

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 February 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Call to Salvation and Service**

### **Matthew 9:9-13**

Years ago, a man named **Ed Decker** left the Mormon religion, and placed his faith in the true God and Saviour—the Lord Jesus Christ. For Ed and his family, this was an enormous life change, for he was a Mormon of high rank. From the time of his conversion to Mormonism, he had advanced to the "priesthood of Melchizedek." This means that he was one of the few "elites" who get to see the inside of Mormon temples. At that time in his life, Ed had no idea that, according to **Psalm 110** and **Hebrews 7**, the Lord Jesus Christ is the *only* Man who is qualified to belong to "the priesthood of Melchizedec," since He is both God and Man! He had no idea that the Mormon "priesthood of Melchizedek" was utterly contrary to the Bible. Ed really thought that he was serving God by participating in the secret, occultic ceremonies of the temple. However, there came a day when the Lord removed the spiritual scales from Ed's eyes; and he realised that he was participating in a lie.

This realisation came upon Ed while he was in a Mormon temple in Fairbanks, Alaska. As a temple worker, he was wearing an apron which is designed to look like an apron of fig leaves. As he was going about his rituals, and thinking about the account of the fall of man in Genesis chapter three, he suddenly realised, to his shock, that the apron of fig leaves that he was wearing represented *man's attempt to cover his sin and hide from God*—just as Adam and Eve had tried to do in the Garden of Eden! He realised, for the first time, that he was glorifying *Lucifer*—the very one who tempted Adam and Eve to sin in the first place. As the theological dominoes began to fall in his mind, he also realised that the fall of man into sin was *not* a "blessing in disguise," and a doorway to progress to godhood, as Mormonism had taught him, but was instead the most awful tragedy in the history of the human race. Furthermore, Ed realised, to his horror, that he had just pronounced the "power of the priesthood" (which, he now realised, was satanic) upon his children, and his children's children! He was so distressed, that as soon as the ceremony was finished, he rang his wife to tell her about his discovery. He told her, "You won't believe what happened to me 45 minutes ago"; and in reply, *she* said, "You won't believe what happened in this house here 45 minutes ago!"<sup>1</sup> It turns out that at the very moment when he realised that he was participating in a satanic lie, and that he needed to get out of the temple as fast as he could, his two sons, Jason and Joshua, had suddenly gone into convulsions. They were "rolling on the floor in a foetal position, vomiting and crying." His wife, realising that this was demonic, and knowing enough to rebuke the demons in the name of Jesus, commanded them to leave the house. Immediately, the boys calmed down. Up to this point, Ed and his wife had had increasing exposure to the Gospel through some born-again believers that they had recently met; but soon after this incident, Ed and his wife not only left Mormonism, but became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They became *disciples* of Jesus; and they didn't look back.

In the past weeks, we have been focusing on **Matthew 8 and 9**; and, as you know (if you've been here), these chapters record nine miracles that Jesus did, which show that He is the Messiah. However, wedged in between all these miracles are the records of two occasions when Jesus called disciples to follow Him. We've already learned about the first of these two occasions, back in **Matthew 8**; and now, we will look at the second of them. This morning, we will examine Jesus' call of a man named **Levi Matthew** to follow Him. The title of this message is *The Call to Salvation and Service*.

## Read Matthew 9:9-13.

### I. The call of Matthew (v. 9)

In **Matthew 9**, we read about an event in the early ministry of Jesus which, for the people of Capernaum, would have been scandalous. The Teacher from Nazareth had already called a lowly bunch of *fishermen* to be His disciples (which was shocking enough); but now, we find Him going to the customs office in Capernaum to call a **tax collector** named **Levi** to be His disciple! (In the books of **Mark** and **Luke** he is called “Levi”; but Matthew himself preferred his new name, “Matthew.”) Now, can you imagine the shockwaves that this move must have sent through the community? Can you imagine what must have been going through the minds of Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Nathaniel, and the others, when they saw Jesus speaking to a *tax collector* and saying, “**Follow me**”? Tax collectors were the “worst of the worst” in Jewish society. They weren’t even considered worthy to be called “Jews,” because, in the people’s estimation, they were *traitors*. Not only did the tax collectors work for an oppressive foreign power, the Roman government (which took up to 80% of the Jews’ income in taxes), but they took even *more* than Rome had exacted, and slipped the extra money in their own pockets. It is estimated that 90% of the Jews in Galilee lived barely at subsistence level, or below it. There was no middle class: nearly everyone was poor, except those who worked for Rome. Yet, the tax collectors grew rich from the suffering of their own people.

This raises a question, then: was Matthew an *honest* tax collector before Jesus called him? Or was he a cheat and scoundrel, as almost all tax collectors were? The Bible doesn’t tell us whether Matthew was an honest tax collector or not; but at the very least, Matthew must have turned a blind eye to the corruption, and put up with it. (It appears that Matthew had plenty of tax collector buddies at his “retirement party”; so they must have gotten on with him well enough!) Yet, despite his questionable past, Jesus called *this man* to be His disciple—and not only a disciple, but one of His twelve *Apostles*! Why? Because of His mercy and love! The Lord delights in taking sinful, unworthy people, and making them into trophies of His grace.

My friends, Jesus is still calling unworthy people to this day. He calls *us*, sinful though we are, to be His “**disciples.**” The word “disciple” is translated from the word *mathetes*, which means a “learner,” or a “pupil.” We get our English word “maths” from this word, because a *mathetes* is someone who learns by systematic teaching and discipline. A disciple is not merely one who takes in *intellectual* knowledge from Jesus: He is someone who *knows* Jesus personally, and *follows* His commandments implicitly, from a heart of love. Being a disciple is so important to the Lord, that the word “disciple” (or “disciples”) is mentioned 272 times in the New Testament! “Discipleship” is not a one-year program of one-on-one Bible study with your pastor or another mentor, at the end of which you receive a certificate of completion (although we certainly do this sort of thing at Redemption Baptist Church): no, it is much more than this. A true disciple is someone who is committed to follow Jesus wherever He goes until the day he dies, no matter how narrow, rough, or dark the path may be. To be a *Christian* is to be a *disciple*. It is a lifelong calling. Let’s see what Paul said about “the call.”

### Read Ephesians 4:1-3.

What does Paul mean when he urges the Ephesians to “*walk worthy of the vocation* (or “calling”) *wherewith ye are called*”? Well, that word “*worthy*” means “appropriately” or “as becomes.” Paul is saying that a Christian’s “*walk*” (or “way of living”) should reflect his calling. And what is that “calling”? **The Christian’s “calling” is salvation.**

Time and time again, the Scriptures tell us that God *calls* sinners to repent and be saved. However, there is something that you must understand: Christ’s “call” is more than just a call to have your sins forgiven, so that you can miss hell and go to Heaven. It is a call *to God, from sin*. The whole reason Christ saves people is that they might *be freed* from the tyranny of sin, and receive the power to live righteously, unto God. **A person who has truly repented of his sin and received God’s gift of salvation has changed his mind about his sin.** He doesn’t want to live in it anymore. Yes, he wants to miss hell and go to Heaven; but he also wants God to *change* him, so that he can live a holy life, which honours God.

### Read 1 Peter 1:15 and 2:9-12.

My friends, **the call to salvation is also the call to service.** You cannot separate service from salvation. You aren’t saved by trying to serve God; rather, you are *able* to serve God because you have been saved! *After* you receive God’s gift of salvation, you are now *able* to serve God. You have a newfound *desire* to serve God; and you are *obligated* to serve God. It’s only reasonable! Those who have answered the call to salvation should now be *living* like saved people! This life of service begins *immediately* after salvation, and continues to death.

Now, what about Matthew? Was *he* already saved before Jesus approached him at the receipt of custom? Probably not. The Bible doesn’t give us any indication that he had placed his faith in Jesus as Messiah prior to that point. However, he, being a resident of Capernaum, would surely have witnessed Jesus’ teaching, preaching, and miracles already; and he must have been thinking about Jesus’ words, and turning them over in his mind. Of course, Jesus, being God, knew that there was a tax-collector named Matthew whose heart was being prepared for salvation; and in His love and grace, *Jesus* came to *him*, and said, “***Follow me.***”

Those two words, “***Follow me,***” sound simple; but they are as deep as an ocean! When Jesus called Matthew, His call included not only the command to *believe* on Him for his soul’s salvation, but to *follow* Him full-time as one of His disciples! Matthew didn’t have *time* to “think this over.” He didn’t have *time* to “look at all his options.” The call had been made to believe on Him, *and* to follow Him; and he *immediately* quit his profitable job, and embarked on a new life, in which he would have to trust *Jesus* to provide his needs. Why did Matthew do such a seemingly “foolhardy” thing? Because the Son of Man bade him do so!

To those who have only an empty profession of faith in Jesus, Matthew’s decision to leave all and follow Christ is not only incomprehensible: it is the height of folly. Like the character Mr. By-Ends in the book *Pilgrim’s Progress*, false believers do **not** feel that it is their “duty to rush on their journey all weathers”: instead, they are “for waiting for wind and tide.” Instead of “risk[ing] it all for God at a clap,” false professors are for “taking all advantages to secure my life and property.” Instead of standing for God’s truth “though all other men be against them,” false professors are for religion “so far as the times and my safety will bear it.” Instead of

being willing to endure “rags and contempt” for Christ (if need be), false professors are for religion which “walks in his golden slippers, in the sunshine, and with applause.”

A true Christian is a disciple; and a disciple is someone who loves the Lord, loves His Word, and strives to be like Him. When a person *says* that he’s saved, yet has never shown any love for Christ, or a love for God’s Word, or a desire to allow God to *change* his way of living, I can only assume that this person has never truly been born again. A “changeless” Christianity is no Christianity at all! You don’t merely enter into a new phase of your “journey” when you become a Christian: you get *off* the path to destruction, and get *onto* a *new* path—the path of eternal life in Christ. The Bible says, **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”**

Is it possible to be saved, yet not be living like a disciple? Sadly, yes. There *are* many people who are truly saved, and whose lives had *begun* to change: yet, somewhere along the way, they stopped submitting themselves to God, and stopped growing in Christ. Consequently, their lives have become “unworthy of” (not becoming) their **“vocation.”** A saved person who has stopped allowing God to change him is like a medical student who began to study for the medical field, but who has lost his zeal for medicine, and is quickly forgetting whatever he *did* know, and is no longer pursuing his medical bar exam; and as time goes on, he becomes less and less a help to anyone. Christian, don’t go backward (or even stand still) in your Christian life! A Christian who is not going forward for Christ, and living the life of a disciple, is a living contradiction: and he is absolutely miserable! Following Jesus is often difficult, and fraught with trials; but it is *joyful*. In contrast, *not* following Jesus always brings misery. Christian, take up the cross daily and hourly, and keep following Jesus!

## II. The celebration of salvation...and service (v. 10)

**(Read Matthew 9:10 again.)** In **verse 10**, we find that Matthew, shortly after his salvation, held a big party in his house, and invited all his old tax collector friends. This dinner was like a “retirement party” and an “ordination supper” combined! It was common, in Semitic cultures, for people to hold a feast to seal a covenant that they had made with someone, or to celebrate a huge life-change that they were making. They would sit down with the person with whom they had made the covenant, and eat a meal with that person, in order to “seal the deal.” So it was with Matthew. Now, there was nothing sinful, in and of itself, about the tax-collecting profession. We know this to be so, because Jesus and John the Baptist never commanded the tax collectors to quit their jobs: instead, they commanded them to be honest, and to exact no more taxes than what the government appointed them to exact. *Matthew*, however, was leaving that profession in order to follow Jesus full-time, because Jesus had bidden him to do so. This party was his way of celebrating his new life in Christ, *and* his ordination to the ministry. However, it was even more than that. Matthew obviously wanted his old buddies to come and meet his Master at the party, so that they might hear the words of eternal life! The disciples probably still weren’t sure that they could trust Matthew, since he had been a tax collector; and on the other hand, Matthew’s publican friends were probably mocking him behind his back for being such a “fool” as to abandon his lucrative career. Yet, Matthew didn’t care what people thought of him. He just wanted his friends to be saved!

Now, on the surface, this story about Matthew’s “farewell party” sounds very similar to another account of a disciple who desired to say “farewell.” In **Luke chapter 8**, we are told about a man who came to Jesus, and vowed to follow Him; but when he asked Jesus for permission to go first to his house, and bid his family “farewell,” he didn’t receive the answer that he had expected. What was Jesus’ response to *that* man? Let’s take a look.

**Read Luke 9:61-62.**

Why did Jesus allow *Matthew* to have a farewell party for his shifty, dishonest friends (and even honoured the party with His presence)—yet, when *this* man asked Jesus for leave to say farewell to his family, Jesus implied that he was not “*fit*” for the kingdom of God? It’s simple: Jesus, being God, knew what was in this man’s heart; **and what He saw was *hesitation***. Jesus knew that this man was thinking of a more *prolonged* period of “farewell”—a time of “setting his house in order,” and getting used to the idea of leaving. Jesus knew that this man wouldn’t follow through with his commitment, because his heart was not truly set to follow Him without looking back. Was this man *unsaved*? Not necessarily. The word “*fit*” is translated from the word *euthetos*, which means “well-placed, ready for use, suitable, or useful.” This man may have *believed* on Jesus for salvation; but he would not be a useful servant in the Kingdom of God so long as his heart was inclined to turn back to the “easy life.” (*John Mark* was a true believer; but he had this same problem. He left Saul and Barnabas in Pamphylia, right when they needed him most, because he was homesick; and his unfaithfulness ended up causing a rift in the missionary team.) In contrast, when Jesus called Peter, James, John, and all the other disciples, they got up and followed Him *immediately*. They were ready and “fit” for service. Now, don’t misunderstand: the disciples were often with their families throughout the three years of Jesus’ ministry. It appears that their wives often travelled with them. In fact, Peter spent much time in *his own home* in Capernaum, as Jesus abode there as a permanent guest. The disciples were *not* cut off from their families when they committed themselves to follow Jesus. Yet, they were willing to follow Jesus *immediately*, whenever He bade them follow Him to another town or region.

Whether Jesus call you to serve Him while working a “secular” job, or to enter “full-time ministry,” the reality is that *all* service to God is “sacred”! Whatever God is leading you to do (whether it be a small, every-day decision, or a huge life-change), you *must* do it without reserve. It’s all part of the call. Take God’s call of Elisha to the ministry, for example.

**Read 1 Kings 19:19-21.**

When Elijah went to Elisha and threw his mantle over him, Elisha understood exactly what it meant. It meant that he was being called to the office of prophet. He was being called to be Elijah’s disciple—perhaps even to take his place someday (which, in fact, he did). Now, you’ll notice that Elijah did not *force* Elisha to follow him. In fact, Elijah kept on walking, and did not wait for Elisha to go and have a farewell feast with his family. When Elisha was finished with the feast, he had to arise and go *after* Elijah, and find him! Why did Elijah do

this? Was he being rude? No. He was simply giving Elisha a little “pushback,” to see what he was made of. He was seeing whether Elisha would follow through with his commitment.

Just like Matthew, Elisha hosted a “farewell dinner,” which was, in effect, an “ordination dinner.” It wasn’t wrong for Elisha to do this: nonetheless, Elijah wanted Elisha to realise that time was short, and that there was work to do. Elijah didn’t *plead with* Elisha to answer the call to service: instead, he basically said, “You can go back and say goodbye to your parents if you wish; but I am not going to force you to answer the call. I’m going to keep moving. If you want to follow me, you know where to find me.” Now, that’s not the way that many pastors or mentors would have approached this situation. Many good men would have given Elisha a no-nonsense lecture about answering the call. Why didn’t *Elijah* push the envelope a little bit more? Because he understood that if anyone is going to do anything worthwhile for God, he must do it of his own freewill, and not because someone twisted his arm. If one must be *pleaded with* to serve the Lord, then that person’s service isn’t worth having.

Jesus had only a couple years left before His death and resurrection; and the work that He had to do in that time was immense. Jesus told His disciples, “***Yet a little while the light is with you.***” If Matthew were to follow Christ, and learn from him, then he had better start following Him straightaway. Fortunately for us, that is precisely what Matthew did. Many generations of people have been led to the Saviour through the priceless gift of the book of **Matthew**, because a man named Levi answered the call to salvation...and service! That is why Jesus gave Levi the new name “**Matthew**,” which means “gift of Jehovah.”

### III. The criticism of Christ (v. 11)

**(Read verse 11 again.)** At the beginning of this message, I told the story of **Ed Decker**, and of his conversion from Mormonism to a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point, I would like to tell you about another incident in Ed’s life. About five years after his salvation, Ed produced a film (and wrote a book) called ***The God Makers***, in which he exposed the teachings of Mormonism, and contrasted them to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. This book caused a huge stir in the Mormon world back in the 1980’s—so much so, that there was a huge slow-down in the growth of the Mormon religion, as both baptized Mormons and prospective converts to Mormonism found freedom in Christ Jesus!

Now, some time after the production of this film, Ed was speaking in a church; and the floor was opened for questions-and-answers. A local Mormon official, who had slipped into the meeting, stood up and began to shout at Ed. He said that Ed and his ilk were doing the Mormon church a favour, because they were taking in the “dead wood” from their religion. (In this man’s mind, the “dead wood” were the people who couldn’t live up to the Mormon standard of righteousness.) The man shouted, “You are getting our refuse, our garbage! Who would want them, anyway?” Ed’s response was, “*I want them, and so does Jesus.*”

The man who shouted at Ed had no comprehension of what Ed was saying, because he had no concept of *the grace* of Jesus Christ toward sinners. So it was with the Pharisees, as they stood outside Matthew’s house. They shuttered in disgust as they saw the tax collectors and

sinners going into Matthew’s house, and *eating* alongside the Teacher from Nazareth. “How could this so-called ‘rabbi’ eat with this human scum?” they thought. They had no clue that they themselves were sinners in need of repentance.

To this day, many people are just like the self-righteous Pharisees. Of course, most people would resent the idea that they are like the Pharisees, since they are not fixed on voluminous rules and regulations, as the Pharisees were. “After all,” they say, “I have my own simple religion. I’m not into religious institutions. I worship God my own way. I don’t even believe that I have to go to church. I can worship God on Sunday in my own house, or out at the lake, surrounded by nature. How am *I* like the Pharisees?” Yet, they *are* like the Pharisees. Why? Because they, just like the Pharisees, have made their *own* rules, and their *own* standard of righteousness, which is attainable for *them*: and they *think* that they are good enough to get to Heaven because they have attained to their own standard. They are too proud to accept what the *Bible* says about all of us—namely, that “***All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.***” They self-righteously believe that God *must* accept them, because “I have lived a good life,” and because “I’m better than most people.” They refuse to believe what God says about all of us in **Romans 3:19**—that “***every mouth***” is “***stopped,***” and “***all the world***” stands “***guilty before God.***” They fail to see that the mouth of hell is wide open, and that they are dangling over the fiery abyss by the rotten, threadbare, tearing rags of their own unacceptable righteousness. While they themselves are sinking down to hell, they proudly insist, “Well, at least *I’m* not like *those* sinful people over there!” My friend, should *this* be the way you think about yourself, please listen carefully to what Jesus said to the Pharisees!

#### IV. The correction of the critics (vv. 12-13)

**(Read verses 12 and 13 again.)** Just like every other self-righteous person in history, the scribes and Pharisees had no concept of the grace of God. Jesus made it clear to these self-righteous men that He had come to save “***sinners,***” and not righteous people. If we could be righteous enough to please God, then we would not need to be “saved”! However, the fact that Jesus died for *all of us* shows that we are *all* sinners in need of God’s grace. As long as a person *thinks* he is righteous, he *cannot*, and *will* not, receive the gift of salvation, because he thinks he doesn’t need it. The Bible says, “***For by grace*** [God’s undeserved *favour*] ***are ye saved through faith*** [personal trust in Christ]; ***and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.***” Salvation is a *free gift*, which God, in His *mercy*, has provided for us, through the death of His Son on the cross for our sins. That is why, as Jesus responded to the Pharisees, He quoted **Hosea 6:6**. Let’s take a look at that Scripture.

#### Read Hosea 6:4-6.

The people of Israel were good at doing outward rituals, such as the animal sacrifices that God had required of them. Yet, most of them did not know God, and were on their way to hell. Why? Because they didn’t see themselves as being in need of God’s *mercy*. They thought that

their rituals were good enough to appease God, and to get them into the Kingdom; but their so-called acts of “righteousness” were like morning dew, which quickly vanishes. They failed to see that their hearts were desperately wicked, and that they needed to be reconciled to God. That is why God gave them this urgent command at the end of the book of **Hosea**.

**Read Hosea 14:1-2.**

In this verse, the Lord likens words of repentance to the sacrifice of a calf upon the altar. Our words are very important! Jesus said that *“By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”* However, words that do not proceed from a contrite heart are meaningless to God. David wrote, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* What God wants is our *hearts*. He wants us to turn our hearts *to Him*; and as we do so, He wants us to *“take with us words,”* and confess our sins, and ask Christ to save us. **Romans 10:9-10** says, *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

**Conclusion:** My friends, Jesus is still calling *sinners* to repentance. If you *think* that you are righteous, then you are like a person who is dying of a fatal (but curable) disease, yet who refuses to acknowledge that he is dying, and that he is in need of the cure that the physician is offering to him. *Jesus* is the Great Physician! He heals sinful souls of the lethal disease of sin. Yet, He will not force His gift of salvation upon you. You must acknowledge that you *need* it; and, in faith, you must *ask* Him to give it to you. If you have never been saved, I urge you to humble your heart before Christ today, and receive His remedy for sin! Confess with your mouth (and your heart), and say, “Lord, I know I’m a sinner, and that I can’t save myself; but I now believe that you died for *me*, and rose again for *me*, to pay for my salvation. By faith, I ask you to save me, and to come into my heart, and be my Lord and Master from this day forth.”

Should you already know Christ as your Saviour, I would end this message with this question: “Are you serving the Lord?” Are you living the life of a disciple? Are you wholly obeying and following Him? Or are you hesitantly saying, “Lord, I will follow you; but let me do *this thing* first. I have other things to tend to right now. I’m busy. I *will* serve you; but just not yet.” If this be what you are telling the Lord, I urge you to set your hand to the plough, and follow Jesus—and *never* look back!

<sup>1</sup> Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), p. 86.