

## **Come follow me**

*Luke 5:18-29 ESV*

*(18) And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus,*

*(19) but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.*

*(20) And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."*

*(21) And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

*(22) When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts?"*

*(23) Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?*

*(24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the man who was paralyzed--"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home."*

*(25) And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.*

*(26) And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."*

*(27) After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."*

*(28) And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*

*(29) And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.*

Since the beginning of the year we have been looking at the nature of the early church.

Looking at what made it so effective  
What made it so powerful

The **first thing** we noticed was their single focus on the mission at hand.

**The second thing** was that they were all in one accord.

They were of one mind and one passion.  
They were mission and vision focused.  
They knew who they were and what they were called to do.

They knew what they believed; they had a single united doctrine of belief based upon the Apostles teaching

**The third thing** we commented on was the supernatural nature of the church.

How it was something that only God can build.

How its origins were supernatural.

And how the early Christians needed an encounter with the Holy Ghost to enable them to be who they needed to be and do what needed to be done.

We talked about how nothing has changed since then.

You can't build a crowd based on marketing; you can only build the church supernaturally.

**The final thing** that we noticed about the start of this early church was that it was extroverted by nature.

It started with God touching the lives of the early Christians and then He commanded them to touch others.

But we also noticed that they touched others not only because it was a command from heaven, but a passion of their lives,  
It had become the reason for their lives.

They were so overwhelmed with this Jesus that they knew – they wanted to do something about it

They wanted to tell someone about it

Church to them was not simply a place they attended, but a place that they celebrated

### **The events in this scripture**

We have a series of incidents here in this scripture that follow one another chronologically.

**First we have** the story of the four men and their paralyzed friend.

**Then we have** the calling of this man called Levi, who would become known as Matthew

Before we take some time and look at the different aspects of this story I need give you a little history on Tax Collection.

I need you to understand what an incredibly profound thing Jesus did and in some way potentially damaging things He did.

This act, this conversation, this acceptance of a dinner invitation was a kind of social and religious suicide in His day  
For one who claimed to be whom He did, and to engage in the thing that he did, was to fly in the face of not only religious tradition and custom, but social tradition and custom.

It would be similar to you sitting down and having dinner with the friends and family members of the terrorist engaged in the 9/11 attacks in New York City for the sake of sharing the gospel, this people who came to kill us. This people who meant us nothing but harm, these murders, and there you are actively engaged in presenting the gospel to them...that is the emotion that this particular act of Christ would have summoned.

## **Tax collectors and their taxes**

The KJV uses a word here for tax Collectors, publican

If you ask an English person what a publican is, they will tell you that it is a person who owns a bar, or tends a pub.

Publicans were tax collectors

They would have their offices at something called seat of custom, or a tax office

It was a toll both on a major highway or a tax collection office where money was paid for taxes that were due.

Rome collected three principal kinds of taxes

(1) A land tax

(2) A head tax

(3) A customs tax of 2% to 5% of value on goods being transported on any of the roads or into any of the ports

A tax office or booth would be located near a city gate or port to collect the custom tax

Those taxed would have primarily been those engaging in commercial trade to other areas such as fishermen exporting dried fish, or farmers shipping surplus crops to a larger city, or people traveling and selling goods

## **Rome's method of tax collection**

Across the empire, Rome had instituted a very effective and very ruthless method that was guaranteed to ensure that local and regional taxes were collected in each province across the entire empire.

Rome's method of collecting taxes was to employ people who knew a region, successful or politically connected people, who knew which persons in a region had money and who didn't.

A province was divided into tax districts.

Local tax collectors were local business people, or crime bosses, who would bid for the contract of collecting taxes in a district.

The bid that was accepted, the bid that won the contract, was the money that the tax collector agreed to pay the government in taxes; the benefit, the profit, the kickback for them was that they could keep whatever they collected over that amount.

So if person A said:

I believe I can raise \$50,000 dollars in taxes through legitimate means

But person B said:

I believe I can raise \$100 000 through whatever means I want

Then they won the bid, they were given the contract.

If however, through extortion, intimidation, corruption, crime, or bribery they raised \$200,000; then they kept the difference.

Now a chief tax collector - such as Zacchaeus in Luke 19:2 - owned the contract for his region.

He was responsible for handing out the contracts and ensuring the monies were collected and sent to Rome. He received a percentage of everything on the way through

He would have been a very wealthy man with a small free standing army of thugs, who would enforce the taxes and collect money owed or extorted or even money paid for protection.

Matthew would have more than likely worked for Zacchaeus.

Notice something here...Christ, called Matthew, then Mathew reached out to his friends and family members

He didn't go to strangers  
He went to those that he knew  
That he had built a relationship with

Friend...you have to build relationships with people if Christ is going to use you

3 in 30 is our determined and constant effort to return to the true nature and Christian way of evangelism and kingdom expansion

These Tax collectors weren't numbered among the poor.  
Their profession, made many of them wealthy.

But their profession also made them hated men.

Rome itself was hated.

And tax collectors were seen as an extension of Rome, they were despised, hated and shunned because of their affiliation.

They were viewed as traitors, turncoats

Tax collectors were widely regarded as thieves and robbers.

They worked for the enemy out of greed, a greed that sucked the people dry.

A greed that perpetuated a system of oppression and tyranny.

Tax collectors were both hated and avoided by everyone in respectable society.

To eat with a Gentile or tax collector was considered by the strict Pharisees to render one spiritually or ceremonially unclean.

You soiled yourself

You were unfit to worship God

These people were never allowed to join the temple society

Never allowed in the inner ranks of the religious elite

Now there are four things which I wish to bring to your attention to in this story.

Four things that I want you to notice concerning Jesus, and two things Matthew responded with.

*Luke 5:27-29 ESV*

*(27) After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."*

*(28) And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*

*(29) And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.*

## **1. The next generation of world changes, will not come from the religious establishment**

*(27) After this he went out*

Jesus left a room for of people that we all would have qualified as apostolic material and went looking for his next recruit

He left a room of the biggest brains in the land because they had all the answer.

They knew how things where supposed to be done, and even what needed to be done

It is not your intellect that qualifies you to be a disciple but your willingness to follow

Paul was writing to his son in the faith, Timothy; and he was outlining to him how to identify leaders, how to identify those people who would serve the church, who would perpetuate a kingdom vision after he was gone

He said

*2 Timothy 2:2 ESV*

*(2) and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

Choose faithful people and equip them to be able to teach faithful people to teach.

Do not choose able people and hope that they will be faithful

So much of the church in our western nations is built on the ability to perform and not the desire to provide.

On the desire to be seen, instead of serve

The Pharisee, the Sadcessus, all wanted to be in the same room as Jesus, they were just not prepared to follow Him.

So many people want to go to a good church  
Love to attend a good church  
But they balk at building it

It is like they would like to have the successful honors grad student,  
but they don't want to speak to the greatness in a toddler and wrestle  
it to maturation

We have become victims of a fast food mindset  
Where if I can't have it in 2 minutes, it must not be the will of God,  
and the devil is stopping my destiny

I believe that God is looking for a people, a generation of leaders that  
will not come from the ranks of the religious but from those delivered  
from the world

He is looking for a people who have been so touched, so changed, so  
transformed that they have freed themselves from the religious  
bondages and mindsets that they grew up in.

Our target market in Texas, is not the unchurched, I don't know if  
there is anyone you meet or know who has not been to church or who  
has not heard the gospel in some form.

No, our target is the same as Jesus' targets.  
Our target markets are the people just like you and I  
The Luke warm,  
The back slider,  
The judgmental religious know it all  
The religious bigots and those walking wounded from a poor and  
unsound Christian experience.

My experience is that God would rather call a Lazarus from the grave.  
Someone who loves him  
Someone who needs him  
Some one who stinks and is seen as useless in the eyes of the world

Then call someone who is going to spend their days fighting Him.  
He wants sons and daughters in the faith, not an argument with  
Pharaoh

## **2. You don't go looking for Jesus, Jesus comes looking for you.**

Luke 5:27

*(27) After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi,*

Jesus went out and saw.

He left the gathering and went looking

It is Christ who chooses us, not us who chooses Christ.

It is Christ that comes to us, not us who come to Christ.

No one can come to the father, except through Jesus (John 6:44)

Our coming to Christ is a gift.

It is a sovereign work of His irresistible Grace.

Before we call, He answers.

Jesus came out of an incredible meeting, not overwhelmed with His own greatness, but with the desperate need of those around Him and with the desire to raise a team that would change the world for ever

He came out and didn't see the crowd;

He came out and He saw a man.

Did you hear me.....he came out and didn't see the crowd that was pushing in...He came out looking for a tax collector.

A tax collector wasn't supposed to be in those circles, 90 feet from the Synagogue, in the best part of town, at the house of peter; that is where this meeting took place

Mathew would not have been welcome at this meeting

But the people didn't drive him away; there was something different about those that sought this messiah

His teaching changed them like no other  
It softened the hearts of those that had never been soft before

Maybe Jesus saw him standing there, maybe Jesus knew by word of  
knowledge that he was out there

But how ever he did – he did – and when Jesus looked outside, he  
didn't see the crowd, He went looking for Mathew

Friend you can never take your eyes of the people around you.

You hold eternity in your hearts and your hands; you have the answer  
that they are desperately looking for.

It isn't a crowd at Wal-mart  
It isn't a crowd at the ball game  
It isn't a crowd at the office or at school  
It is a group of individuals looking for a Savior

You have to go looking for Mathew  
You have to reach out to Mathew

Mathew couldn't come to Christ; Christ had to go to Mathew

There is nothing you can do to save yourself.  
It is Christ who comes to you, as He is this morning and says:  
I see you; I know you; and I love you, just as you are, right where you  
are.

### 3. He sees you as you are

Luke 5:27

*“27 After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. “*

When Jesus saw Mathew he was in his tax office

He was in his profession  
In his corruption  
In his state of sin and squalor.  
Despised and rejected by all around him

And Jesus came to Him

You can't hide from Jesus....you might say...*I will get my stuff together, then get right with God...*you will never have your stuff together

In fact it is impossible for you to have your stuff together

He who is sinful can not seek Him who is righteous.

Jesus sees you just as you are.  
You can't clean yourself up to qualify for salvation, or for the calling of Christ.

You can't get yourself in order to qualify for the election of God.

Jesus knew Matthew was a sinner.  
A corrupt man.  
A perverted man  
A self seeking man  
A man of no reputation and yet he sought him out and called him to Himself.

Do you notice that Matthew was called whilst in his sin?  
Whilst in the midst of a despicable occupation.

Matthew has for all eternity been defined as Matthew the tax collector.

It is like you being call Bob, the seller of pornography. You get saved, you go onto become one of the greatest Christian ministers in the world, and yet you are still know as Bob the pornographer. You don't head out on a publicity campaign to re-launch your image.

Why?

Because Christ loved you as you were and if your sin was good enough for Him to know and still love you, it is good enough for the world to know that they to can be saved, just like you were. The shame and sins of the past are badges of redemption and signs of hope to those we meet. It allows us to say someone like you can be changed too!

Friend you can not clean yourself up to come to God. You can not say *"No I won't respond to His call, I will first clean myself up and hope He comes walking by again and calls me at another time"*.

No!

When Jesus calls you, that is the time to respond.

When He comes and invites you to salvation that is the time you must answer.

You don't get to decide when to get saved.  
You don't get to decide when to respond to the call of God.

You get an opportunity come along, like the one presented to Matthew, and you must respond.

#### **4. Come follow me – God’s agenda for your life**

Luke 5:27-28

*“27 After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me*

*28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.”*

When Christ comes to you to He comes to you with an agenda

He comes to call you to follow Him.

But the calling to follow Him is not mindless, it is not pointless, it is purposeful.

In Matthew 4 Jesus said: *Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*

Our leaving is not just about leaving, but about following.

Our following is not just about trailing after Him, but allowing Him to make us.

To make means to:

To form, to fashion, to prepare, to construct.

To be made obedient.

There is another verse in Romans that says a similar thing. We ignore the teachings that lead to righteousness.

Some commentators say what Paul is doing here is painting a picture

He is painting a picture of metal being molten  
Metal being melted down and poured into a mold, of being stamped

That all that we were gets melted down and formed into the image of Christ

Conformed to the image of who God is

That is what happens when a person becomes a Christian

It is not just enough to follow Christ, we must allow Him to make us

You just don't take Christianity on as a thought process

It is not just a philosophy or intellectual argument that has no effect upon this life

A Christian is a person who has been poured into the mold of Christ

It is a lie from the pit of hell that has anyone believing that Christ wants to save your life for you to do nothing with it.

God wants to change you, but  
God has an agenda for your life

He wants to transform you and remake you in His image

A person who has truly been transformed by Christ does not whine,  
does not complain

Does not make excuses as to why they don't read their Bible or they  
don't go to church

They are changed...and they are overwhelmed with the glory of a  
second chance, and open to being used by God in every way every  
day.

## **He left all and followed:**

*Luke 5:27-28*

*And He said to him, "Follow Me*

*28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him."*

Matthew left all.

He got out of his comfort zone.

He got out of the familiar.

He rose above his circumstance and he followed.

Christ will call you – but you have to leave.

Christ will invite you – but you have to respond.

The Holy Ghost will convict you – but you have to repent.

God wants to touch and change your life for ever....but you have to follow

## **Matthew didn't keep this to himself**

*(29) And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.*

The first response of Matthew was to reach out to his circle of influences, the people he knew and loved and introduce them to the one that changed his life

As it was then, so it should be now

An encounter with Christ is something that should touch and change us so profoundly that we want to tell the world about it immediately

Not after Bible college

Not when we turn 21...

Not when we have our stuff together...but now!