

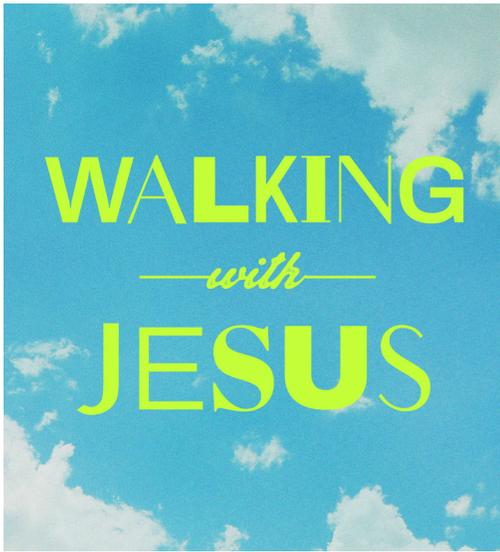


WALKING
—with—
JESUS

Sermon Growth Guide

June 11, 2023

Follow Me



Sermon Growth Guide

June 11, 2023

Walking With Jesus - Follow Me

Matthew 9:9-13

Key Verse: Matthew 9:6 “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.”

Big Idea: Regardless of our past and present, Jesus invites us to follow Him and to share in His mission to heal our broken world.

Foundations

This week, we continue our five-week summer sermon series on ***Walking with Jesus***. We are focusing on five snapshots of the ministry of Jesus found in chapter nine of Matthew’s Gospel.

Today’s message focuses on Matthew 9:9-13 and the calling of Matthew, the tax collector, to follow Jesus.

Not only did Jesus invite Matthew to follow Him, but Jesus also went to Matthew’s home and had dinner with several notorious sinners and people with questionable morals and reputations.

The Pharisees were the protectors of the Hebrew scriptures and the Law, and they thought that Jesus was wrong and corrupting Himself by dining with these unholy people.

In response to the criticism by the Pharisees, Jesus reframes His purpose and mission by reminding them about the centrality of compassion and mercy.

This same Jesus invites us to follow Him and to share in His ministry to go into our broken world with the healing message of the gospel.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Matthew 9:9-13.

Compare this passage with the similar passages in Mark 2:14-17 and Luke 5:27-32.

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

What does “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” mean?

Applying God’s Word

How have you experienced Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?

What have been the implications and effects for you in following Jesus?

In what ways have you shared in Jesus’ ministry by going into the broken and sinful world?

With whom might you extend mercy?

Witnessing God’s Word

If Jesus came to your house to have dinner, who would you invite to that meal? What could you do to make something like that actually happen?

How good it is to be together this morning to worship God and to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen? Amen!

Last Sunday, we launched a new five-week summer sermon series entitled *Walking with Jesus*. In this series, we will look at select passages from the ninth chapter of Matthew's gospel and see important snapshots of the impact of Jesus' ministry. Jennifer Holz kicked things off last Sunday with a solid message about the **Forgiveness** that is extended to us through Jesus. Next Sunday, John Goodale will advance the sermon ball up the field with the theme of things being **Made New**. On June 25, my good friend and former colleague at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston, Dave Peterson, will be joining us for a message on the **Healing** that Jesus offers. And on July 2, I'll wrap things up by looking at the powerful and provocative question of **Do You Believe?**

Today, we focus on the life-changing invitation that Jesus extends when He says, **Follow Me**. Our text is Matthew 9:9-13. As we now turn our attention to God's Word, let's commit this time to Him in prayer...

Introduction

Nearly 20 years ago, one of the darkest moments in human history took place. Many of us vividly remember the images and stories from the Rwandan Civil War. As is usually the case with such conflicts, there were many factors and an array of opinions that brought Rwanda to that terrible moment in their history. And if that Civil War wasn't bad enough, between April 7 and July 15 of 1994, a systematic ethnic cleansing took place, known as the Rwandan Genocide. At that time, there were several ethnic groups fighting for control and power, and violence was common and assassinations of key leaders were frequent.

But during this period of roughly 100 days, the Hutu militia conducted a systematic genocide of the Tutsi ethnic group. The Hutus set up roadblocks, went from village to village, and proceeded to exterminate every Tutsi they found. Rather than going into the horrific details, suffice it to say that the accepted estimates are that between 500,000 and 662,000 Tutsis were massacred during the Rwandan Genocide.

In the Rwandan culture, if a leader in authority gives an order, it is carried out with no questions asked. It is a matter of loyalty and obedience. As a result, many Hutus became

part of the murderous militia. One of those Hutus was Emmanuel. Emmanuel followed orders and proceeded to murder many from the Tutsi ethnic group. Emmanuel's story of transformation is a powerful one. Now some people might say, "How could God forgive someone who has committed such atrocities?" And yet, through Alpha, the Lord Jesus reached out to Emmanuel with compassion and mercy and essentially said, **Follow Me**. And what an amazing story of redemption Emmanuel now proclaims and lives.

Our text from Matthew 9:9-13 tells the story of the redemption of what might be considered another unlikely recipient, namely Matthew... a tax collector.

The Tax Collector: Matthew

Matthew 9:9a tells us, "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth." It would be easy to gloss over Matthew's tax collector role and think of it as nothing more than our modern state and federal income tax system. We might say, "So, Matthew was basically an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) agent, right?" It might be reasonable to assume that the public has a negative view of the IRS. I mean, having a tax debt, or getting investigated or audited is not usually high on anyone's bucket list, right? But our friend, Matthew, wasn't a well-regarded part of a respected agency. No, Matthew was seen as a parasite. He was low-life scum. He was despised, self-serving and greedy. He was the worst of the worst. Why?

The Roman Empire had conquered Israel and had established their rule and governance. That these despised polytheistic Gentiles occupied the Holy Land and established their rule incensed the Jewish people. It was beyond offensive. And part of the Roman system included the mandate that taxes be paid. And who would best know the financial capacity of the people of a given community? Someone from that community, of course! So, Rome recruited knowledgeable and shrewd Jews to serve as tax collectors for their own people. This was wrong on so many levels, not the least of which was the Jewish tax collectors were violating purity regulations by having dealings with Gentiles.

But it was even worse than that! Not only were the tax collectors in partnership with Rome, but they also collected more than was required and extorted their own people for

personal financial gain. If a person's tax bill was 10 shekels, the tax collector might charge 20 shekels and pocket the over payment. The tax collectors were seen as traitors against their own people and in cahoots with the pagan enemy. They were unclean, unholy, and unredeemable. They were so despised for their low morals that they were disbarred from the synagogue and counted among unclean beasts. In the framework of that day, robbers, murderers and tax collectors were all classed together.

You may have seen that disgraced FBI agent Robert Hanssen died on Monday of this week. Hanssen could be considered something of a modern-day version of Matthew the tax collector. From 1979 to 2001, Hanssen spied for the Soviet and Russian intelligence services. Hanssen sold thousands of classified documents to the KGB regarding U.S. technologies and strategies, which ultimately led to an untold number of U.S. assets being killed. Hanssen was arrested on February 18, 2001, and plead guilty to 14 counts of espionage to avoid the death penalty. He was sentenced to 15 life terms without the possibility of parole. Robert Hanssen was an American, a devout Catholic, a husband, a father, and a career FBI agent, and he committed these acts against his own country, for his own personal gain and in partnership with the enemy.

The Invitation: Follow Me

But this parasite of a tax collector received a visit and an invitation. Jesus approached Matthew and said, "Follow me." And Matthew got up and followed Him! There was something so simple and yet so compelling in those two words that Matthew immediately rose and walked away from his position and his wealth. Those same two words were said to Peter, Andrew, James and John, and they walked away from their normal lives into the service of the Lord Jesus.

I've mentioned New Testament Scholar Dale Bruner before. In his marvelous commentary on Matthew's gospel, he says of these two words: "The Word that summons a person to follow Jesus is a Word invested with nuclear power. This Word has the power to tear persons away from all that which until then had been most precious to them (fishing, boats, parents) or from that which until then had most debased them (colonialism, money)." If we did a quick word-study on those two words, Follow Me, we'd find that there's nothing too extraordinary about them.

But one helpful description comes from the Billy Graham Team: "The act of following someone implies that you are walking step-in-step behind them."

Several years ago, I made the ill-fated suggestion to my wife, Jenny, that we should get a puppy to be a buddy for our older dog. Now what you need to appreciate is that Jenny is a dog lover. I mean in all caps, A DOG LOVER. I, on the other hand, am more of a dog tolerator. After much research, we decided to get a female Cavapoo. The theory here is that a Cavapoo gets you the perfect, laid back and loyal Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, blended with the no-shedding and the intelligence of a poodle. And so, we got Tilda. And let me just say, that the theory is absolute nonsense... Tilda can be anxious, uptight and demanding. And that no shed thing? We have tumbleweed-sized hairballs floating through our house.

Tilda is Jenny's dog, no question about it. Tilda's happy place is anywhere near Jenny. And what do I get? She barks at me like I'm a home invader and only shows minor interest if I handle feeding time. Even then, it's a stretch. The interesting thing is that wherever Jenny goes, Tilda follows. If Jenny gets up to do something, Tilda follows. I think that if Jenny just walked around the house, in and out of rooms, around and around the dining room table, Tilda would just keep on following. Personally, I think this is a case of Canine Idolatry. But this may put a spotlight on the issue before us. Tilda loves Jenny. Tilda adores Jenny. Tilda wants nothing more than to be with Jenny, and so Tilda follows Jenny wherever Jenny goes. This seems like true devotion, true trust, true affection, true loyalty, and true love.

The call for us to follow Jesus is certainly more nuanced than Tilda following Jenny around. And while it does call for devotion, trust, affection, loyalty and love, it also calls for radical surrender and transformation. Consider what Matthew said later in his gospel, in chapter 16:24-25: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.'"

The Controversy: Dining with Sinners

After Matthew left his tax collector booth and followed Jesus, Matthew hosted a dinner party at his home. Jesus was there,

but so were several unsavory and notorious people. The text says: 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

The question the Pharisees asked is simple to understand. Jesus was seen as a holy man, a Rabbi, a teacher, a prophet, maybe even the Messiah. Such a person needed to stay away from unholy and sinful people to avoid being corrupted. The concept of being set apart had serious implications for the Jews, especially for those in leadership, and Jesus was clearly hanging out with the wrong crowd.

For those of us who are parents, we can probably identify with the concern, right? I mean, I wish I had a dollar for every time Jenny and I talked with our two sons about being careful to not hang out with the wrong crowd... Anyone else have that talk with your kids???

But then Jesus beat the Pharisees at their own game. The Pharisees were the experts in scripture and the Law. Their goal was to protect and preserve Israel through rigidity and legalism. As Jesus overheard His disciples being asked this question, He offered this answer, citing Hosea 6:6, and challenged the Pharisees with their own use of scripture: "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 might paraphrase what Jesus said by affirming that when we're **Walking with Jesus** and answering His call to **Follow Me**, it is a directive to infiltrate a sick and needy world with His mercy. It is not a directive to become separatist, exclusive, and safely cocooned in a nice and tidy Christian shell. No, it's a directive to be Christ's ambassadors, to be salt and light, and to help the sin-sick world be healed by God's grace and mercy.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot of discussion and debate about safety protocols, vaccinations, natural immunity and personal responsibility. There was fear and uncertainty and confusion. One of the things I found very helpful was to look back on how faith leaders approached the various plagues from centuries ago. Martin Luther, the giant Protestant reformer, faced several health

pandemics in his time. And on this, he wrote: "Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. If God should wish to take me, He will surely find me, and I have done what he expected of me. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid person or place but will go freely."

I think Martin Luther may have been onto something regarding following Jesus. If we're serious about **Walking with Jesus**, then His invitation to **Follow Me** has profound implications. The very essence of being a disciple (or apostle) of Jesus to be a sent one. That means we are sent into the world where the need is, not to remain in the safety of our shelter.

First, Jesus extends that invitation to people, to saints and sinners, to losers and winners, to lost souls and to wayward hearts. If He can transform the likes of Emmanuel from Rwanda, He can transform the likes of you and me. The invitation to **Follow Me** is not reserved for good people, clean people, or holy people. Rather, it is for broken people, sick people and spiritually destitute people. The Hound of Heaven, as God has been called by poet Francis Thompson, hunts and haunts us, regardless of condition, with unconditional love and grace.

Second, the invitation to follow Jesus means that we are to go where He went and carry the Good News into the world. He ate with sinners. He spoke with a Samaritan woman. He touched lepers. He extended compassion and forgiveness. Here is how Jesus understood His mission:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).

I wonder if we could recreate Matthew's dinner party in our lives today? Can you imagine a scenario where we invited guests for dinner, but that guest list was made up of sick people who could benefit from a divine appointment with the Great Physician?

To follow Jesus means to love as He loved and to go as He went. And thanks be to God for the power of the Holy Spirit that calls us, compels us, and empowers us to be Christ's ambassadors. Amen.