

# Matthew 9:9-13

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Date: 27 October 2013

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I don't do Twitter. If that's what you do, do you do Twitter or whatever? But whatever it is, I don't do it. But even Twitter refusenics, and I imagine there's quite a few of us gathered this morning, I don't know, but I would imagine quite a number of us fall into that camp.

We can't avoid the Twitter sphere. It's difficult to get through a news broadcast, 6 o'clock news, 10 o'clock news. It's difficult to get through it from beginning to end without some reference to Twitter, something that a politician, a union official, a personality has tweeted is made reference to, even on the news.

Now, given that I'm not on Twitter, I certainly don't follow those who are. And again, in my ignorance, I'll try and explain that, but for the uninitiated, to follow somebody on Twitter is to choose to receive all the tweets that they tweet. So, when some personality, or indeed anybody, tweets, you get their tweet, and you hear what they're saying, and the wisdom that they're sharing with the world. And of course, celebrities of different hues buy for bragging rights on the number of followers they can secure. And I was out of curiosity having a look online at the top 100 tweeters in terms of the number of followers that they have. And if my source is accurate, Justin Bieber leads the way with close on 50 million followers. I don't know if you're a follower.

I trust not of Justin Bieber, but hey, I suppose it could be worse. But perhaps of others. Do you follow others on Twitter? Now, if Twitter had been around when Jesus came, I wonder if He would have been on Twitter. That may seem a very silly question to pose, but we think about it a little bit. On the one hand, Jesus avoided the multitudes. Certainly, for a significant time during His ministry, He actually consciously and deliberately avoided the crowds. And yet, on the other hand, He did have a message that He needed to get out there.

Bringing to bear the passage we read in Matthew, maybe being on Twitter would have been, or would be, a modern-day equivalent of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. I don't know.

[ 2 : 4 0 ] What is certainly true is that Jesus was very interested in securing followers. In gathering a band of disciples, the words that occupied a central place in the call that He made were the words, follow me. This morning, I want us to consider one occasion when Jesus addressed these words to a man many would have thought was an unlikely candidate for discipleship, Matthew, the tax collector.

And as we think of this occasion when Jesus addresses these words to Matthew, follow me, there are two big questions that I want us to think about. And the two questions are these. Why did Jesus call Matthew, and why did Matthew follow Jesus? We know the facts. We know that Jesus did call Matthew, and we know that Matthew followed Jesus. That much is abundantly clear from the passage that we've read. But we want to go behind that, and inasmuch as we're able, inasmuch as the passage gives us answers, ask these questions.

Why? Why did Jesus call Matthew, and why did Matthew follow Jesus? And as we consider these two questions, I want you to very consciously apply what we discover to yourself. As you ponder on this question, why does Jesus call you, and why should you follow Jesus? First of all, then, why does Jesus call Matthew? And I would suggest that the answer to that question involves different elements. And I'll mention what I think they are, and then we can think of them each in turn. So, in summary form, the answer to the question, why does Jesus call Matthew could be as follows. He loves him, he knows him, he came for him, and he has plans for him. Four aspects that I think respond to that question. Why does Jesus call Matthew? He loves him, he knows him, he came for him, and he has plans for him.

So, let's think of that in the light of the passage that we've read there in Matthew chapter 9. First of all, he loves Matthew. Now, how do we know that? Now, I'm not saying how do we know that in the light of everything we know about God, about Jesus, of everything that we read in the Bible, because then we could say, well, yes, of course we know that Jesus loved Matthew. That's evident from everything we read in the Bible about God, about Jesus. But my concern is, how do we know that from what we have in the passage that we've read in Matthew chapter 9? How do we know from that evidence, if you wish, that Jesus loves Matthew? And I think the words of Jesus that we need to focus on are the words that He uses to challenge the Pharisees. We've read the passage, we know more or less the order of events.

He calls Matthew, Matthew responds, Matthew organizes this great feast in his home, and at that feast, there are tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees are indignant, they complain to the disciples, and Jesus responds to their complaints. And in responding to their complaints, He directs words to them that He is quoting from the prophet Hosea. There in verse 13 of Matthew 9, we read what He says to them, but go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

[ 6 : 39 ] Well, what does this mean? That was the challenge that the Pharisees were given. It was the homework they were given. Go and learn what this means. Go away and think about it. Go away and consider what this means, because as you discover what it means, then if you're honest, and if there's integrity in your consideration, you'll see why I gather with these people. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Well, what does this mean? He's quoting from the prophet Hosea, as we've already said, and he's quoting the words of God. In the original context, the words were addressed to God's people to warn them of the danger of merely external religion. We've read the chapter. It's very vivid, quite disturbing, the language that it uses. We don't have time to go into it in detail, but I think we can fairly say this, that this particular part of God's message to them had this as its purpose, to warn them about the danger of merely external religion, which seemed to have been a big problem at that time.

They were disobeying God on so many fronts, but in parallel, they were ticking the boxes of external religion, of going through the rites and the rituals, of offering the sacrifices, to use the specific language of what Jesus says there in quotes, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. They were doing that. They were offering the sacrifices. They were doing what they'd been told to do, but in parallel, they were disobeying God and oppressing the poor and all manner of disobedience.

And they are warned in that original context there in the day of Hosea, the people of God are warned that you can't take all these boxes in regard to religion and ritual and sacrifice and ignore the heart of the matter. And the heart of the matter, God is saying to them, is mercy. The Hebrew word that we have there in Hosea is a fundamental word in the Bible, *hesed*, sometimes translated, steadfast love, God's covenant love. And God is saying, what I desire above all else, and everything else has to come in the context of this is mercy, it's *hesed*, it's love, not ticking boxes to say that I'm doing everything that I've been asked to do. In Hosea, then, the rebuke is directed to God's people and is intended to provoke a change of attitude and a change of behavior. But let's get back to Matthew and our question, why does Jesus call Matthew? And this first part of the answer, because He loves him. Let's get back to Matthew and ask, what was the purpose of Jesus in quoting these words on this occasion? Having very fleetingly explained what its original purpose was, what about His use of these words of God on this occasion? And I think the purpose of Jesus is twofold. In the first place, it is a rebuke to the Pharisees, much like the original purpose. The Pharisees were guilty of the very same thing that the Israelites were guilty of in the days of Hosea, forgetting the heart of the matter, forgetting matters of compassion and of love, and focusing entirely on fulfilling ritual and offering sacrifices. Jesus isn't saying, don't do that. But He says, don't do that while you forget about that which is more important, mercy or steadfast love. So, the purpose of Jesus in using these words is to rebuke the Pharisees. They were very appropriate given what they were guilty of. But secondly, in quoting these words, Jesus, I think, is doing something else, and it goes to the point that we are seeking to arrive at. In quoting these words, they serve as a declaration of the principal motivation of Jesus Himself in His approach to and dealings with people, namely love, steadfast love, love that never lets down and never lets go. So, Jesus isn't just rebuking the Pharisees for forgetting about love. He's saying, this is what is most important to me. This is what determines how

I act and how I relate to people. Love, mercy, this is at the heart of my reason for being here and doing what I do. And so, in answer to the question, why is Jesus concerned for sinners as He evidently was, as He would gather with them and feast with them and be questioned because of the attitude that He had to them? Why? Why does He do this? Why is He concerned? Why is He concerned for those who are sick, for those who are spiritually in need? Why? Well, Jesus answers, because He loves them. Why does He call Matthew?

[ 12 : 09 ] Because He loves you. Why does He call you? Because He loves you. I desire mercy, not a sacrifice.

So, in answer to the question, why does Jesus call Matthew, we must begin where Jesus begins in terms of the priorities. He calls Matthew because He loves Matthew. But I think we can also say, and these things, of course, overlap and are related. He calls Matthew because He knows Matthew. Getting back to the circumstances that are described for us, the Pharisees object to the company Jesus is keeping, tax collectors and sinners. And chief among His objectionable companions is the owner of the house where He is keeping such disreputable company. And that, of course, is Matthew. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house. Now, what does Jesus say about those that He is having dinner with, the gang that He is hanging out with? What does He say?

How does He describe them? Well, He describes them in this dialogue with the Pharisees. He recognizes that they are sick, that they are sinners. These people that He is with, they are indeed sinners. Jesus describes them as such. Does this include Matthew? Well, Matthew's at the top of the list.

Jesus states to the Pharisees that He had come to call sinners. He states that so explicitly there in verse 13, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. I've come to call sinners.

And who has He just called? Well, Matthew. And so, there can be no doubt that Matthew is considered by Jesus, is known by Jesus to be a sinner. He knows Matthew. He knows he's sick. He knows he's a sinner.

[14:09] This He knows concerning Matthew. And that is why He calls him. Why does He call Matthew? Because He knows He knows He's a sinner. He knows He's a sinner. He knows He's in spiritual need. And so, He calls him in order that He can attend to His spiritual need, which immediately brings the matter home to ourselves.

Why does Jesus call you? Does He call you because you're a good person, a religious person, because you're an upstanding citizen? The reason He calls you is because you're a sinner. You are a needy sinner. That is why He calls you. Some people, very perversely, and I use that word, I hope, carefully, but some people think that they're not good enough to follow Jesus. Not good enough to follow Jesus. The question isn't if you're good enough. The question is if you're bad enough. And believe me, you are. We all are. Jesus knows Matthew. He knows he's a sinner. He knows he's spiritually sick. That's why He calls him. Why does He call Matthew? Because He loves him. Because He knows him. But thirdly, we can say, because He came for Matthew. Again, back to verse 13, and we've read it a couple of times, and I guess you know where I'm heading here. But what does Jesus say to the Pharisees?

For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. And in these words of Jesus, Jesus reveals two big truths, two big truths concerning His identity in a somewhat implicit way, I suppose we might say, and His mission very explicitly. First of all, He reveals truth concerning His identity, that the very language that He uses when Jesus says, I have come. I have come to do this. The very verb that He uses speaks of or points to the matter of precedence. He came from somewhere. It implies pre-existence. He was somewhere else, and He came to fulfill the mission that in a moment we're going to see He identifies. Well, where did Jesus come from? Well, reminded of the gospel song that we sometimes sing, from heaven He came, helpless babe. He came from the Father. He came into the world. And so, in these words, Jesus reveals something or hints in some way as to His identity, where He has come from.

But what He does very explicitly is identify His mission. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. That is what I have come to do. I have come to call sinners.

Now, we've already established that Jesus knew Matthew. He knew that Matthew was a sinner. So, it should be no surprise that He calls Matthew. That is why He came. He came to call sinners. We've established that Jesus knew full well that Matthew was a sinner. And why does Jesus call you? Why does He call me? Why does He call us? Well, that is why He came. He came to call sinners.

[17:53] So, why does Jesus call Matthew? Because He loves him, because He knows him, because He came for him, but then finally, because He has plans for Matthew. He has plans for Matthew. And what are these plans?

Well, the plans that Jesus has are to be found certainly in seed form in the simple but revealing words with which He calls Matthew and with which we began. What words does He direct to Matthew? Well, there we find them in verse 9 of chapter 9. As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth, follow me, He told him, follow me. And in these words, we have, as I suggest in seed form, an indication of what Jesus' plans for Matthew were.

You might say, well, follow me doesn't give you that much information. Indeed, you might imagine a hypothetical dialogue that could have arisen between Matthew and Jesus. It didn't, to Matthew's credit, but let's just think about it, indulge me as we think of what Matthew might have said when Jesus addresses him with these words, follow me. You know, Matthew might have looked at Jesus and said, okay, but what's the plan? What would Jesus have said? Follow me. No, no, I heard that. I got that. But what's the plan? Follow me. That's the plan. That is the plan that I have for you. My plan for you is that you would follow me. But we can legitimately, I think, dig a little deeper and consider what is involved or contemplated in following Jesus. And I think we can identify three intertwined elements of what is involved in following Jesus, what was involved for Matthew and what is involved for us.

It certainly involves relationship. The call to follow is a call to accompany, to be with, to be related to the one who is a calling. It is a call to companionship. Jesus doesn't give Matthew a document, a manifesto and say, follow that. There are the rules. There's what you need to do if you want to be my disciple. There it is. You follow that and you'll be fine. He doesn't do that. He says, follow me. Follow me. It's a call to relationship. It's a call to imitation. To follow is to go where Jesus goes and to do what Jesus does.

We follow in His footsteps. There is a sense in which there is this call to imitate Jesus, but that takes us on to something much more fundamental, and that is that it is a call to transformation. We're not just mimics. We don't just parrot fashion seek to do and seek to say what Jesus does and says.

[ 20 : 56 ] No, in following Jesus, we are transformed by Jesus into the likeness of Jesus. This call, follow me, is a call to transformation. Why does Jesus call Matthew? Because He has plans for Matthew to be His companion and to transform Matthew into His own likeness. And why does Jesus call you?

Because He has plans for you to be your companion and friend and to help you become a likeness. But how does this work begin for us? How does this relationship begin for us? We don't have Jesus in front of us. We can see Him and hear His voice and see where He's going and follow Him. We don't have that. Matthew did. You might say, well, it was easy for Matthew. Maybe not easy to actually do it, but to understand what was involved, to actually see Him there and follow Him. We don't have that.

So, how do we begin this matter? How do we respond in practical terms to the call, follow me? For us, it begins with repentance. Notice that what is said in verse 13 in the chapter or in the account that we are looking at in Matthew's gospel, in verse 13, right at the end there, the verse we've been focusing on significantly, for I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.

And there it ends. It's interesting to compare that with Luke's account in Luke chapter 5 and verse 32. It's an account of the same occasion, but as we often find in the gospels, you get the full picture as you draw together the different strands that are presented to us in the different gospel accounts, not contradictory accounts, but accounts that reinforce one another. And what do we find in Luke chapter 5 and verse 32? Well, we can read what it says. Well, let's just read from verse 31.

Jesus answered them, the Pharisees, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. And then notice what He says and how it adds one important element. I have not come to call the righteous. We recognize that language, but sinners to repentance. This call of Jesus, this call that He makes to Matthew when He says, follow me, this call that He addresses to us is a call to repentance.

[ 23 : 40 ] That is where it begins. That is where it continues. Also, it's worth adding. To repent is to recognize our need of forgiveness and to turn from our sin to the one who is able to forgive us.

Why does Jesus call Matthew? Well, He calls Matthew because He loves him, because He knows him, because He came to call him, and because He has big plans for him. But moving on, and much more briefly, why does Matthew follow Jesus? It's the other side of the coin, if you wish. And the answer that we're going to give will, in some sense, mirror what we've already said concerning why Jesus calls Matthew. So, why does Matthew follow Jesus? Well, let's just notice in summary form what we want to say, and then think about that very briefly. Why does Matthew follow Jesus? He's drawn by the love of Jesus. He's granted a measure of Jesus. He's persuaded of the mission of Jesus. I think very especially and very clearly, he trusts in the plans of Jesus. He's drawn by the love of Jesus. Now, Matthew had, I'm sure, as sure as one can be, almost no idea of the depth and breadth and height of Jesus' love for Him, but He could sense something, maybe just something of the love that was drawing Him, almost inexplicably, to Jesus. This rabbi, who, when he saw the crowd that was following Him, from all that crowd, indeed beyond the crowd, because Matthew wasn't even part of the crowd,

He just happened to be there, but He saw beyond all the crowd, and He fixed His eyes, He fixed His attention, He fixed His care, He fixed His affection on Matthew, on Matthew, the despised tax collector.

Now, this surely struck a chord with Matthew. I wonder if Matthew had any previous knowledge of Jesus that maybe granted Him, that maybe granted Him some prior insight into His love for sinners like Himself. We simply don't know. We simply don't know. We could only speculate. Perhaps He did. But Matthew knew somehow that Jesus loved Him, and this was hugely attractive and drew Him from His collector's booth into the embrace and the care of Jesus. And what about you? Jesus calls you. Are you drawn to Jesus by the love of Jesus? But we're also suggesting that Matthew was granted a measure of the knowledge of Jesus. Now, what I'm trying to say there, and maybe I could have found a slightly neater way of putting it, but what

I'm trying to say, or what I'm referring to, is what Jesus knew about Matthew. We've already spoken about that, that Jesus knew Matthew. And what I'm suggesting is that Matthew shared some of that knowledge of himself that Jesus knew. Jesus knew that Matthew was a sinner. Jesus knew that Matthew was spiritually ill and unclean. And unclean. And Matthew, in a measure, and unclean. And Matthew, in a measure, knew that too. How keenly? We don't know. How deeply? We don't know. How accurately? We don't know. But we know that he knew enough to know that if Jesus came to call sinners, then He was on that list to be called. What about you? Do you recognize that you are a sinner? Do you recognize that you stand in need of the one who can forgive sins? Do you recognize that you are spiritually sick and ill, and that the only one who can heal your spiritual illness is this man, Jesus?

[ 28 : 10 ] He was drawn by the love of Jesus. He had some conception of his own condition and need. But I'm suggesting also that he was, in some measure, persuaded by the mission of Jesus. Jesus makes it very clear. We've looked at that already. Jesus came to call sinners. And Jesus calls Matthew.

And what does Matthew do as the object, if you wish, of Jesus fulfilling his mission? What does he do? Does Matthew listen in quizzical bemusement? Does he politely decline the invitation?

Does he courteously ask for time to give the proposal some careful thought and consideration? He doesn't do any of these things. He follows Jesus. Why does he do that? Why does he do that?

Well, he is surely persuaded. In some measure, he has an understanding and is persuaded by the mission of Jesus. And perhaps especially by the evident authority of Jesus in carrying out his mission.

I think that allows us to enrich a little of what we've already said about the drawing power of Jesus. It seems to me that on this occasion and to this day, the drawing power of Jesus has two elements that go together. There is the love of Jesus that draws the sinner, but there's also the authority of Jesus that draws the sinner that imposes itself upon the sinner that he might respond to the call, follow me.

[ 29 : 52 ] Well, what about you? Are you persuaded of Jesus' mission that he did indeed come to call sinners, that you're a sinner, and therefore he calls you?

But the final thing that we want to say about why Matthew followed Jesus is this, that he trusts in the plans of Jesus. We might put it more personally and say, he trusts in Jesus, period.

Now, so far, in trying to answer the question, why does Matthew follow Jesus, we've had to be a little tentative. We've had to be a little tentative because we don't know for sure to what extent, for example, Matthew understood that Jesus loved him. He didn't. We don't know how clear his understanding of that was. We don't know to what extent Matthew was conscious of his own sin and need.

We don't know how much he understood of Jesus' mission. But we do know from the evidence before us, in this passage, we do know, and we can state very confidently, that Matthew trusted Jesus. Indeed, his trust almost appears at face value cavalier. It is a deep trust in Jesus. It is a mature trust in Jesus. And why do we say this? Well, it's interesting that Matthew himself, perhaps somewhat modestly, I don't know if that is what is behind this, but Matthew himself, remember that this gospel is Matthew's own account of the incident. Matthew himself just says that he got up and followed Him. Jesus addresses him, follow me, and Matthew records what happened, remembers the occasion well, and he says, well, what I did was I got up and I followed Jesus. But listen to what Luke says. Luke introduces an element that maybe Matthew felt he didn't really want to focus on at risk of being thought that he was puffing himself up. I don't know if that was the reason or not. But listen to what Luke says in Luke's gospel, chapter 5 and verse 28. Relating the same occasion, what does Luke say?

Well, we have there in verse 27 the words of Jesus, follow me, Jesus said to him. And then we read, Levi, Levi, another name for Matthew, Levi got up, left everything and followed Him. He left everything.

[ 32 : 29 ] Matthew doesn't tell us that, but Luke does. Matthew left everything and followed Him. And that's what he did. Matthew left everything to follow Jesus, his trust in Jesus. And that is why I say we can very confidently assert the trust of Matthew in Jesus. His trust in Jesus was such that he was prepared to place Jesus at the very center of his life and future. We might say, well, is that not what all the disciples did? Well, yes, but with Matthew, the risk, if risk is the right word to use, but from one human perspective, we could use the word risk. For Matthew, the risk was greater. Matthew could not, if things didn't work out, go back to his collector's booth. Having abandoned his post.

I think the possibilities of him getting his job back were remote in the extreme. The fishermen, well, they could go back to their boats. They did briefly. Not Matthew. And so that's why I say he trusted Jesus. He was willing to leave everything. Matthew trusts Jesus. He, entrusts his life and future in the hands of Jesus. And what about you? Are you willing to leave everything? And what does that mean? What does that mean? It doesn't necessarily involve leaving your job, as was the case for Matthew. It certainly doesn't involve abandoning your home and family.

Notice that Matthew, the very one who Luke describes as having left everything, is able to hold a great feast in his own home. He still has a home. He still has a family. He still has resources to put on a great feast, having left everything. So, it's not about literally leaving everything in that sense, but it is about what your priorities are. The issue is one of priority.

To leave everything involves placing Jesus at the very center. And if that would involve or would require you to leave your job, so be it. If it would require you to give up your home or your house, so be it. Now, it's unlikely that for many of us that will be required, but it's an issue of priority. Having Jesus at the very center. He is Lord, and He must govern in your life.

And we close by asking a question that we've asked repeatedly already, but it's right that we close asking it again. Will you follow Jesus? You can't follow Him as one of many, a la Twitter, or you can follow in parallel, or you can follow in parallel in some superficial way that brings no demands upon you. But will you follow Him as your only Lord and Savior? He is calling you, and He's calling you because He loves you, because He knows you, because He came for you, because He has plans for you. He's calling you. Will you follow Him? From heaven He came, helpless babe, entered our world, His glory veiled, not to be served, but to serve and give His life that we might live.

[ 36 : 05 ] This is our God, the servant King. He calls us now, and He calls you now to follow Him, to bring your life as a daily offering of worship to the servant King. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come and we thank You for Your Son, Jesus. We thank You that He is the Messiah. We thank You that He is the only and sufficient Savior of the world, the only Lord who calls us with these words, follow me. We pray that we would be enabled to follow Jesus, that we would, with Matthew, know what it is in a real way to leave everything and follow Jesus, that Jesus would be at the very heart of our lives, that the service of Jesus would be our greatest priority, that everything else in life, legitimate though it may be, would find its place in that context, around and in the service of our following of Jesus. And all of these things we pray in His name. Amen.

We're going to close our service by singing from Psalm 40 in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 40 on page 259.

On page 259, Psalm 40, we'll sing verses 1 to 4, and we'll sing to the tune, Belorma. I waited for the Lord my God, and patiently did bear. At length to me He did incline my voice and cry to hear.

He took me from a fearful pit and from the mighty clay, and on a rock He set my feet, establishing my way. Psalm 40, verses 1 to 4. We'll stand to sing.

Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5.

[ 38 : 32 ] Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5. Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5.

To lean who's trust upon the Lord ■■■e Vitamin S want gathered. Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5. Psalm 40, verses 1 to 5. Psalm 40, verse 1 to 5. Psalm 50, verses 1 to 5. Psalm 50, verses 1 to 5.

10 to 5. Psalm 49, verses 2 to 5. geht it with the strong name of Yuya Kitchen, Psalm 51, verses 2 to 5. Psalm 60, verses 1 to 6.

[ 40 : 27 ] Now may the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always. Amen.