



Follow Me

The Call of Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Mercy, Calling, Sinners

Matthew 9:9-13 (ESV)

Reader: Eleanor Pierson

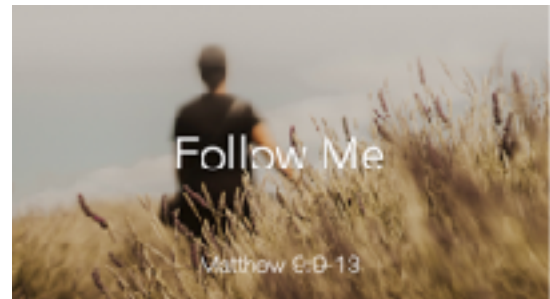
⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Introduction

As we have been following Matthew's gospel, we have seen that he has been highlighting the authority of Jesus. That is not a mere abstract topic for him. In the passage before us this morning, we will see a very personal application of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. This authority breaks into Matthew's life as well as the life of his friends.

Through Jesus the mercy of God is applied to Matthew's life and he is never the same.



This portion of Scripture is also told in both Mark (2:13-17) and Luke (5:27-32). Both Mark and Luke refer to him as *Levi*. Thus, we learn that Matthew is also called Levi. (This may mean that he was a Levite¹ and if so, then he has abandoned his Levitical heritage and calling in order pursue a career in tax collecting.) Having two names is not uncommon in NT. Just as Peter was also called Cephas, Saul was also called Paul, and Barnabas was also called Joseph (Acts 4:36).

¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 224..

Jesus Calls Matthew

This section begins by Matthew telling us that Jesus passed by him and spoke to him.

Matthew 9:9 (ESV) As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

Matthew is "**sitting at the tax booth**." Thus, his occupation is a tax collector. It is likely that Matthew collected a kind of income tax on goods brought across the Sea of Galilee, including a tax on the fishing industry. First century Jews hated tax collectors. They were deeply despised because they were "greedy, self-serving," and as one commentator went so far to say, "parasitic."² Tax collectors were problematic for several reasons.

- Political problematic - served the occupying Roman government. They were cooperating with a non-Jewish government. They were viewed as colluding with their captors. They were members of the wrong political party. They were in league with the oppressors. They used their position to enrich themselves by overtaxing. They were politically corrupt.
- Religious problematic - Tax collectors were considered to be unclean. "Jewish law barred tax collectors from all synagogue services on the basis of Leviticus 20:5, which required orthodox Jews to cut off anyone who was guilty of "prostituting [himself] to Moloch." Tax collectors were deemed idolatrous. They were considered to have sold their soul to the idolatrous pursuit of the love of money over their own people. They were not even allowed to witness in a court of law."³ They were religiously corrupt.
- Social problematic - "Religious people spoke of those who failed to keep every petty detail of the law as the 'am ha'arets ("people of the land"). The orthodox were forbidden to go on a journey with them, do business with them, give them anything, receive anything from them, have them as guests or be guests in their homes. Matthew was one of these."⁴ They were morally corrupt.
- Tax collectors were pariahs. They were parasites. They were perverse. They were to be avoided at all costs, all the time.

Jesus said to him, "**Follow me**." Why did Jesus call him? Why would Jesus call a guy like this to follow him as one of closest disciples? What is Jesus doing? Why does Jesus want an unclean, hated, enemy of the people to be on his team? Holy guys don't hang out with corrupt criminals.

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 238.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 149.

⁴ Ibid.

"And he rose and followed him." Matthew did the exact same thing that the paralyzed man did. Jesus gave a command and he obeyed, he ***"rose up and followed him."*** Why did Matthew follow Jesus? Why did the paralyzed man rise up? He did so because Jesus forgave his sins (Mt 9:2). Matthew is another example of a sinful person rising up out of his sins and choosing to follow Jesus. Matthew does not explicitly tell us here, but surely he wants us to see the connection. In Jesus commanding him to follow him, he is also forgiving his sins. Jesus is publicly declaring him ***forgiven!***

Luke tells us that Matthew ***"left everything"*** (5:28). Jesus had been preaching by now for a while in Capernaum. Matthew's job required him to know the comings and goings of people. There's no doubt that he had heard of Jesus or perhaps had even with his own ears heard him preaching and teaching. What he heard and saw convinced him that Jesus was worth following. Luke tells us that Matthew ***"left everything"*** to follow Jesus. He walked away from his job which almost certainly would have never been offered to him again. He walked away from everything! He left the money, he left the connection to Rome, he left job security, he left everything and followed Jesus. Matthew had been thinking about this. He was simply waiting for an invitation. When he received it, he immediately took it.

Jesus Eats With Sinners

Next, we see that Matthew calls for a feast.

Matthew 9:10 (ESV) And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus reclined at table in the house... Matthew writes about "the house." The definite article 'the' in front of house means that Matthew has in mind a particular house. Both Mark and Luke tell us that "the house" is actually Matthew's house. Matthew hosted Jesus "in his house."⁵ Matthew had his sins forgiven and he wanted to have all of his friends over to celebrate! This was a happy day.

Behold many tax collectors and sinners came... ***"Behold!"*** Matthew you wants us to see this. 'Behold' means 'look.' Look at this table and those seated around it. Look, because such people as these never eat together. ***Many tax collectors and sinners came.*** Luke tells us that it was ***"a great feast... with a large company of tax collectors"***⁶ and other ***"sinners."***⁷ This was a very large dinner party.

This gathering drew no small amount of attention. When wealthy people held large dinners it was common for the word to spread and the poor and hungry to come by hoping to get some of the leftovers (See Luke 7:36-50 when Jesus ate at the home of a Pharisee and "a woman of

⁵ Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29.

⁶ Luke 5:29.

⁷ Mark 2:15.

the city" washed Jesus' feet with her tears). This dinner party would have been spoken of widely. It drew a large crowd. **Behold!** There's lots to see here.

Matthew was a tax collector. He only hung out with other tax collectors. No one else would hang out with him. The Mishna forbade orthodox and devout Jews from having dinner with such an unclean person. You were not allowed to go to their house for dinner and neither could they come to yours. Thus, Matthew invited to his celebration dinner the only other people he knew, "**many tax collectors and sinners.**" Sinners hang out sinners, but when a sinner gets his sins forgiven, he wants all his sinner friends to know and rejoice with him.

... **and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.** Matthew also invited "Jesus and his disciples." "The genitive absolute αὐτοῦ ἀνακειμένου, 'when he was reclining at table,' refers to Jesus and suggests that he was the guest of honor."⁸ There were many people there, but Jesus was the one whom Matthew intended to honor.

"**Reclining at table,**" means leaning in with head toward a low, U shaped table, with feet facing out and away from the table. Servers could access the table from the middle, while the guests kept their unclean feet out and away from the food.



The "Question" of the Pharisees

Now, Matthew relates the response of the Pharisees to this incredible night.

Matthew 9:11 (ESV) And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

When the Pharisees saw this... The Pharisees were present, but not participating. They would never have joined in eating at this meal. It would have made them unclean. However, their concern for uncleanness did not overcome their curiosity at who was hosting this party and who was attending it. So they poked their heads in the windows or doors and got close enough to see what was happening.

They said to his disciples... It is interesting that they do not ask Jesus directly, but rather ask his disciples obliquely. The concern of the Pharisees is not about the conduct of the disciples, but rather with that of their "teacher."

⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 238.

Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? The Pharisees, at this point, view Jesus as nothing more than a ‘teacher.’ Despite the miracles that we have so far seen—the healings he has done, the casting out of demons, and so on—they see him as nothing more than a ‘teacher.’

This question is most likely is not a question, but rather an accusation. Jesus’ choice to enter Matthew’s house and eat at his table was confusing to the Pharisees. For **to eat with someone implied agreement with them.**⁹ This is why Jews would never eat with Gentiles. Thus, for Jesus to eat with such sinners, it appeared that he “fully accepted them”¹⁰ and was in complete agreement with them.

The Response of Jesus

Though the question was not asked of him, Jesus takes the initiative to answer.

Matthew 9:12 (ESV) But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

From this statement, we can make several observations.

1. **Jesus views sin as a sickness.** Jesus is sitting at dinner with a table full of sinners. Everyone knows this, including the tax collectors and sinners sitting there listening to Jesus. Sin is a spiritually sick condition from which one needs to be healed. Sin is a disease that needs to be healed and a contamination from which we need to be cleansed. Sin is not
2. **Jesus views himself as the healing physician.** Jesus is here likening himself to one who gives healing to the sick. Cleansing and healing come from being near Jesus. Jesus is a spiritual physician who can make sin-sick people to be cured from their illness. Did not Isaiah well say of messiah, “He took our illnesses and bore diseases” (Mt 8:17; Isa 53:4).

Matthew recorded this story here because it is the application of the authority of Jesus to heal the sickness of sin. Jesus had healed Matthew’s spiritual sickness and there are many other sick people who also need healing. Matthew invited all his sick friends to meet Jesus so that they too could be healed of their spiritual disease.

Jesus Calls Sinners To Leave Sin and Follow Him

Jesus is a merciful physician who calls sinners to leave their sin and follow him.

Matthew 9:13 (ESV) “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- Jesus is indeed a **teacher** and he now requires the Pharisees to "**go and learn.**" He is quoting Hosea 6:6. In saying, "**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,**" Jesus is not saying that sacrifice is no longer need, but rather that steadfast, deep-rooted, real, genuine love of God is vastly more important. The passage explains God desires genuine inward affection far more than mere outward conformity to religious rules and regulations. He desires true repentance (i.e. "*come, let us return to the LORD*" Hos 6:1) far more than correct religious observance. Jesus is after the hearts of the people with whom he is sitting, not merely "church attendance" or accurate participation in religious practice. God is after both your heart and your hands, not your hands alone. The Pharisees missed this. They were strong on outward observance, but they had missed the fact that God wanted the heart first.
- God's primary word of self-description is "**merciful**" Ex 34:6. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God responded by saying that He would reveal his name to him. And when God revealed his name, the first word out of his mouth was "merciful."
 - Exodus 34:5-6 (ESV) The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."
 - God is a merciful God. He does not give us what we deserve. He withholds divine justice, which is what we deserve.
- Jesus came "**to call sinners.**" The call of Jesus is, "**Follow me.**" If we would obey this call, then we cannot continue in our sin. Jesus did not walk in sin. Jesus walked in holiness. If we would follow him, then we too must do the same. Matthew walked away from tax collecting forever. He never returned to that job. Remember Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery, "*Go, and sin no more*" (Jn 8:11). Having thus experienced the mercy of Jesus on that day, do you think she went out with that guy again? No. She deleted him from her contacts and threw away all the cards, notes, and gifts he'd ever given to her. ***The call of Jesus is leave sin and follow him.***
- Luke adds that Jesus included the word "repentance" in this call (5:32). "*Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners... to repentance.*" Is there anything from which you need to repent?
- It is obvious enough that "light can have no fellowship with darkness" and that Christians ought never "unequally yoke themselves together with unbelievers," but this does not mean that all interaction with sinners is therefore forbidden. If the purpose of the meal or meeting is ever to lead the lost to the merciful Savior who seeks them, to help them recover from their spiritual sickness, or to express and explain the call to repentance, then sit and sup with them. But if the moment the light begins to fade and the darkness overpowers the light, then that is the moment you leave the table.

Conclusion

Jesus calls to himself problem people. Jesus passes by and looks at sinners and says, "Leave that mess and follow me?" He sits with us and invites us to get to know him. He invites us to have a meal with him.

Revelation 3:20 (ESV) "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

John 14:23 (ESV) Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Jesus is the kind of man, the kind of Savior, who invites us to "leave everything" and follow him. Do you hear his voice this morning?

Do you have questions? Don't direct them to his disciples, but ask them directly of him? Pray to him.

Can you admit your sins are sickness—something from which you need to be healed, not accommodated? If so, then go to Jesus. Go to a merciful Savior. Confess your sins to him and he will heal you. He is the only spiritual physician who "takes your disease of sin, and carries away your illness of sin."

Is your heart where it should be? Does he who created you have all your heart? Or are you like the Pharisees still playing half-hearted religious games? Stop poking about on the edges. Throw yourself wholly into Christ and He will throw Himself and His Holy Spirit wholly into you.

Are there some contacts you need to delete? Are there boxes of old letters that you need to throw away? "Make no provision for the lusts of the flesh." Come to a merciful God through a self-sacrificing Savior who stands with open arms saying, "*Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out*" (Jn 6:37).