

The Call

Luke 5:27-32

Would you take your Bibles and turn to our text in **Luke 5:27-32**. Please join me in standing this morning for the reading of God's Word.

May God's Word guide our steps and guard our paths as we read and apply it.

I would like to begin this morning by telling you about a phone call I received this past week and then about a follow up email. It was one of those totally unexpected calls that came out of the blue, and from an unlikely person.

It was late afternoon on Monday and I had just finished staining some molding that will go into our bedroom. I checked my cell phone to see if there were any messages that I had missed and there was a message from an unknown number. I listened to the message and it was from someone that I only see a couple times a year. He asked if I would give him a call to discuss something with him. He did not tell me what the something was in his message. By the time the dust settled on the day, it was evening before I could return his call. We discussed the nature of his call and hung up. Tuesday he followed up with an email to provide some background to the decision and our subsequent conversation. His story fits well with our passage.

He has given me permission to share this with you although I will keep his name anonymous along with other related information. Here's his note:

I feel that I should fill you in on what's going on especially since you agreed to help me out. I came to know Christ at a VBS when I was a little kid but I never grew spiritually. Even being raised in the Episcopal Church as a teenager didn't do much for me. I lived my life without much thought of God through my twenties until alcohol started to cause some real problems for me. At age 29 I realized that I needed God's help to beat the alcohol problem

I was having. I prayed about it and the answer came back to ask for help and trust Jesus. I did, and any addiction that I had to alcohol was gone immediately at that moment. I was forced to go to meetings and counseling because I was on probation, but it had nothing to do with my sobriety.

Unfortunately, after God removed that particular sin from my life, I let other sins creep in and replaced God with other goals and activities. I now liken this period in my life to the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness, even after God performed miracles for them they still worshipped idols and other gods (I didn't worship other gods or idols but you get the idea). This whole time we were attending the church that [my wife] had been going to since she was a teenager. I never felt like I fit in there. The idea of being saved and that was it confused me. (By that he means that being saved with no other life commitment is all you need.) Why was I still sinning? What was going on with me? I couldn't find the answer, but must admit I wasn't trying very hard to find it. In 2012 I started to think everything was going to come apart. I had become someone that I didn't like very much and I don't think anyone else did either. I finally gave in and looked to God for the answer. Same answer-Ask Jesus for help, duh! I did, for real. I did exactly as God told me. I revealed the sin that I had been carrying and dealt with it as best as I could. I went through a period of deep repentance. I was given a new job and was led to a new church. They have a strong children's and youth ministry and do not compromise on Scripture. I have never been much for doctrine (I suspect you are not either) [that's something I'll have to talk to him about.] but the teachings of the church make sense to me. I don't feel like I don't fit in God's plan anymore. We have been very active at church. I became a member in Spring 2013 and was baptized last summer in Lake Huron. I was notified a couple of days ago that I was nominated to serve on the Local Board of Administration at church and am considering whether I will accept the nomination. I am thankful for all of the undeserved gifts that I have received.

As far as this ministry program goes: I have been sensing that I was being called to do something more for a while. This past winter something I heard in Sunday school caused me to meditate on it

later in the day (I meditate while cutting firewood sometimes, crazy huh?) What God put on my heart was this: I am to equip myself for an opportunity that will happen in the future. The message very specifically said this. I have no idea what is in store for me. I discussed this with my pastor and we thought the best thing for me to do was prepare for ordination. I had no idea that this would even be possible for me, but Pastor directed me to the Cross Training program. I am on my second class (of 23). I have a lot to learn and a lot of growing to do.

Thank you for your help. I have definitely been considering 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 3. I look back at my life and know for sure that I would have definitely been disqualified from ministering even several years ago. I never would have thought of it anyway and I admit that this is not my idea to begin with. I was somewhat reluctant to tell my pastor about it but the way I figure, I have spent enough of my life being disobedient. As you mentioned I have no idea if this will lead to a career change, but there are plenty of other things I could do. I feel like there is a demographic of people, mostly men, that I can minister to in various ways. Around the same time I felt called one of the assistant pastors formed a group to explore starting a ministry associated with the CCDA and I was asked to be a part of that. There may be something related to that for me.

There's so much more to all of this that I would never have time to tell you, so please know that I realize the importance of ministry and am not taking these steps lightly. I really think that God has allowed me to make a lot of wrong choices and experience some very negative things in my life in order to prepare me to do my part in spreading His Word.

My friend asked if I would come alongside him during this academic journey while he pursues this program in ministry and help him when he has questions. I told my friend that whether or not he goes into ministry of some kind doesn't really matter. What matters is that a) he is obedient to follow the Lord and b) it is a great opportunity for personal spiritual growth. He has already shared his story at church, which in itself is amazing. He has

shared his story at a local homeless shelter where his church ministers and also with an alcohol recovery program.

By trade, he is an electrician, skilled in heating and cooling. He's done some small farming with about 35 head of cattle. His phone call and request took me by surprise because I would never have suspected he had any interest in ministry. I knew there had been some life changes and interest in spiritual things, but to see a total transformation in this direction is nothing short of remarkable. If you knew him, you might even conclude it was miraculous. But that's the thing we see throughout Scripture and it's the point of our passage today. Whatever God calls you to do, He will equip you.

My friend's story is not unique. It has been read or told countless times from the lips or pen of the most unlikely people. Some who come to mind are Moses, Joseph, Gideon, David, Paul, Mark, and Matthew.

When the Lord stirs the heart and the person responds in obedient faith a total transformation takes place that many find unbelievable, but when the Lord does the transformation, the change is unmistakable. [I went to college and counseled at Camp with a guy who was led to the Lord by Pastor Don. He would show up at Sunday afternoon football games in the park. He hung out on street corners and wore his hair long. After he got saved, he made some lifestyle changes, got a haircut and so on. One day he saw one of the policemen he knew from hanging out and went up and asked if he knew who he was. The policeman didn't recognize him, so he told him his name. The policeman didn't believe him, so my friend got out his driver's license which still had a picture of him with his long hair. He told him that Christ had made a difference in his life. He's now in ministry.](#)

That's what happens in our story about Matthew.

I. MATTHEW HAD A CALL TO ANSWER

This story that is intended for every one of us. It doesn't matter our age or even how long we have been a Christian. It doesn't matter our status at what we do for work or what we might possess or even our physical condition. It doesn't even matter about our educational level.

Reading the opening words of this text we understand that this event took place right after healing of the paralytic. Mark tells us that Jesus ventured down to the Sea of Galilee. Strolling along the beach He saw a tax collector sitting at his tax booth. Since money was being exchanged and he probably didn't have a safe behind him, I can imagine that there were a couple of body guards around to enforce the tax and to ensure a robbery didn't occur. Drive to the bank now and you are likely to encounter security guards.

When it mentions in our text that Jesus saw this tax collector it doesn't mean that he had general sight of him. You may come in to church and I may see that you are here, but fail to notice that you are sporting a new suit or dress or that you got a haircut while someone else is quick to notice such things. You are one of many others here that I see.

As Jesus strolled along the seashore that day, it wasn't just for the purpose of finding some respite in the refreshing breezes blowing in from the lake or listen to sounds of seagulls calling to one another about the fish scraps left by fisherman from the days catch. Jesus was on a mission, there was a purpose behind His excursion to the sea that day. He was enroute to a divine encounter.

Understand tht every encounter is a divine encounter. Every meeting we have with someone whether just for a few seconds as we greet them at the cash register or we pass them in the halls of school or nod to them across the fence row as we

mow our lawn or sit across from them with a cup of coffee or a coke is a divine encounter choreographed by God. They aren't chance meetings. Every encounter is an opportunity to pass on something or to receive something in that encounter. It may only be for a few seconds but it can be something that could alter your life or the life of the other person in some way.

Matthew was about to have a divine encounter that would forever change his life. Jesus saw the tax collector sitting at his desk doing his work. The word "saw" as used here means to look with attention or interest. It is the idea of gazing with a purpose, to view attentively, to see with admiration, desire or regard with an emphasis on the one who is doing the seeing.

Recently I went to a track meet to watch Jordan McGrath run. There were a lot of events and a lot of runners that were before his event. I saw all those runners but with little interest or concern for the outcome. However, when Jordan's race began, I watched with great interest. Even though there were a dozen other runners, my attention was on him. I was there solely to see him run.

Jesus saw this man at his tax booth with great interest as He approached him because it was the intention of Jesus to invite him to join in ministry. Maybe Levi, or Matthew as he came to be known, started with the usual rhetoric as he sat there sharpening his pencil and getting the scales ready. "What is your name, where are you from and what do you have to declare?"

Now let me pause there a moment and tell you that while that is speculation, I have every reason to believe that Matthew knew who Jesus was, had heard Him speak and possibly saw some of His miracles. After all, they were not done in secret and if people from all over the region came to be healed or hear Jesus teach, certainly news about Jesus

would have not gone unnoticed by someone living in the same town. Word got around.

For a few moments let's get to know Matthew. He is a rather obscure individual in Scripture. On one hand, we might think of him as a very flamboyant and outgoing person given the very large party attended by his old friends. On the other hand, we find through the gospels very little said about him. But we do know this, he was a tax collector.

We have discussed the nature of tax collectors before, but let me remind you that they were not well thought of. Most were as crooked as the day is long. Herod sold tax franchises to the highest bidder. There were great or chief tax collectors and small tax collectors. The great tax collectors never collected taxes themselves. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. They hired others to do the dirty work while they raked in the goods. Rome taxed the countries it conquered so that its citizens didn't have to. And they taxed everything. The tax would be set and the local tax collector could add to it whatever he wanted and keep his cut.

We also learn that Matthew was from Capernaum. As we noted a few weeks ago, it was situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Trade routes going east and west as well as north and south passed through the town. Matthew was in a good spot economically for his tax business. That he is seen sitting at a tax booth indicates that he was a small tax collector. He would keep his cut and give the rest to his boss. That he was down by the sea indicates that he taxed the fishermen on their catch. Records indicate that fishermen were taxed 20%. And we think Chicago with its 9% tax rate is high.

Because of the location of his tax booth, it is quite likely that he had regular encounters with Peter, James and John who were fishermen. You can just imagine his eyes gleamed with dollar signs when they had that huge haul the day Jesus called Peter, James and John to follow Him after their boats about

capsized from the catch.

Being a tax collector, he was hated by all other Jews and considered a traitor to their country and people in league with the hated Romans all for material gain. As a tax collector, he was alienated from the religious community. If he went to the Temple, he was not allowed to go any further than the court of the Gentiles. Later when Jesus tells about the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray and it says that the tax collector stood afar off, it means that he was out in the court of Gentiles. He couldn't go any further, not just because he felt unworthy; he wasn't allowed to go any further.

When someone wanted to symbolize sin, they described the sinner as a tax collector. In the opinion of religious leaders, it was unthinkable that a tax collector could ever go to heaven or be forgiven. They had a notorious reputation.

Aside from his occupation there is something else you need to know about Matthew. It isn't stated in the gospels but inferred by what we read through the gospel that bears his name. Matthew quotes more of the Old Testament than the other three gospel writers combined. You might ask what that proves. It shows us that Matthew had a keen understanding of the Old Testament. It shows us that Matthew had a very good grasp of Scripture and had good Biblical teaching as a child. Some scholars even suggest that this Biblical hunger continued into adulthood even though he was restricted from religious activities. Maybe it was a way of easing a guilty conscience from his immoral and unethical practices. He was the ancient version of the Sheriff of Nottingham in the tale of Robin Hood taking from the poor and keeping it.

People today try to do that – ease their guilt by doing some religious activity. They may pray or read their Bible or go to church or do good deeds – all in an effort to get rid of the guilt. But it only

lasts for a short while.

But I believe that wasn't the case with Matthew. I believe there was a genuine interest on his part to somehow fill the God sized hole that was in his heart. I say that because when Jesus came along and saw him sitting at his tax booth and said to him, **"Follow Me"**, he was ready, willing and obedient. The thin veneer of materialism provided no satisfaction. It left him spiritually hungry.

It is so easy to attach ourselves to something visible and tangible in the hopes of getting peace or filling the God sized hole. Like eating candy all day, it will fill you up, but not nourish you with what you need.

Like my friend, some fill the God shaped hole with alcoholism or drugs.

Some will attempt to fill the God shaped hole with more work or a different job or moving to a new part of the country.

Some immerse themselves in hobbies or pursuing dreams in retirement to fill the void.

Some look to social gatherings and surround themselves with lots of people and pursue popularity.

For those in High School or college it could be the pursuit of academic dreams and career objectives. You might try to find it in sports. You may try to fill the God void with the sounds and words of music on your ipod or iphone. Music may seem to resonate with what the spirit longs for but at the end of the day it, like all the other things, will never come close to filling the God shaped hole you have. There is only one thing that can fill the spiritual void and Matthew was about to find that out.

Jesus walked along purposely on His way to a divine encounter with an unlikely person. It probably never occurred to Matthew when he woke up that day that something special was going to happen to him. Maybe, like my friend, Matthew hoped beyond all hope that something could

change, but wasn't sure anything would because of his reputation. He didn't even have to be a rascal as most tax collectors were. Just by the nature of his occupation and their reputation, he was branded. Even if he were to change careers, people would still look at him with suspicion, even disdain and contempt – after all, he was one of those. There will always be those who question the motives or say that they are not qualified because of their past. Like my friend, Matthew may have felt unqualified for any kind of ministry. It may never have dawned on him that he could be involved in ministry.

I know someone who made some mistakes and had to give up his church. After a number of years of going his own way there was a genuine repentance and a dramatic change. Someone wanted him to go and fill the pulpit in a church up in the thumb area and they asked is that so and so? The person said yes and the church said they would never let someone like that preach in their church. This person is now in ministry again. For a long time he never thought he could be, that he was disqualified.

Jesus came along and blew Matthew's thinking out of the water. It was an unmistakable call: **"Follow Me."** Maybe Matthew thought that nothing could ever change for him, until that day when Jesus walked up and asked him to follow. It's even possible that after his calling to follow Christ, people talked behind his back about him wherever they went.

Matthew and my friend have experienced something life changing because of Christ. Paul wrote about it. **II Corinthians 5:17 "If any man be in Christ He is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."**

Matthew had a call to answer.

II. MATTHEW HAD A CONSIDERATION TO PONDER

Jesus saw beyond who Matthew was and what he could become and He invited him to follow. This idea of following Christ is used 77 times in the New Testament and means to be in the same way with. Jesus was asking Matthew to give up everything he knew, his livelihood, his lifestyle and join Him. Such a decision meant he would take on the status of a learner, a disciple, someone totally devoted and committed to the Master. Matthew didn't know all that would entail. He didn't know that he was going to be part of a group that would be world changers. But the God sized hole in his heart had just been filled and there was among many options only one clear choice to make. It was something he had to consider.

We know he was willing to go with Christ because our text tells us he got up and left everything. Matthew was making a life commitment to follow Christ. And notice that Jesus made no promises to Matthew that if he followed, he would have a life of ease; if he followed all his worries would be over; if he followed he would get a big promotion like his own tax franchise. It was a simple call and Matthew was ready to be obedient. It was immediate and without hesitation. He didn't ask Jesus what the plan was, where they were going, did it come with benefits. It must have given Matthew a tremendous sense of peace, peace that he longed for.

III. MATTHEW HAD TO CELEBRATE HIS DECISION

That commitment was evidenced by what happened next. Matthew threw a party. It was a coming out party, a party to tell his fellow tax collectors about the decision to leave the tax business and follow Christ and to introduce them to the Savior. The word **“others”** literally means others of the same kind. They were just like him or rather what he used to be. A lot of people gathered for this festive occasion including those who were troubled by the party. There are always those who lurk in the shadows to throw a wet blanket on the excitement.

They can be a discouragement to someone who is excited about a new venture, a change in life. It will never work. Wait and see, he'll be back to his old ways in no time. You'll never change. It won't last. But Matthew had to celebrate this life change.

IV. MATTHEW HAD A CHALLENGE TO ADDRESS

Maybe you know something of what Matthew experienced. It can be discouraging even disheartening. You dream of all the possibilities only to hear someone complain or criticize your desire.

[I saw an article about a woman who had worked as a stripper in a night club, got saved and the miraculous transformation that has taken place. She is now directly involved in a ministry that is trying to reach women in that industry with the gospel. Many Christians still condemn her. We can be so judgmental and condescending.](#)

That's exactly what the religious leaders did. They were still following Jesus around and they condemned the disciples for having a party with “those” kinds of people. Eating and drinking with someone meant that you were fellowshiping with them, that there was a sense of camaraderie. Rabbis had a rule among themselves that they wouldn't eat with riffraff because they could become ceremonially unclean. So they stood at a distance and cast verbal stones of criticism.

At this point Jesus jumped into the conversation and countered with these very thought provoking words: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**

On one hand it is wonderfully comforting words to someone, anyone like a Matthew that repentance is available and service is possible. It gives any and all hope for God's mercy and grace. It gives hope that even the most unlikely not only can be saved, but can also be used in ministry. Every one of us should be thankful.

On the other hand Jesus' words had to be terribly indicting for the religious elite to hear. When Jesus speaks about the righteous in this sense it is not in reference to those already saved, but those who believed they were saved by self-righteous acts. They considered themselves righteous apart from what Jesus had to offer. They did not believe they needed to change. A.T. Robertson notes "the self-satisfied are hard to win and often resent efforts to win them to Christ." That was the case for the Pharisees. They were quick to diagnose the sins of others, but blind to their own sin or need. They failed to understand that the law wasn't given to earn salvation, but was given as a mirror to reflect man's sinful heart and need for a Savior. It's not that such a person can't be saved, but that they won't be saved because of their own prideful heart. Jesus can and will save the soul that is repentant. But it doesn't end with just a call to be saved. Jesus gives a call to each of us to follow in service. He extends that call to you.

The story of Matthew's call is a wonderful reminder that the Lord often chooses the most unlikely person and uses them in extraordinary ways for His glory. Matthew was willing to give up a lucrative business to follow Christ. **How about you? Are you willing to follow Him? Are you willing to give up the temporal for the eternal?**

My friend's story could be about you or about me or about anyone else. The point is that God uses people of all walks of life, even the most improbable. He took a young man who worked in a shoe store and turned him from a fun loving prankster into one of the most dynamic preachers of

his day. The story of D.L. Moody may be similar in fashion to Matthew. A biographer took this from the diary of Moody. [Business] "had become distasteful to me. I had got a taste of another world, and cared no more for making money. For some days after, the greatest struggle of my life took place. Should I give up business and give myself wholly to Christian work, or should I not? God helped me to decide alright, and I have never regretted my choice. Oh, the luxury of leading some one out of the darkness of this world into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel!"

His last eight months in business he made \$5,000, a sizeable amount of money in the mid 1800's. The first year in ministry he made \$300, but he never wavered to what he was called to do. In the early days of his ministry and the hardships he endured many people dubbed him "Crazy Moody".

From the journal of Jim Elliot we read about his resolve to follow Christ "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

On a Saturday night of a weekend winter retreat, a 14 year old skinny kid sat in the very last row of West Side Chapel. I don't remember the speaker, the passage or his message. But I vividly remember the call of God to follow. For what seemed like minutes in reality was probably just seconds, as I contemplated the decision I was faced with. I literally was shaking from head to toe, hands clutching the split rail pew in front me as I forced myself to stand surrendering to God to follow Him. I didn't know what all that meant then and honestly I still don't because each tomorrow may bring something different for me to do. Along the way I made some mistakes, followed my own path, but came to a point quite a few years ago to recommit to that decision. It's not always easy. It's uncertain. It's challenging. But it's rewarding.

During a basketball practice my senior year of High school we got a pretty good chewing out from the

coach. It was late in the season and we were all probably tired of the drills and a bunch of guys were goofing off. He stopped practice because he had had enough and said if we were not committed to the team and the discipline required we could find the door. It was a quiet practice from then on. No one left and we finished with a record of 17-3.

Now, God isn't going to kick anyone off the team, but I wonder if in looking down from His throne He sees a bunch of us just goofing off, not really committed to following Christ and all that means.

I'm not suggesting that God might be asking you to leave your job and go to the mission field, He may do that, but it's more likely that He's asking you to leave who you are to become who He wants you to be. Those of you in college or High school, what if it's about leaving what you want to do in order to do what He wants you to do? What if it means leaving some of your friends because of the wrong influence they are in your life?

Adults, what if it's giving up a habit or a hobby that consumes too much time when He wants you to do something for His kingdom with some of your free time?

You may sit there and think that you can't because you've never been to Bible school or come up with a myriad of excuses. Jesus says "Follow Me." Will you get up? The choice is never easy,

The call to follow is for each of us today.
We can do so immediately but reluctantly.
We can do so immediately, willingly and obediently.

We can stay right where we are.

We can even go in the opposite direction.

Here is the call, how will you respond?

It might be the very first time you rise up and say to Christ "I'll follow." No matter what, I'll follow.

It might be a time to recommit yourself to a decision to follow Him that was made many years ago.

My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,
All I have to do is follow.

My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,
All I have to do is follow.

Strength for today is mine all the way,
And all that I need for tomorrow.

My Lord knows the way through,
All I have to do is follow.

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My friend has chosen to follow, will you?