR PRIDE AND ADMIT YOUR GAP, BUT ONCE YOU DO, JESUS AUTHORIZES YOU TO FILL OTHER GOSPEL GAPS. THE CUP OF WATER HE GIVES TO REVIVE YOU IS MEANT TO BE SHARED. THE CHRIST YOU MEET AT THIS RAIL IS NEEDED OUT THERE.

AMEN?