

## **THE CALL OF LEVI/MATTHEW: WHAT IT MEANS TO REALLY FOLLOW JESUS**

In Hebrew, the name Levi means "joined." Matthew means "gift of Jehovah." Luke and Mark call him Levi, whereas Matthew refers to himself in his gospel as Matthew. I believe Mathew wanted everyone to know that he was once "joined" to the world, but no longer; he was now operating as one who had received the gift of eternal life and was no longer "on the take" as a tax collector but rather on the giving end of the gospel as Paul said, *"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"* (II Corinthians 5:20). I want us to study this man's call and the events surrounding his surrender to Christ. I think we will all be informed as to what it means to really follow Jesus! How can we then effectively follow Jesus?

### **1. We come to an understanding that following Jesus is an acute awareness that God's plans include us.**

Luke 5:27

This was no random meeting. Frankly, I don't believe that Christ did anything randomly. Everything He did was on purpose and had a purpose. Our Lord had just healed the paralytic man and the Lord severely rebuked the Pharisees who questioned His authority to forgive sins. So the Lord shows us in the call of Matthew just how far He is willing to go in forgiving sins *"...because He delighteth in mercy"* (Micah 7:18c). *"For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee"* (Psalm 86:5).

### **2. We come to an understanding that "Follow Me" is an all-encompassing command.**

Luke 5:28

Please observe three aspects:

#### A. Departure

After Jesus said to Matthew, *"Follow Me,"* the Bible points out that Matthew *"left all"* (Luke 5:28a). Too many times would-be disciples say, *"Lord, I will follow thee: but..."* (Luke 9:61). There can be no qualifications, no interruptions and above all, no demands on our part concerning following Jesus. It must be total surrender.

#### B. Direction

Then Matthew *"...rose up..."* (Luke 5:28b). When we follow Jesus, the only direction is up. Jesus said, *"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful"* (Matthew 13:22). We must leave the care of this world behind; there can be no competition. Again the Lord said, *"No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Luke 16:13).

#### C. Dedication

*"...And followed Him"* (Luke 5:28). Christianity is wrapped up in the person of Christ. It is not wrapped up in the duties prescribed by man. It is not living in fear of man. *"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"* (Psalm 118:6). The fear of the Lord delivers us from traps in life (Proverbs 14:27). The fear of the Lord provides incentive to turn from wrong to right (Proverbs 16:6). The fear of the Lord provides total satisfaction (Proverbs 19:23).

### **3. We come to an understanding that following Jesus means we are required to feed sinners.**

Luke 5: 29-35

For a man that made his living by "ripping" people off, this business of not only throwing a feast, but a great feast in his own house was quite remarkable and generous. He truly reflects that a great change had taken place in his life, and he invited as many of his kind (sinners) that he could.

In Luke 5:30 we see the scribes and Pharisees were deeply offended at the company our Lord had chosen to keep. Our evangelistic methods cannot be guided by the opinions of the world, even the religious world. Then our Lord

wisely pointed out that only people who admit they are sick could be healed; the others must die in their sins (Luke 5:31,32).

#### **4. We come to an understanding that following Jesus changes everything!**

Luke 5:34-39.

We see the Pharisees were doing their best to get Christ to conform to their customs and interpretations of the law by pointing out their custom of fastings. Fasting is biblical and Jesus was quick to point out there will be a time for that, specifically after He has died for our sins, risen and ascended to heaven. In Luke 18:9-14 the Lord gives the story that illustrates it is not by the things we do that bring us into relationship with God, but what He does for us when we admit we are sinners, repent and commit our life to Christ.

Our Lord then began to tell them the parable of the garment and the bottles. In Luke 5: 36, Jesus showed the problem of trying to patch an old garment with new material. In those Bible days the only materials available to use were materials such as wool and cotton, which were very susceptible to shrinkage when washed. Once the garment had been cleaned it would get to the shrunken stage and stay there. If you patch a hole with new material, upon washing, the new piece will shrink and tear the garment. Matthew and Mark point out the damaged area will actually become more damaged by the attempted repair. *"No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse"* (Mark 2:21).

In Luke 5:37-39 we see a most revealing truth. When the wine (fruit of the vine) is first captured from the wine press, it is placed into bottles. These bottles are animal skins. The animal's head was removed and the neck became the pouring spout while the legs, still attached, were sewn up to keep the liquid from escaping. As the juice ages, gases are released and the bag expands. Periodically, the juice is poured into other bottles to keep from settling on its lees as illuminated to us by Jeremiah: *"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed"* (Jeremiah 48:11). When the sediments or lees remain in the bag for a lengthy period of time, it turns the solution into sour vinegar or intoxicating wine. Here's the problem. If you try to place new wine into old bags, the new wine will expand and break the bottle where the old wine was stored because it has lost its elasticity from previous stretching. The only

thing to do is get a new bag for the new fresh fruit of the vine. By this parable Jesus is explaining that this is not an extension of an old religion, but a new thing! In joyous anticipation of Christ coming to earth, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah said, *"Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert"* (Isaiah 43:19). If you try to force Christianity into the dead, dried "form of godliness" (II Timothy 3:5) promoted and prolonged by the Pharisees, destruction will come. Sadly, Jesus said, *"No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better"* (Luke 5:39). This means our Lord is saying to the Pharisees, you are rejecting God's message and the Messenger of the New Covenant and choosing the sour vinegar which sends its ugly, pungent stench in the nostrils of a holy God (Isaiah 65:5). Also His message is that if you keep your religion long enough in your old bottles, it will become alcohol and you will lose total judgment that comes with intoxication, literally drunk on the error of your ways! Let us not choose the old wineskin over the sweet, new wine of God's favor.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.