

## “Follow Me.”

Text: Mark 2:13-17

Suggested Hymns:

158, 330, 335, 320, 339

1) What does this call imply?

2) To whom is it directed

3) What action is needed

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 2:13-17, <sup>13</sup> *Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.* <sup>14</sup> *As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him.*

<sup>15</sup> *Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.* <sup>16</sup> *And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”*

<sup>17</sup> *When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What a wonderful picture — Jesus at the seaside! Soon all the multitude flocked to Him, and He taught them. After the sermon the people were dismissed.

Jesus on His way home passed by the tax office, saw Levi, the tax collector, and commanded him, *“Follow Me.”* Sure enough, this tax-collector arose and followed Jesus. Levi then arranged a banquet, invited many tax-collectors and sinners, and also Jesus and His disciples.

When the scribes and Pharisees saw Jesus eat with tax-collectors and sinners, they were so shocked that they said to His disciples, *“How is it that He eats and*

*drinks with tax collectors and sinners?* Jesus then made the significant statement, *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*

This call of the living Christ **“Follow Me”** has effectively brought millions of people to repentance and to eternal life. It comes to each of us today in all its earnestness and power, **“Follow Me.”** May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Just What Does This Call “Follow Me” Imply?**

Jesus yearned for the salvation of that tax-collector. He walked up to where Levi was, looked at him with those eyes brimful of love that melted the cursing heart of Peter, and said, *“Follow Me. Change your heart. Quit your dishonest business. Get out of that tax office. Become another man. Put your trust for peace and pardon in Me, the Christ. Become one of My disciples.”*

Every child born today in its natural condition is no better than Levi, the tax-collector and sinner. To be born in Australia means to be an Australian, but to be born within Christendom in a Christian home does not make one a Christian.

We were children of wrath by nature just like everybody else. This is a serious fact. Our modern age calls in the doctor for the body, but like the Pharisees of old, declares that at least our “innocent” little infants are not in need of a physician for the soul.

The omniscient Christ, however, declares that we must be born again. Our entire nature must be changed. It is not enough to touch up the spots on the old car. The wreck must be rebuilt and furnished with new tires, a new battery, and a new motor. We must become new creatures.

As Levi the tax-collector became Matthew the disciple and apostle of Jesus, so we who are born in sin and unbelief must become genuine and thorough Christians.

To be a real Christian is to believe that the man Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus says, **“Follow Me.”** Other religions do not attach much importance to the person who founded their religion. Jesus does. Faith in His person is all-important.

In his gospel, Matthew, the former tax-collector, relates how he and other disciples at Caesarea Philippi stood around Jesus when He asked them, **“But who**

*do you say that I am?”<sup>1</sup>* Their common conviction was expressed by Peter, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

This Matthew was in the boat that strange night of contrary winds.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus had come into the ship and the winds had ceased, Matthew and the rest exclaimed, ***“Truly You are the Son of God.”*** To be a follower of Jesus, I must believe with all my heart that *“Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”*

The call of Jesus ***“Follow Me”*** furthermore implies that we guilty sinners must put our confidence in the work of Jesus, in His vicarious atonement. The conscience of this troubled tax-collector evidently caused him much grief. There were times when he was thoroughly disgusted with his manner of life.

He had pangs as though that worm that never dies and that fire which shall not be quenched were already tormenting him. But in Jesus he found pardon and peace. Later he writes of Jesus, ***“He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.”<sup>3</sup>*** We need the balm which this Physician has for our wounded souls. ***Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.*** <sup>5</sup> ***But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.***<sup>4</sup>

The call to us is, as this former tax collector quotes Jesus,<sup>28</sup> ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** <sup>29</sup> ***“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*** <sup>5</sup>

When Levi closed his tax-books and became a follower of the Saviour, he thereby also became a disciple, a pupil of Jesus. ***“Follow Me”*** means, ***“Accept My teaching, My doctrine, and My Word.”*** Jesus wants us to be Bible-readers, Bible students, and Bible Christians. This implies more than having a Bible somewhere in the house which we can hand to the pastor when he visits the sick.

A disciple of Jesus is expected to sit in His school and learn His Book every day. What we read in the Word we must accept as true. Not what we read in the papers, not what some great doctor of divinity says, not what our own reason wants to make us believe, not the opinions handed down by committees or faculties, not the resolutions of congregations or synods, but solely the Word of

our only Master is the foundation of our religious convictions and the rule that governs our lives. ***“If you continue in My Word,”*** says the Son of God, ***“then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”***<sup>6</sup>

When Jesus, however, says, ***“Follow Me,”*** He does not merely mean, “Do as I say,” but, “Do as I do.” Levi now left his lucrative job, broke with his sinful habits, and followed in the steps of his new Master. When an unbelieving child of the world becomes a true follower of Jesus, he begins a new life, with changed attitudes and convictions. Salacious and “spicy” books and entertainments no longer interest him.

His Saturday nights and Sundays are devoted to benefit his spiritual life. His occupation and possessions as Christ’s steward and servant he presses into the service of his Redeemer. Following Jesus as He goes before us, we pattern after His spotless life, emulate all His sublime graces, virtues, deeds, and always strive for all of His sublime qualities. We follow not only the precept, but the example of our adorable Saviour.

The call to become a follower of Jesus therefore implies vastly more than possessing a baptismal and confirmation certificate, having our names entered on the church record, attending services more or less regularly, and, to save our face, contributing our mite for the support and expansion of the Kingdom.

A follower of Jesus has undergone a thorough spiritual regeneration. He has an active faith in the person of Jesus as true man and true God, implicitly trusts in His merit, and follows conscientiously in His steps.

## **2. To Whom is the Call “Follow Me” Directed?**

You may feel somewhat reluctant and timid to declare that you are a true follower of Jesus. The call, you feel, is too exalted. You may think the qualities of a follower of Jesus are too high, too sublime. You may think that the call would be better directed to perfected saints, to angels, to the righteous, but not to me, the sinner.

To whom is the call directed? Listen. Jesus at the banquet explains, ***I did not come to call the righteous.*** The “righteous,” a class of religionists to whom Jesus refers, were represented by the scribes and Pharisees. They were self-

sufficient, self-righteous. Such people do not feel the need of a Saviour. They feel perfectly at ease, and satisfied. ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician.”***

That smug, self-complacent, pharisaic estimate that many so-called Christians have is a disastrous condition. Jesus warns us, ***I did not come to call the righteous.*** The eagerness to save some of his goods has cost many a person his life when his house was on fire. Only too many have lost their own souls by expecting to carry their own works and virtues, their own charity and holiness, with them to heaven.

Like the longing and lingering wife of Lot they have perished. Like a bag of gold around the neck of a drowning man, so self-righteousness has sunk many a soul to eternal perdition. Remember, Jesus did not come to call the righteous.

Jesus says in our text, ***“I came to call sinners to repentance.”*** There is such a thing as sin. Sin is the transgression of the divine will and Law. It is the breaking of the Ten Commandments. It is iniquity. It is an enormity, an abomination, in the sight of the holy God. Those who are contaminated with this dread disease, who are guilty of sin, are sinners.

To stand as a sinner, a violator of God’s will, before His bar of justice means to be worthy of being consigned to eternal wrath and damnation. But such guilty and condemned sinners Jesus calls to be His followers.

Jesus came to save the hopeless, and the lost. No matter how deep you have sunk into the mire or how high your guilt has mounted to the heavens, come. Though you have been as dishonest as Levi or Zacchaeus; though you have been as rebellious as the prodigal son; though you have fallen as low as David, the adulterer and murderer; though your criminal record is as black as that of the thief on the cross; though you are as bad a skeptic as Thomas or as ignorant of spiritual truths as Nicodemus; though you have been a religious fanatic like Saul of Tarsus, — ***“come to Me”*** is the plea of Jesus. Jesus tells you, ***But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.***<sup>7</sup>

Is your conscience wounded? I am your Balm Jesus tells us. Does your starving soul long to be filled? ***I am the Bread of Life.*** Are you languishing? ***I will give you Living Water.*** Are you despondent, in the dark valley of despair? ***I am your Hope.*** ***I am the Light of the world.*** Are you floundering about in doubt?

*I am the Rock of Ages. Do you dread Judgment Day? I am He that has died, and have risen again, who is at the right hand of God and making intercession for you. I am your Advocate with the Father.*

“Come, follow Me.” **“Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”**<sup>8</sup> Do you fully appreciate that the blessed Saviour is calling you, wooing you, and pleading with you, the sinner?

### **3. Now, Finally, What Action On Our Part Does This Call Imply”**

Jesus makes it very clear that He does not call sinners because He loves, or purposely overlooks, their sins. That is an opinion that is gaining ground in our day, that sin, after all, is not such a hideous abomination as people in the past have believed.

Sin, according to the modern mind, is a little, pardonable mistake on the part of man which God readily overlooks. No, God abhors sin. Sin is iniquity. It is the poison-gas that kills the soul. **The wages of sin is death.** Sin damns both body and soul to hell.

*“There is an Indian story of a morsel of a dwarf who asked the king to give him all the ground he could cover with three strides. The king, seeing him so small, said, ‘Certainly,’ then the dwarf suddenly shot up into a tremendous giant, covered all the land with the first stride, all the water with the second, and with the third knocked the king down and took his throne.”* That is the nature of sin. So it grows. So it destroys. So it damns.

Note well, Jesus did not say, *“Come, you tax-collectors and sinners, I like your manner of life. Come, follow Me, you dishonest tax-collectors, I do not mind your dishonesty. Come, you harlots, I do not mind your fornication.”* Jesus makes it clear, **“I came to call sinners to repentance.”**

He calls upon you to repent of your sins, of every sin, of all sins. One writer expressed repentance like this. *“If but one sin be unrepented of, the person continues to be a bond-slave of hell. By one little hole a ship will sink into the bottom of the sea. The stab of a pocket-knife to the heart will as well destroy a man as all the daggers that killed Caesar in the senate house.”*

*The soul will be strangled with one cord of vanity as well as with all the cart-ropes of iniquity; only the more sins, the more plagues and fiercer flames in hell; but he that lives and dies impenitent in one, it will be his destruction. One gram of poison will kill a man, and one reigning sin will bring him to endless misery.*” With God’s help cut the viper clean out of your heart. Tear the cords from you. Repent!

Repentance of course does not necessarily call for a sea tears, not for self-inflicted chastisements and sacrifices. To repent means to be sorry that we have sinned against God and to put our trust in His grace and in the merit of our Saviour for pardon. Grieved over our transgressions, we should without merit or work come to the Saviour with the desire, **“Jesus, lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly.”**<sup>9</sup>

The hymnist writes,<sup>10</sup>

Not the labours of my hands  
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone:  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

The eternal Son of God, who purchased you on Calvary’s cross, who rose from the dead, the living Christ, calls you, **“Follow Me.”** May the Spirit of God draw you closer to Jesus! Believe in Him and in His gracious Gospel. Receive Him as your Lord and God. Serve Him in all that you do.

Let us conclude with the words of they hymnist,<sup>11</sup>

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:15

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 14:24

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- <sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:17
  - <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:4-5
  - <sup>5</sup> Matthew 11:28-29
  - <sup>6</sup> John 8:31-32
  - <sup>7</sup> Romans 5:20
  - <sup>8</sup> Isaiah 1:18
  - <sup>9</sup> Hymn 158
  - <sup>10</sup> Hymn 330
  - <sup>11</sup> Hymn 335