

Sermon Notes: Follow Me

Levi was his birth name, but to us and his comrades, he is known as Matthew. The name that his parents had given him meant that they had expected him to serve the Lord like the Levites of the Old Testament. From birth, he would have been set aside and destined to be a spiritual leader for the nation of Israel. Matthew's father, grandfather, and great grandfather were most likely priests who had faithfully served the Lord. By age twelve, Matthew would have had the first five books, known as the Torah, memorized. It is probable that Matthew tried to become a disciple of one of the rabbis, but he must have been rejected. He just did not make the cut. He just could not measure up.

So, Matthew became a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated and vilified by all of Jewish society. The Roman government would auction off the right to collect taxes, and wealthy men would bid for these rights then would hire, at a very hefty pay, local people to collect the taxes. These men would then collect and extort money from the people of Israel to feed the Roman treasury and to pad their own pockets. They often strong-armed money out of people with the use of thugs. Tax collectors were on the same level socially as prostitutes and criminals. To be a Jew who was a tax collector was even worse. He would also have been a religious outcast, forbidden from any synagogue.

Why would he take such a job? Money.

You and I have a lot in common with Matthew; we do not measure up nor do we make the cut. **Romans 3:23** *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* None of us are good enough. We have all said things that we should not have said and done things we should not have done. No matter how hard we try to change and get the stain of sin out of our lives, it just doesn't work. This sometimes leads us to live in denial or to blame others for our misfortunes. Sometimes we rationalize or justify our behavior based on our circumstances. We hope no one sees the truth.

Matthew had reached a point where he was not trying to hide his stains (lifestyle). His friends were prostitutes, thieves, and drunkards; his faults were open for all to see. Matthew was probably aware of Jesus

and some of His teachings, but he didn't know what was about to happen because of His Savior. **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 gives Matthew this two word invitation: "Follow Me!"

Can you imagine what the other disciples thought at this invitation? This was a tax collector! This guy was not just a sinner; he sinned for a living. And yet Jesus said to him, “Follow me.”

What did Matthew do? He got up and followed Jesus. When Jesus said “Follow me,” the invitation was to an imperfect man, stained by the world. Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me, ...”* **Anyone!** Anyone is an inclusive word. **Anyone** can follow Jesus: **anyone** who has thought that they have gone too far or their stain is too big; **anyone** who does not think they have anything to offer Jesus. It is not what we have to offer that changes things, but *what He has to offer.*

Matthew 9:10 – 13 Notice the rest of the story. At Matthew’s house, they are in the company of tax collectors and other sinners. Matthew’s acquaintances were just like Matthew; but Jesus was comfortable with them and apparently they were comfortable with Jesus. Wow! Jesus was not put off by their sin. He still called them to follow.

Notice the response of the Pharisee’s: “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners’?”

Notice the response of Jesus: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” We believe that Jesus makes life better and makes us better for life.

Matthew left his past behind and started following Jesus, but that didn't mean he was perfect. Far from it! Even after we decide to follow Jesus, we need God’s grace for the journey; his grace does not just invite us to follow, but it teaches us to follow. You and I both know what we deserve. By God’s amazing grace, Jesus invites you and me to follow Him. With love, He says “Follow Me!” Jesus knows our stains. He died on the cross so that all our stains could be washed clean. Why live with all the regrets? Why keep putting off that which can give you life? When will you respond to those simple words of Jesus; “Follow

me?” **Isaiah 1:18** *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*