

HOW'S THE FISHING?

Luke 5:27-32

Today we are going to open God's Word and look at the very first Christian to ever participate in a My Hope campaign such as we've talked about earlier today. In fact, he is the very pattern that Billy Graham used when he developed the My Hope strategy a few years ago. You know, that's not a bad idea, getting your methodology from the Bible. For when you do and you implement it under the anointing of the Holy Spirit it works 100% of the time. So today we are going to look at the very first person to use the Matthew plan of evangelism. And you don't have to guess who it was, do you? Yes, it was Matthew, the disciple of Jesus. And what an awesome plan that God gave him, a plan that He just might want to give to many of us today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 5: 27-32 . You've heard before that when Jesus sought out the twelve who would be His constant followers for the next 3½ years that in the eyes of the world He picked some real losers. And perhaps none would be more the case than Levi.

Levi, who also went by the name Matthew, lived life in no man's land. Nobody had any use for Matthew. He was a Jew, so he was looked down upon by the Romans. But he was a tax collector who worked for Rome, so he was also despised by the Jews. For you see, there were certain types of tax collectors could charge you just about anything they wanted to and you had no choice but to pay. Scripture is silent as to whether or not Matthew was one of these types, but just being a tax collector gave him a bad rap all alone. For the disdain for tax collectors was so great that they were considered on par with robbers and murderers, and the Jewish Talmud says that no disciple of the scribes

is allowed to eat with people like tax collectors or other sinners, who do not observe the Mosaic law . So everywhere Matthew went he could probably feel the stares and sense the whispers. And no one in their wildest imagination would have ever thought Jesus would select him as one of His disciples. But our text tells us that as Jesus walked by Matthew's tax booth one day that He noticed him and said, "Follow me".

Friend, if you've never come to the place in your life where you know that you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can be sure that He is calling you to follow Him today. In the last verse of our text Jesus says that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, and if you call yourself a sinner that certainly means you. After Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus He declared that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. And when Jesus looks at you He doesn't see you for what you are, but for what you can become. And Matthew had this hope in his heart when Jesus called him. Look back at verse 27. "After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi". Luke records how everyone around viewed Matthew. As a knifing, lowdown scoundrel. But if you read Matthew's account of his call it says, "As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew..." (Matt. 9:9). Not a tax collector, but a man. Matthew was saying, "Jesus saw me as something better than a hated, untrustworthy tax collector. He saw me as a man, a man whom God loved and whom He loved, and a man that He could change".

And friend, that's the way that Jesus sees you. He doesn't see a piece of human trash that is unredeemable, worthy of nothing but punishment. He sees a precious soul for whom He died. That's how valuable you are to Jesus! And when Jesus calls you, you can be sure that He has a marvelous plan for your life. Now, the pathway of the Christian life is unique for every child of God in certain ways. God has plans for your life that He has for no other believer on the planet. It may not be His purpose for you to

become a Christian recording artist like Lecrae Moore or Lacey Sturm. But you can be sure it will be just as exciting and just as fulfilling for you as their purpose is for them. Jer. 29:11, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you”, says the Lord, “Thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”.

But there are some callings of Jesus on our lives that are common to every one of us. And in Matthew’s call we see four, and I want us to look at each one briefly. And Matthew’s first calling that is common to all of us is the **call to sell out**. Look again at verse 28. That means just what it says. Matthew said, “Whatever the cost, whatever I have to give up, I’ll give it up to follow Jesus”. Paul said the same thing. He said, “I’ve suffered the loss of all things and do count it but animal waste in order to gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

Beloved, let me remind you of something that many of us know but so easily forget. The true Christian life is a way of life. The **true Christian life is a way of life**.

The Christian life is not being at church one, two or even four hours on Sunday and again on Wednesday night. Let’s suppose that you spend five hours a week in church services. That’s still less than 5% of your waking hours during the week. Psalm 55:17 says, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”. Psalm 35:28: “And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness *and* of thy praise all the day long”. To the psalmist, prayer and proclaiming God’s praises was a fulltime occupation. And to all whom Jesus calls to be saved He declares, “Yes, be saved. Yes, miss hell and gain heaven. But this is only part of the package. The rest is to follow in My footsteps, to imitate Me, to arise every morning with the purpose of your day being to glorify Me in whatever you do all day long”.

And that’s what Matthew committed to do when he got up from his tax table and followed Jesus. He had no promise of income anymore. He had no promise of his family

going with him. Would they reject him in his new life? He didn't know, but He didn't care. And Matthew didn't say to Jesus, "Where are we going?", or "What are the dangers in following You?", or "How long is this journey?" He just got up and said to Jesus, "OK, Jesus, I'm all in." And beloved, when Jesus called **you** to salvation, when He said, "Follow Me", He called **you** to be all in.

Can you truly say today, "Lord, I'm all in?" A lot of Christians are all in when it comes to their job, or to a hobby, or to their kid's and grandkid's school activities. They don't let anything interfere with these things. But when it comes to spiritual things they are all in only if it doesn't conflict with the other interests in their lives. And when it does whatever else that they are really "all in" always wins out. I know a man whose pastor once asked him to participate in a onetime ministry project for his church. He told his pastor that he would if he could, but he just couldn't. That was because he had to cut his grass that day. But he went on to say that he had to cut his grass that day because on Saturday he had to watch football games. Now, that man might say that he loves Jesus, but he's a long way from being all in.

I want to ask you, what are you the most "all in" this morning? Is it following Jesus? Is it watching football? Is it something else in your life? When Jesus called Matthew, he forsook all and followed Him.

There is a second call upon every Christian's life that we see in Matthew. Not only the call to **sell out**, but also the call to **share**. Look at verse 29. When Matthew rose to follow Jesus his life was changed in an instant. He was gloriously saved. And the first thought on his mind was to reach out to his colleagues and friends and invite them to meet the One Who had saved him. Because he knew that they needed an encounter with Jesus just as he had had. And so he threw a great feast for that purpose. Jesus was the guest of honor, and Matthew invited many to come to meet Him, and they came.

Now, let's stop and make two important observations here. First of all, **Matthew was a man of hospitality toward sinners.** Now admittedly, Matthew knew a lot of sinners, because this is the crowd that he had run with all of his life. All of his friends were sinners. But it matters not if we've been saved 30 minutes or 30 years, you and I are called to be a friend of sinners. That's what Jesus was, wasn't He? Especially during the first part of His ministry He was spending huge amounts of time teaching and healing and eating and drinking with multitudes of sinners. And beloved, all of us who really know Jesus really know that He has called us to reach out and befriend those who do not know Him, don't we? But many of us must make an effort to reach out and establish contact with lost people. We have to be intentional about getting out of the four walls of our churches and our homes and meeting them. Otherwise we'll never do it.

This is one of the tasks of our Assessment and Action Team. We are seeking ways to build bridges to lost people in Fosters and Ralph with the ultimate intent of sharing Christ with them. But it all starts with befriending sinners and sharing our lives with them, and for many of us this would include sharing our homes with them, showing them genuine Christian hospitality. So don't wait on the Assessment and Action Team to suggest something to you. Many of you are great at hosting your families for birthday and holiday celebrations. You are great at pulling off a Christmas party for your Sunday School class or coworkers. You can tailgate on Saturday afternoon with the best of them. But you've never even considered reaching out to your neighbors and inviting them to a party for the purpose of sharing the love of Jesus. But this is what Matthew did, as a brand new Christian. He was a man of Christian hospitality.

But there's something else we can learn from Matthew here. And that is, **people will respond to a spiritual invitation.** A number of years ago a study was done to try to determine the reason that people first visited a church. The results should be eye-

opening to any church that is serious about winning people to faith in Christ. It discovered that 2% of church visitors come because of advertisement, 6% by an invitation from the pastor, 6% by an organized evangelism campaign, and the rest, 86%, came because of an invitation by a friend or relative. But another study revealed that only 2% of Christians ever invite anyone to their church. And in another study, 37% of Christians surveyed linked their salvation to an invitation to church.

Beloved, many of your friends and neighbors are open to an invitation to church, and they are open to an invitation into your home as well. A number of weeks ago I mentioned to a man who lives not far from me that one day I wanted to have a cookout and invite some of my neighbors to attend, and he said, “Hey, I’ll go anywhere where there’s free food”. Now, we’ve not had that cookout yet, and when we do the purpose will be just to begin to build some relationships. I don’t plan to share the gospel unless God gives me a wide open door. But what I’m saying is, when you reach out to people with a loving invitation, just like Matthew’s friends, they will respond. **But we must be willing to share.** Share our lives and if we are capable, share our homes.

So we’ve seen that when Jesus says, “Follow Me”, it is a call to **sell out** and a call to **share**. But notice something else. It is also a call to be **scorned** (v. 30). When you read the parallel passages of Matthew’s calling, they render this verse slightly different. Matt. 9:11 reads, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”, and Mark reads essentially the same way. But in Luke the Pharisees and scribes are scorning the disciples: “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” The word “You” in the NKJV should not be capitalized there. The verse is not talking about Jesus, but about His disciples. They were catching heat right along with Jesus for being at Matthew’s party.

And beloved, it will be the same with you if you reach out and fellowship with sinners. You will be the target of many who spend all of their time criticizing and sanitizing. They criticize the unsaved for how they speak and act and do all they can to separate themselves from them. And the sad thing about that is, many of these folks go to church every week. They are the best Bible toting, hymn singing people you'll ever meet. And every church is blessed with them. Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, you name the denomination. But actually they are all only one denomination. They are all 21st century Pharisees. Now, just like we sang earlier, Pharisees love to tell the story of Jesus and His love. The only thing is, they only tell it to one another.

So beloved, don't let the scorers discourage you for reaching out to sinners, but instead rejoice. For Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matt. 5:11). And let me just say one more word. It could be that you are one of those criticizing, sanitizing Pharisees. You find yourself condemning the homosexuals and the rappers and the tattoo kings and queens and the Sunday morning snoozers and shoppers. Friends, never forget that sinners are going to act like sinners. They are marching to the beat of the devil's drum, and it is a mesmerizing beat. The Bible says that they are bound by the cords of their sin (Pvbs. 5:22). And just as surely as it a dog's nature to bark, it is a sinner's nature to sin. And instead of carping on the sinner, you should be calling on God to save the sinner, and then do all that you can to love him to Jesus.

We've seen that the follower of Jesus has the calling to **sell out**, to **share**, and to **be scorned**. Now let's look briefly at a final calling, and that is the calling to **save**. When the Pharisees began to criticize the disciples for eating with sinners, Jesus quickly stepped up to their rescue. Look again at verse 31-32. Jesus said, "The very reason that I came was to mix and mingle with sinners and to save them from their sins". And

because you and I are now Christ's ambassadors, that is the ultimate goal of our association with sinners, too. To bring them to faith in Jesus. You see, this goes further than just sharing with sinners, with befriending them for Christ's sake. We must begin with sharing, but we must not stop there. We must not stop until by the grace of God we have attempted to share the plain truth of the gospel with them, the good news that if they repent of their sins and trust in Christ alone they can be saved.

Notice how Jesus illustrates this truth in verse 31. He compares Himself to a doctor who enables the sick to get well. And we, too, who spread the gospel are doctors. And Jesus said, "Well people don't need a doctor, sick people do. And that's the reason that I eat and drink with them". Suppose for a moment that Tuscaloosa had an outbreak of some lethal virus. Scores of people were dying all over the city. And there was a group of doctors who received hundreds of doses of the only antidote to the virus. But they never made it known to the public. Nobody knew to go to their office to be cured. And people kept dying and dying and dying. Tell me, what would you think of those doctors? Why, I know what you would think. You'd think just like I think – those doctors are just a little up the scale from murderers. They ought to be out in the malls and on the sidewalks all over town set up and giving shots to everyone who wanted one.

Beloved, I promise you, the lost without Christ don't know where to find Him. They don't know to come looking for Jesus in a church. Why, they don't even know that they are lost in the first place! And the only way they will ever know of their need of Him and how to know Him is if you and I become present day Matthews and introduce them to Him.

In Matthew 4 Jesus issues the same call to Peter and Andrew that He issued to Matthew, the call to follow Him. But He added the result in that instance. He said,

“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”. I ask you, how’s the fishing been lately?
Are you willing to go today?