

# Matthew 9:9-17

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Date: 30 September 2018

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, hello again and welcome everybody. If you're new, my name is Aaron and I look after this service. I'd love to meet you afterwards if you feel like doing that.
- Our passage tonight has a great deal to do with the conversation we're going to have downstairs afterwards. So I'll keep this shorter than normal.
- Well, Jesus gives two commands in this text. They are, follow me and go and learn.
- Follow me, go and learn. Follow and go. Those are the two commands he gives. And to everyone watching this unfold, these encounters here unfold 2,000 years ago, it would have been a great surprise to see who Jesus said, follow me to.
- And it was a great surprise who we said, go to. It was a great surprise because those who were well on the outside, Jesus says, come, follow.
- [ 1 : 0 8 ] And those who presumed to be the insiders were told to go. Now, perhaps that's all a bit confusing. So we'll look at these commands one at a time.
- Follow me. These are nuclear words, aren't they, from Christ. Follow me. The scandal of Matthew 9 is that he says them to seemingly the wrong person, a tax collector.
- Jesus is recruiting disciples and he picks that guy, the tax collector. So Matthew sat in a booth on a row that bordered two provinces and he'd collect taxes from merchants, bringing their goods from one province to another.
- And tax collectors were hated. They were hated because they were working for the Romans. They were Jews working for the Romans. And they were hated because most of them were dishonest.
- They would overestimate the value of goods that merchants would bring over and they'd sort of just pocket the difference. And as a result, they were socially ostracized. They were religiously unclean.
- [ 2 : 1 7 ] They couldn't participate in religious life, which was central to the life of Jews in the ancient Near East. They were outsiders. They were reviled. They were tools of the oppressor.
- So then Matthew's sitting in his booth, betraying his people, dishonoring God. And Jesus says, yeah, you, you, you, follow me.
- And how does Matthew respond? He gets up and he follows. In the other Gospels, it says Matthew leaving everything, got up and followed Christ. And then what does he do?
- He throws a party. And it's just a wonderful story as I've been sort of in this this week. I actually got a little bit weepy in my little windowless office at work. I'm sitting there because I'm just, I'm just thinking about this, this scene of this party and thinking how beautiful it was.
- You notice when it describes the attendees of the party that Matthew threw, it describes them as tax collectors and sinners. So interesting they put those two things together, right?

[ 3 : 21 ] That little couplet, tax collectors and sinners. Why is that? Because sinners were the only friends that Matthew had. I mean, who's the tax collector going to hang out with? He's going to hang out with other tax collectors and nobody wants anything to do with them except all the other religious rejects, all of the sinners.

That's, that's their gang. The only people he gets to hang out with is all the other people, the religious elite have pushed to the margins.

So Matthew throws a party. And he invites all his friends and he invites Jesus. He's so overwhelmed by the kindness of Jesus. He wants his friends to know him as well.

And it's just a wonderful picture of salvation, a wonderful picture of what the church should look like. And I remember when I was a very young Christian going to this Christian conference-y, concert-y thing in this small town in New Zealand.

And there were some cool kids there, but there were some really odd people at this thing as well. Very odd, different kind of people.

[ 4 : 25 ] Yeah. That's what I was doing. I was quietly laughing at them. And, and, and, and I was thinking, thank goodness they didn't invite anyone. Because I would have been embarrassed.

And so I, right towards the end of it, I chatted to a mate that had sort of brought me along, who was a more mature Christian. And I said, this is just embarrassing.

You know, if this is what the church looks like, goodness, no wonder we're struggling to get people through the door. And he goes, are you kidding me? Like, this is church operating at its best.

So then I felt like a jerk and, you know, Christianity and all that, you know, like. I've never forgotten. It was like probably 25 years ago. What do we learn from this?

What do we learn from this, this first little story here? The first thing we learn is, is when Jesus calls people, he doesn't come to add to their shame.

[ 5 : 32 ] I mean, don't you just love Jesus, this picture of Jesus hanging out with all these rejects? All the not good enoughs, eating and drinking and laughing. When Jesus comes to us, he doesn't come to add to your shame.

And if you're here and you're not a Christian and you're kind of thinking about it, he doesn't come to add to your shame. He doesn't come to put his foot on your neck and load you up with obligations. He comes to be with you in a joy-filled, grace-filled relationship.

He comes to be with you in a joy-filled, grace-filled relationship. And if you don't know that, I'd love to talk to you about that. I think the second thing we learn is that he comes into this relationship, Matthew does, via a call.

It's not Matthew's idea. It was Jesus' idea. Jesus pursued him and reached out to him. And all great adventures, you know, well, a lot of great adventures begin with a call.

Peter inviting Wendy and John and Michael to Neverland. And Bilbo inviting, Gandalf inviting Bilbo. These great adventures start with a call.

[ 6 : 42 ] You know, what I'm saying here is if you're a Christian here, you're here because somebody called you. You didn't decide to take up religion to make your life, you know, moderately better. Conversion to Christianity.

It's like you have this sense of being confronted by a person, don't you? That you're being dealt with by a person. That person is Jesus.

And he said to you, follow me. Okay, let's move on. As I said, we have to keep this pretty tight tonight. Jesus says, follow me to the wrong person, it seems.

That's what I would have looked like from the outside. And he says, go to the wrong people. I mean, you think if you're trying to start a religion, you'd want to get the religious leaders of the day on board, upward mobility and all of that.

But verse 13, it says that Jesus says to the religious expert, all these power players, he says, go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice, for I came not for the righteous, but for sinners.

[ 7 : 45 ] He's basically saying to the religious elite, he goes, you guys, you don't get it. You've missed it. You've lost the plot. That's great. It's a great challenge to me reading this.

It means I can think I can have it all together in a philosopher plot. See, the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees and the ancient Neroes, decided their job was to keep themselves in quarantine away from all possible sources of moral and spiritual infection.

They were separatists. They believed this pleased God, and they despised these religious no-hopers. These tax collectors. These tax collectors. These sinners.

And they despised Jesus for hanging out with them. It's one of the reasons Jesus was crucified. It was because who he chose to eat with. See, the Pharisees had this great desire to be holy.

And it drove them away from sinners. It drove them away from people on the margins. And they were very disciplined about it. And Jesus says, you have got it so wrong, whilst trying so hard to get it right.

[ 8 : 52 ] You've got it so wrong. You've completely missed the mission of God. And he says to them, go. Go and learn. I desire mercy.

Where is your mercy? Where is your mercy? It's a quote from Hosea. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. So Hosea, as some of you might know, Hosea was an Old Testament prophet.

And God told him to marry the local prostitute. Her name was Goma. And God said to Hosea, you know, do this because then you'll understand what it's like for me to love people who give their hearts to other things.

Israel was a spiritually adulterous place. So Hosea married Goma and he loved Goma. But Goma, you know, she was texting his friends and running off with other guys and running around doing stuff.

And it was a horrible situation. And Hosea wanted Goma restored and he believed God could restore their relationship. And at one point, he'd heard that her latest lover that she'd run off with had abandoned her.

[ 9 : 59 ] And she didn't know what to do, so she sold herself into slavery. Hosea's praying. You'd sort of excuse the guy for sort of going, okay, that's it.

It's all over. No more. No more Goma. That's it. But he prays and he said, the Lord spoke to him. And this is what the Lord said. Go again. Love a woman who was loved by another man and is an adulteress.

Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods. Isn't that lovely? Go again and love this woman. It's a brutal story. It's a brutal story. It's a wonderful story.

It's a story of God's undying love. A story of a God who pursues. It's a story of a love that we cannot escape. God's love pursues us.

When Amy and I got married, our sort of theme for the wedding was that hymn, O love that will not let you go. This is the love of God, isn't it? It doesn't let us go.

[ 10 : 58 ] The Pharisees hadn't grasped this. They were separatists. This week, this Kavanaugh-Ford judiciary hearing down in the States has been awful, hasn't it?

It's been a partisan bloodbath. Politics, in its worst manifestations, has a way of dividing people into two groups.

And this is exactly what's happened as a result of these hearings, right? It's divided people into two groups. And people on either side of the camp look at the other with great suspicion and really don't want anything to do with the other person because the other person is so wrong.

Religion can do the same in its most sort of unhealthiest state. It divides and it separates and it carves a great chasm between groups of people.

And Jesus says, no. He looks at the Pharisees who should have known the heart of God. And he says, you've lost the plot. You've divided when you should be gathering.

[ 12 : 13 ] Now go and learn the heart of God again. That the heart of God is mercy. It's undeserved favor. It's not giving someone what they deserve.

Pharisees, Jesus says, you do not have the priorities of God right in your life. Application, just to close this up here. What does this all mean for us? Well, I think first it's very helpful for us because Jesus is giving us a spiritual thermometer.

He's saying this. He's telling us that our attitude towards the outsider, those on the edge, those that we would wish to separate ourselves from, our attitude towards those folks is a spiritual thermometer.

That's measuring whether we have the priorities of God right in our life. Have we sequestered ourselves off into our own little Christian ghetto, which is so easy to do because actually it's a lovely ghetto.

Jesus says to us, go and learn. Go and learn. Go and learn. And tonight we're going to have a chance to do that.

[ 13 : 27 ] You're going to, if you'd like, we'd love it. If you'd head downstairs and join this discussion, we're going to continue to have this discussion downstairs. I hope you'd come down to go and learn.

And secondly, the Pharisees believed that they were saved through rigorous sacrifice and separation. And it reminds us that the only thing that can save us is the reality that Jesus eats with sinners.

That's the only reason you're a Christian. It's the only reason you have a relationship with God because Jesus eats with sinners. Put it another way.

You are not a Christian until you realize you are Goma in that story. But Jesus called you and he sought you out and he pursued you.

He pursued you. And you don't come to that point. If you don't come to that point, you will be buried under a weight of trying to prove how good you are to God. And that will be a joyless, graceless relationship.

[ 14 : 36 ] And the only way to get out from under that, the weight of that, the only way to get out from underneath the weight of your own sort of personal sacrifices, trying to prove yourself to God, is to look to another sacrifice.

So look to the sacrifice of Christ. And that's what we're going to do tonight when we come to the table. We're going to remember that. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.