

"A CHRISTIAN'S FOLLOW THROUGH"
MATTHEW 9:9-13
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MESSIAH, BOERNE
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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: MT 9:9-13

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

IN MANY SPORTS, COACHES TALK TO THEIR ATHLETES ABOUT
THE IMPORTANCE OF *FOLLOW THROUGH*. IN BASEBALL, GOLF, AND
BASKETBALL, FOR EXAMPLE, COACHES TEACH THEIR ATHLETES TO
DEVELOP THE PROPER FOLLOW THROUGH OF THEIR PITCH, STROKE,
OR SHOT SO THAT THEY WILL BE EXECUTED CORRECTLY. NOW, IT
MAY SEEM ODD THAT SOMETHING ONE DOES *AFTER* THROWING,
HITTING, OR SHOOTING THE BALL WILL AFFECT THE SHOT, BUT
THAT'S NOT THE RIGHT WAY OF LOOKING AT IT. THE POINT IS
THAT THE PITCH, STROKE, OR SHOT WON'T BE EXECUTED CORRECTLY
WITH CONSISTENCY WITHOUT THE TYPE OF ACTION THAT RESULTS IN
THE DESIRED FOLLOW THROUGH. THUS, FOR EXAMPLE, PITCHING
COACHES CAN TELL WHEN IT'S TIME TO PUT A NEW PITCHER INTO
THE GAME SIMPLY BY WATCHING THEIR PITCHER'S FOLLOW THROUGH.

SIMILARLY, GOOD WORKS ARE THE PROPER FOLLOW THROUGH IN
THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN. IN RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S GRACIOUS
CALL TO FOLLOW HIM AS HIS DISCIPLE, A CHRISTIAN FOLLOWS

THROUGH WITH ACTIONS OF FAITH. IN OUR GOSPEL TEXT, FOR EXAMPLE, WE SEE MATTHEW'S FOLLOW THROUGH IN RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S CALL: FIRST, HE RE-PRIORITIZES HIS LIFE BY PUTTING JESUS FIRST; SECOND, HE ACTS WITH LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE TOWARD OTHERS; AND, THIRD, HAVING LEARNED FROM JESUS OF GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY, HE JOINS HIM IN SEEKING LOST SINNERS.

NOW, THE FACT THAT MATTHEW WAS A TAX COLLECTOR INTERFERRED WITH HIS RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A JEW. TAX COLLECTORS WERE GENERALLY HATED AND DESPISED BY THE JEWS. FIRST OF ALL, THEY WERE HATED BECAUSE THEY SERVED THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT, THE SO-CALLED "OPPRESSORS" OF ISRAEL, AND WERE CONSIDERED TRAITORS BY THEIR FELLOW JEWS. SECOND, THE GENERAL BUSINESS PRACTICE OF TAX COLLECTORS INVOLVED PAYING THE ROMANS FOR THE RIGHT TO COLLECT TAXES FOR THEM. THEY THEN DEMANDED MORE MONEY THAN REQUIRED FROM MERCHANTS AND TRAVELERS IN ORDER TO ENRICH THEMSELVES. THUS, THE MAJORITY OF ISRAELITES DESPISED TAX COLLECTORS FOR THEIR GENERAL DISHONESTY.

WHILE SERVING AS A TAX COLLECTOR IN CAPERNAUM, MATTHEW PROBABLY FELT THE REJECTION OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED THERE, AS WELL AS FROM THE MERCHANTS WHO PASSED THROUGH THE CITY. SERVING IN CAPERNAUM, HOWEVER, ALSO PROBABLY AFFORDED HIM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR ABOUT JESUS—THE GREAT

PROPEHT, TEACHER, HEALER, AND MIRACLE WORKER. HE AND JESUS MAY HAVE EVEN MET BEFORE HIS CALL INTO DISCIPLESHIP.

ALTHOUGH MATTHEW RECORDS ONLY THE SIMPLE FACTS OF HIS CALL, IT PROBABLY MEANT A LOT TO HIM AS A SOCIAL OUTCAST TO BE ACCEPTED BY JESUS JUST AS HE WAS.

MATTHEW RESPONDED TO OUR LORD'S CALL, FIRST OF ALL, BY RE-PRIORITIZING HIS LIFE. OUR TEXT SAYS THAT AFTER JESUS TOLD MATTHEW, "FOLLOW ME," "MATTHEW GOT UP AND FOLLOWED HIM" (V 9b). LUKE WRITES THAT HE "GOT UP, *LEFT EVERYTHING* AND FOLOWED HIM" (5:28). WHATEVER HAD GONE BEFORE, THE *FIRST* STEP IN MATTHEW'S FOLLOW THROUGH AS JESUS' DISCIPLE INVOLVED PUTTING JESUS FIRST IN HIS LIFE—FIRST THINGS FIRST—WHICH MEANT LEAVING EVERYTHING ELSE BEHIND AND FOLLOWING HIM AS HIS RABBI OR TEACHER.

JESUS ALSO CALLS YOU AND ME TO FOLLOW HIM AS HIS DISCIPLES OR STUDENTS. FOR MANY OF US, WE WERE FIRST CALLED TO FOLLOW JESUS THROUGH HOLY BAPTISM WHEN WE WERE ACCEPTED JUST AS WE WERE—"DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES AND SINS" (EPH 2:10—AND FORGIVEN *ALL* OF THEM. WE BECAME A PART OF GOD'S FAMILY BY ADOPTION THROUGH HOLY BAPTISM IN ORDER TO DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO CALLED US OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT (1 PET 2:9). LATER, AT OUR CONFIRMATION, WE MADE THE GOOD CONFESSON AND PROMISED TO

FOLLOW HIM, EVEN TO DEATH, RATHER THAN FALL AWAY FROM THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. THE QUESTION TODAY IS: HOW'S YOUR FOLLOW THROUGH? HAVE YOU CONTINUED TO PUT JESUS FIRST IN YOUR LIFE, OR HAVE OLD, SINFUL PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR TAKEN OVER YOUR LIFE? HAS THE TEMPTATION OF MATERIALISM, THE DELUSION OF FINANCIAL SECURITY, OR THE PLEASURES OF THE WORLD HINDERED YOU IN YOUR SPIRITUAL FOLLOW THROUGH?

AS SINFUL HUMAN BEINGS WE ARE ALL TEMPTED AND DELUDED AT TIMES BY WORLDLY DESIRES. THEREFORE, JESUS REMINDS US TO SEEK *FIRST* THE KINGDOM OF GOD "AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL" (6:33). ST. PAUL PROVIDES US WITH A TREMENDOUS EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JESUS' DISCIPLE WHEN HE WRITES: "BROTHERS, I DO NOT CONSIDER MYSELF YET TO HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF IT. BUT ONE THING I DO: FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND AND STRAINING TOWARD WHAT IS AHEAD, I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL TO WIN THE PRIZE FOR WHICH GOD HAS CALLED ME HEAVENWARD IN CHRIST JESUS" (PHIL 3:13-14).

SECOND, MATTHEW DEMONSTRATED THE FOLLOW THROUGH OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH BY SHOWING LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE TOWARD OTHERS IN HIS LIFE. OUR TEXT SAYS: "WHILE JESUS WAS HAVING DINNER AT MATTHEW'S HOUSE, MANY TAX COLLECTORS AND 'SINNERS' CAME AND ATE WITH HIM AND HIS DISCIPLES" (V 10).

IN RESPONSE TO OUR LORD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE, MATTHEW HELD A FEAST AT HIS HOUSE IN JESUS' HONOR. HE WAS SO GRATEFUL FOR THE LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE HE RECEIVED FROM JESUS THAT HE WANTED ALL HIS FELLOW TAX COLLECTORS AND OTHER SOCIAL OUTCASTS TO EXPERIENCE HIS LOVE AS WELL. BY EATING WITH THEM, JESUS WAS SHARING TABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH THEM, THEREBY DEMONSTRATING THAT HE ACCEPTED THEM COMPLETELY.

DO WE ALSO FOLLOW THROUGH IN OUR FAITH-WALK BY SHOWING LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE TO OTHERS? DO WE PROVIDE A WARM AND ACCEPTING ENVIRONMENT IN OUR WORSHIP SERVICES SO THAT OTHERS CAN MORE EASILY HEAR THE GOSPEL AND FOLLOW RABBI JESUS AS LORD? SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I READ A BOOK ENTITLED *FROM GUEST TO DISCIPLE* BY DR. JOEL HECK. THE BOOK IS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM AND DISCUSSES VARIOUS STRATEGIES FOR MAKING DISCIPLES THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY. THE VERY FIRST ILLUSTRATION IS ABOUT A MAN WHO WAS VERY EFFECTIVE AT REACHING OUT TO NON-CHRISTIANS BY INTENTIONALLY INVITING THIRTY TO FIFTY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OVER TO EAT AT HIS HOUSE ON SUNDAY. HE WRITES: "FOOD AND CAMARADERIE BREAK DOWN BARRIERS. THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT EATING A MEAL WITH SOMEONE THAT ACCELERATES FRIENDSHIP" (PP. 7-8).

FINALLY, MATTHEW DEMONSTRATES HIS FOLLOW-THROUGH BY ACTUALLY *FOLLOWING* JESUS AS HIS DISCIPLE. IN THE TEXT, JESUS SAYS:

"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" (VV 12-13).

DEEPLY AWARE OF HIS OWN SIN-SICKNESS, MATTHEW ANSWERED JESUS' CALL, LEAVING THE TAX BOOTH AND THE FEASTING TABLE BEHIND, AND FOLLOWING HIM AS ONE OF JESUS' TWELVE APOSTLES, THAT IS, "SENT ONES."

WE READ ABOUT MATTHEW ONLY ONCE MORE IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, IN THE LISTING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES JUST PRIOR TO THEIR BEING SENT OUT TO "THE LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL" (10:6). EUSEBIUS, THE EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORIAN, WRITES THAT AFTER MATTHEW HAD PROCLAIMED THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS THE MESSIAH TO THE HEBREWS, HE "MADE UP HIS MIND TO GO TO [OTHER PEOPLE GROUPS] TOO" (*HISTORY*, III, 24.6). FURTHERMORE, HE WRITES THAT MATTHEW WROTE HIS GOSPEL "OF NECESSITY," SO THAT "THE GAP LEFT BY HIS DEPARTURE WAS FILLED BY WHAT HE WROTE" (III, 24.6). THUS, MATTHEW FOLLOWED JESUS BY WORD AND DEED TO THE END, WHETHER BY NATURAL CAUSES OR BY FIRE OR SWORD.

NOW, OUR CHRISTIAN FOLLOW THROUGH MAY NOT ACHIEVE

SUCH NOTORIETY AS MATTHEW'S, BUT WE CAN CERTAINLY FOLLOW THROUGH WITH OUR CONFIRMATION VOWS BY CONFORMING ALL OUR LIFE TO THE DIVINE WORD, BEING FAITHFUL IN THE USE OF GOD'S WORD AND SACRAMENTS, AND REMAINING TRUE TO OUR TRIUNE GOD IN FAITH, WORD, AND ACTION, EVEN TO DEATH.

YOU KNOW, ONE OF THE THINGS I LIKED TO DO WITH MY CHILDREN WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG WAS TO WATCH MOVIE VIDEOS WITH THEM. ONE OF OUR FAVORITES WAS "HOME ALONE," AND WE'D LOVE TO LAUGH AT THE ANTICS OF KEVIN AS HE'D OUTSMART THE WOULD-BE THEIVES, THE SO-CALLED "WET BANDITS." A SUB-THEME OF THE VIDEO THAT ALWAYS STRUCK ME, HOWEVER, WAS THE TREMENDOUS EFFORT MADE BY KEVIN'S MOTHER TO GET BACK TO CHICAGO FROM FLORIDA DURING THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS IN ORDER TO RESCUE HER SON, WHO HAD BEEN LEFT "HOME ALONE."

DEAR FRIENDS, GOD THE FATHER HAS ALSO MADE A TREMENDOUS EFFORT TO RESCUE US FROM SIN, SATAN, DEATH, AND HELL BY SENDING HIS ONE AND ONLY SON INTO THE WORLD IN ORDER TO SAVE HUMANKIND. WE HUMAN BEINGS ARE IN GREAT NEED OF BEING RESCUED BECAUSE NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE (PS 14). YET, BECAUSE OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE AND MERCY, JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO OFFER HIS LIFE ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SALVATION. THROUGH HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS WE HAVE PERFECT FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS, AND JESUS

CALLS *ALL* PEOPLE THROUGH YOU, ME, AND OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS
TO COME AND FOLLOW HIM TO ETERNAL LIFE. GOD GRANT YOU THE
POWER TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN'S FOLLOW THROUGH; IN JESUS'
NAME. AMEN.