

{ call of duty }

:: mark 2.13-17 ::

We're still on break from our chapter and verse study of Ezekiel. Lots of great stuff still left in that book, but tonight we're going to spend some time with Jesus in Mark chapter 2.

Specifically we'll be in verses 13 through 15, where we see the call of Levi, who we know as Matthew and the feast that he throws for Jesus and his friends.

Tonight we want to talk about our calling as Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ. Calling is always a good thing to think about and talk about and work through because when we remember the calling that God has placed on our lives and what that means, then everything else falls into place in His will.

The Apostle Paul spoke about our calling and how important it is.

Romans 11.29 - For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

And also:

1 Corinthians 7.20 - Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

You are important to God and He has called you to a new life as a disciple, one who follows Jesus Christ and receives from Him irrevocable gifts. We see a little of how this all works out in the record of Jesus calling Levi the tax collector.

So let's take a look at our passage:

Mark 2.13-15 - Then [Jesus] went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 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. 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.

This is a great passage. Concise, full of devotional insight, lots of principle here for us to dive into.

Now, obviously, the entire Bible is important. The Scriptures *in whole* are inerrant and inspired, and therefore authoritative for our lives, but on some level it's interesting to think about the stories and ideas that God repeats for us over and over again in His word.

Here's what I mean: John said in his Gospel that Jesus did so many things that if you wrote every one of them down in a book, the world itself would not be large enough to contain all the volumes. Now, specifically speaking about the Gospels, God gave us 4. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. 4 short books which give us a look at Jesus on the earth, His teachings and His ministry in a special, narrative form.

Now, if Jesus did so many things that we couldn't house them all in the libraries of the world, and if God determined to give us only 4 Gospels, then our human logic would dictate that there shouldn't be any repetition between the 4. Logic dictates that each Gospel should be completely unique so that we get as many different stories as we can.

But that isn't how God sets up His word. In fact, in the Gospels we find overlap. We find repetition. We find reoccurrence. Why? Because God wants to remind us of things as we read His word.

This particular story of Levi's calling and feast is recorded for us in Matthew 9, Mark 2 and Luke 5. So we can be assured that God is really wanting us to *get* the principles we find. He reminds us of this story 3 times so that we can understand more of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a biblical Christian.

So let's see what this is all about.

Mark 2.13 - Then [Jesus] went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him and He taught them.

The first and most important principle of our calling is that Jesus Christ is the **focus** of that calling. Not us. Not some goal. Not a list of rituals or requirements. We're called to follow **HIM**, a Person. And through the Bible we learn a great deal about who Jesus is and what He is like. We have His recorded word which reveals Himself to us. And here we are reminded again that Jesus is a Teacher. He's always teaching. He spent His time on earth saving and serving and teaching and inviting people to find new life in Him.

As a boy in the temple, we find Him teaching. As a man on the seashores, we find Him teaching. In boats and in houses and in the wilderness and with His friends, He was always teaching.

Jesus is the same today. He is a Teacher. And His desire is to teach His people. That's why you're here tonight, right? We're here to worship God and to study His word because we believe that God is actively speaking day in and day out.

But in our personal lives, I know I need the reminder that Jesus is all about call and response. Call and response. Offering us wisdom or truth or opportunity and then waiting for our response. Waiting for our decision. Waiting to see if we have ears to hear or not. Because He is a God who wants to inform and transform. He wants to inform us about who He is and how to live life in His will and then He wants to transform us and empower us to do all the things He talks about in the Bible. He is a Teacher, not a fixture. The gods of world religions are fixtures. Little statues that stand inanimate in a shrine somewhere. They are gods who do not speak, they do not breathe, they do not transform.

Jesus is very different. He is an active God who is actively speaking to you, calling to you. He is the focus. We are called to *Him*.

And so on this particular day Jesus went out to the sea and taught the people who came to listen.

Mark 2.14 - 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.

Now I think sometimes I have an improper mental picture of how the disciples were called in the Gospels. I don't know if it's because of movies or just assumptions I've made, but if I'm not careful I start imagining that Jesus just goes and cold-calls these strangers that He's never seen before and they sort of hypnotically get up and follow after Him like zombies or Pavlov's dogs.

That isn't how it worked. Levi, also named Matthew (I'll be using those names interchangeably), had already heard about Jesus and, no doubt, had heard Him teach. Now, here in this moment, Jesus turns to him and says point blank, "Right now, follow Me. Yes or no?" and Matthew was convinced. He believed that this Man was the Messiah. He was converted to Him. So he got up, left his tax office and followed the Lord.

Luke's account of this story points out that he left all. He left everything. Most of you know that tax collectors of that time made a lot of money, but that they were also hated because, even though they were Jews, they had decided to serve and labor for the Roman empire, who was currently subjugating the people of Judea.

In fact, Levi's name means '*joined*.' And so to those around him, his very name would be a subtle reminder that he had *joined* Rome and abandoned his own people.

We can speculate that he was probably from the tribe of Levi. We don't know for sure, but it's possible and probable. If he was then he would've been one of the privileged few who were allowed to serve in the temple. One of the few that should have been set aside as a priest or Levite. Yet there he was, in a Roman tax office, collecting fees for Caesar, extorting his countrymen for his own benefit.

But Jesus looked at him, in that state and He called him. He looked at Levi and said that He wanted to offer him more in life and Levi left all to follow the Lord.

Now, as we look out on the Kingdom of God, we see that God calls different people to different levels of sacrifice. Even in the Bible we see this. The 12 were called to leave everything. Eventually they were called to even leave their own lives behind and suffer martyrdom. That still happens today.

But then there were others who, after finding salvation in Jesus, He did *NOT* call to that total, ascetic sacrifice. When Jesus healed and saved a demon possessed man in the country of the Gadarenes the man came and said, "Let me follow You. I'll leave it all behind to go with You." Jesus told him no, to stay in his town and live his life there. The man did as God commanded.

Jesus doesn't call *ALL* of us to sacrifice every material thing and every earthly relationship in order to follow Him. We are all called to **sacrifice**, but the physical degree of that sacrifice is not always the same.

The question for us tonight is two-fold. First: What level of sacrifice of my time and my energy and my wealth and my life has God called me to? And second: **AM** I sacrificing anything for the Lord? Am I offering anything to Him? Have I answered the call and turned away from an earthly mindset to focus on Jesus and His will for my life?

Not all of us are called to be penniless missionaries in the 3rd world, but all of us *are* called to rise up and give complete control to Jesus as King. Control of our finances and our schedules and our decisions and our dreams, control of our lives. *ALL* of us are called to that; a life where we leave

everything for the direction of Jesus, who then instructs us on where to go, what to do, how to give, how to live.

The wonderful thing about the call of Jesus is that it is personal and it is continual. The words there don't only mean 'follow Me,' but they can also be translated as 'accompany Me.' Jesus wants us to accompany Him in this life He's prepared for us, day in and day out, as we labor together, as He teaches and fills us, as He unveils this amazing plan He has. He is the continual Teacher. He is the continual Forgiver. He is the continual Leader. Though our salvation is once and for all, the call to be a disciple is one that we receive every day. Jesus said that we choose daily to take up our cross and follow Him. We choose daily to pursue after Jesus or to stay seated in the place where He found us.

Matthew believed that Jesus was the Messiah and then he received the personal call. But just hearing Jesus doesn't make you a disciple. Listening doesn't equal pursuing. There had to be this moment of action. What did James say? He said "faith without works is dead." And here we understand that. Because Matthew *could've* believed it all he wanted, but if he wanted his life to change, if he wanted to be used by God, if he wanted to become who we know him to be, then there had to be action. There had to be that choice to go and follow, to engage and pursue Jesus.

Contrast Matthew with the rich young ruler in Luke 18. That guy came to Jesus and said, "I believe what You say in Your teachings, I want eternal life, what do I do?" And when Jesus gave him this same call, the man walked away sorrowful. His faith was dead because he was unwilling to turn to God and give Him control of His life. He was unwilling to relinquish his wealth. He was unwilling to sacrifice temporal things for heavenly treasure. Call and response.

There's another interesting element to the call of our man Matthew.

He was there at his tax office by the sea shore. Bible commentators like HA Ironside point out that there was a customs office where the fisherman would have to bring their catches of fish in and then pay a tax per fish. It would seem then that Levi's tax office was one of those places, who charged fishermen for their fish.

Now, Jesus was calling Matthew to not only minister to these same people that hated him, but also to live and minister **WITH** them. Peter, Andrew, James, John. Fishermen. Who in their old lives would have been ideological and practical adversaries, now brought together in Jesus Christ to live and work and minister alongside each other. Laying down those old offenses and hatreds as new creations in Christ Jesus.

If there's one thing you can learn in this section (and the verses immediately after it) about what our attitude toward others is to be as disciples, it is that we are to lay aside every prejudice, every bias, every attitude that would look at someone and say, "You're **disqualified** from my love. You're disqualified from Jesus and His righteousness. You're unworthy of my time or my compassion." That's what the Scribes and Pharisees did. That's a whole other study that we don't have time to develop tonight. But if we're not careful, we lose the attitude of a willing, compassionate disciple and we put on the attitude of a disapproving Pharisee, who looks at people and determines if they are worthy of love, worthy of grace, worthy of my time or not.

Levi was called to serve those who hated him and live in unity with them as a **new** creation.

In fact, after Levi rose and followed after Jesus, we have forever known him as Matthew, the author of the first Gospel, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Before, his name meant *joined* reminding us of us attachment to the world, but afterward his name was Matthew, which means *Gift of God*.

When God calls us, He gifts us a new life. He gifts us a new nature. He gifts us new empowering and new opportunities. He gifts us His everlasting wisdom. He gifts us His strength. He gifts us His Spirit. Our whole lives become a gift. And those gifts are irrevocable. We can choose to set those things aside, we can choose to turn back toward our old life joined with the world, but that which God has offered to us He continually offers to us morning by morning. Offering us life and a cross. Offering us hope and service. Offering us love and sacrifice.

What did Matthew do? He went home and threw a feast. He was full of joy. He was full of excitement. He wasn't penny-pinching now that he didn't have a job. A financial advisor would've told him that he needed to save as much as possible now that he was going to be a jobless, mostly homeless itinerant minister, but instead we see him celebrating and evangelizing. His attitude was one of excitement and joy and evangelism.

In this man we see a transformation. He accepted the call. He put action to his faith and, though he would eventually be called to minister to people all over the region of Galilee, he started at home with his friends and family and coworkers. He brought Jesus to them with joy and exuberance and passion. He threw a party!

And here we learn another principle about our calling as disciples: We may not all be gifted as evangelists, but all of our lives are to be evangelistic.

How do we do that?

We do it by bringing Jesus home with us. That's what Matthew did. We do it by bringing Jesus to our coworkers and friends and families. That's what Matthew did.

God is saying to us through His word and by His Spirit that, *"YES! I WANT to impact those people as well. I WANT to help them as well. They are in great need of the Great Physician."* And so, even if we are not given the specific gift of evangelism, we all are to be evangelistic in our living.

We live that way by having joy. We live that way by not complaining. We live that way by letting go of prejudices and hatreds. We live that way by following where Jesus goes and then doing what He asks us to do. That's evangelistic living. Telling people how God has changed your life and being excited about all the irrevocable wonders He has gifted to you. Showing people that you trust the Lord enough that you've given Him your future. You've given Him your decisions. You've given Him your finances and your desires. You've given Him control of those things, because You know He is the Messiah and you know He is good and you know that He has a plan for your life.

That's living evangelistically. And that's our call. To follow Jesus, to be transformed, to be used to glorify God and to bring others to Him.

God looks into your life and He says, "Nothing else in the world matters right now except you and Me. So right now, yes or no, follow Me." Discipleship is simply answering the call. The call to follow Jesus is the same for every believer. There aren't classes of calling. "Ok, you guys over here, I want

you guys to follow Me. But you guys over here, you don't need to follow me, just wait till you're dead and then we'll meet up in heaven."

Discipleship is answering the call. Getting up and receiving the gifts and the calling God has offered to you. Discipleship is about bringing action to our day to day life, where we make the choice to serve, we make the choice to trust, we make the choice to have ears to hear, we make the choice to enthrone God in our hearts.

And if we know one thing, it's that disciples of Jesus Christ can change the world. Disciples of Christ are the most satisfied, inspiring, dynamic and hopeful people on the planet. And you are one of them.

So remember, God is calling. He is calling lovingly and personally and powerfully. He has irrevocable gifts and purpose for your life. See Jesus. Hear Jesus. Believe Jesus. Follow Jesus.