

The Most Important Call

Brandon Phillips / General Adult

The King and His Glory / Follow Christ / Matthew 9:9–13

In Matthew 9:9a, Matthew recalls Jesus' command to follow Him. In Matthew 9:9b-13, he gives three clear results of this call.

Pre-sermon Comments

Matthew 16:18 LSB

¹⁸ “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Ephesians 6:12 LSB

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Ephesians 6:13 LSB

¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Introduction to our Text

“I started considering the plagues that sweep across parts of the planet and indiscriminately kill—more often than not, painfully—all kinds of people, the ordinary, the decent, and the rotten. And it just became crystal clear to me that it is not possible for an intelligent person to believe that there is a deity who loves.” ~ Charles Templeton

One of the Devil's most effectual methods is to instill doubts about God's goodness. ~ **R. Kent Hughes**

Luke 14:28 LSB

²⁸ “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Sermon Text

Matthew 9:9-13 LSB

⁹ And as Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he stood up and followed Him. ¹⁰ Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining *at the table* in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.*” ¹³ “But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Sermon Proposition and Outline

In [Matthew 9:9a](#), Matthew recalls Jesus command to follow Him. In Matthew 9:9b-13, he gives three clear results of this call. When Jesus commands you to follow Him, you will:

- Respond with Obedience ([Matthew 9:9b](#))
- Respond with Overflowing Joy ([Matt 9:10](#))
- Receive Overwhelming Criticism ([Matt 9:11-13](#))

Review

The Author

Matthew 9:9 LSB

⁹ And as Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he stood up and followed Him.

The Gospel of Matthew Was Written By a Profaned Character!

Who was Matthew and what was his background?

“The Talmud distinguishes two classes of ‘publicans:’ the tax-gatherer in general (Gabbai), and the Mokhes, or Mokhsa, who was specially the douanier or custom-house official. The Gabbai collected the regular dues, which consisted of ground-, income-, and poll-tax. ... The Mokhes collected a kind of duty on imports and exports, on all that was bought and sold, and on all kinds of property.” ~ Alfred Edersheim

- Gabbai = handled the basic state taxes (land, income, poll tax).
- Mokhes = handled customs duties and tolls, and was more despised because his work opened the door to corruption and abuse.

[Tax collectors] were classed with harlots and heathens. They were *excommunicated* in the synagogues, their testimony was not admitted in Jewish courts, and the Rabbis reckoned it disgraceful to associate with them.” ~ Alfred Edersheim (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book III, ch. 17, ccel.org link)

“As the Rabbis taught, there is no hope of restitution from a tax-gatherer; to take his alms was a sin. A Jew who became a publican was regarded as cut off from the congregation of Israel.” ~ Alfred Edersheim (*Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, ch. 4, biblestudytools.com link)

Matthew 9:9 LSB

⁹ And as Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he stood up and followed Him.

Discussion Questions

Pastor Brandon said he “cannot overstate the importance of the local church.” Why do you think Jesus promises in [Matthew 16:18](#) that “the gates of Hades will not overpower” His church? How does that promise encourage you to stay committed to a local body when attendance trends or cultural pressures go the other way?

The sermon noted that many people have stopped attending church or have replaced gathering with online ministries or other activities. What are some dangers of “going it alone” in the Christian life? How can we graciously encourage friends or family who have stepped away from the local church?

Pastor Brandon reminded us of [Ephesians 6:12-13](#), that our struggle is “not against flesh and blood.” How does recognizing a spiritual battle shape the way you respond to tragedies or public events? What does “taking up the full armor of God” look like in daily habits this week?

Jesus warns in [Luke 14:28](#) to “count the cost” of following Him. What “costs” have you personally experienced, or expect to experience, because you follow Christ? How does remembering the surpassing worth of Christ help you endure those costs?

Read [Matthew 9:9](#) again. Matthew leaves everything at a single command: “Follow Me.” What does this immediate obedience teach us about the nature of Jesus’ call? Where might God be calling you to take a decisive step of obedience right now?

Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners (vv. 10-11). Why was this so scandalous to the Pharisees? How can our group or church imitate Jesus’ willingness to share the table with those society—or even Christians—might consider “unclean”?

In [Matthew 9:13](#), Jesus quotes Hosea: “I desire compassion, and not sacrifice.” How can religious activity become a substitute for genuine compassion or mercy? What practical acts of compassion could you show this month?

Pastor Brandon said followers of Jesus will “receive overwhelming criticism.” Where have you seen criticism or misunderstanding because of your faith? How can we encourage one another to stand firm when criticized?

Tax collectors like Matthew were viewed as beyond hope. What does his conversion reveal about Christ’s ability to save anyone? Who in your life seems far from God, and how can this passage fuel your prayers for them?

Charles Templeton admired Jesus yet turned away because of doubts about God’s goodness. When have you wrestled with similar doubts, and how did God meet you there?

You Will Respond with Obedience ([Matthew 9:9b](#))

Matthew 9:9 LSB

⁹ And as Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he stood up and followed Him.

The command

Luke 5:28 NASB95

And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him.

Luke 19:2 LSB

² And behold, there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.

Luke 19:8 LSB

⁸ But Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have extorted anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”

Philippians 3:7 LSB

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see ~ John Newton

Hebrews 11:7 LSB

⁷ By faith Noah, being warned about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:8–10 LSB

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise, ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:23–25 LSB

²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

Hebrews 11:31 LSB

³¹ By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after welcoming the spies in peace.

Matthew 16:24–26 LSB

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ "For whoever wishes to

save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.²⁶ “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

You Will Respond with Overflowing Joy ([Matt 9:10](#))

Matthew 9:10 LSB

¹⁰ Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining *at the table* in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

Matthew 11:19 LSB

¹⁹ “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

You Will Receive Overwhelming Criticism ([Matt 9:11-13](#))

Matthew 9:11 LSB

¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”

A Dishonest Question

Matthew 23:1-7 LSB

¹ Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,² saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;³ therefore all that they tell you, do and keep, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*.⁴ “And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much* as a finger.⁵ “But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*.⁶ “And they love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues,⁷ and respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and being called Rabbi by men.

Luke 18:10–12 LSB

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ “The Pharisee stood and was praying these things to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’ ¹² ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

The Bible Teaches Us Not to Associate With Evildoers

Psalms 1:1 LSB

¹ How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the way of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Proverbs 4:14–15 LSB

¹⁴ Do not enter the path of wicked men And do not step into the way of evil men. ¹⁵ Avoid it, do not pass by it; Stray from it and pass on.

Proverbs 12:26 LSB

²⁶ The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked makes them wander about.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 LSB

²² abstain from every form of evil.

2 Corinthians 6:14 LSB

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

1 Corinthians 5:1–2 LSB

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and sexual immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. ² And you have become puffed up and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

1 Corinthians 5:3–5 LSB

³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present: ⁴ in the name

of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 5:6–7 LSB

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, also was sacrificed.

Jesus Responds to the Pharisees

Matthew 9:12 LSB

¹² But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.*”

Matthew 9:12 LSB

¹² But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.*”

Matthew 9:13 LSB

¹³ “*But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’* for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Hosea 6:6 LSB

⁶ For I delight in lovingkindness rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Exodus 34:6 LSB

⁶ Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

Without compassion they proved themselves to be more ungodly even than the despised tax-gatherers and sinners, who made no pretense of godliness. ~ John MacArthur

James 2:14–17 LSB

¹⁴ What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.

Matthew 9:13 LSB

¹³ “But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 5:6 LSB

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Conclusion:

Sinner, we shall know whether God calls you by this: if he calls, it will be an effectual call—not a call which you hear and then forget but one which produces good works. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

2 Corinthians 5:21 LSB

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Exodus 34:6 LSB

⁶ Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

Discussion Questions

Irresistible Command – Jesus simply says, “Follow Me,” and Matthew immediately obeys ([Matt 9:9](#); [Luke 5:28](#)). What does this teach about the authority of Jesus’ call? How does this compare to your own experience of coming to faith?

Counting the Cost – Matthew left wealth, security, and career ([Phil 3:7](#)). What might “leaving everything” look like in our culture today?

Overflowing Joy – Matthew hosted a banquet for other “tax collectors and sinners” ([Matt 9:10](#)). Why is joy a natural fruit of salvation? How can we cultivate that same eagerness to share Christ with friends and neighbors?

New Believer Zeal – The sermon compared Matthew’s excitement to new believers today. How can seasoned Christians keep their first-love passion alive ([Rev 2:4-5](#))? What practical ways can your group encourage someone recently saved?

Expecting Opposition – The Pharisees grumbled at Jesus’ table fellowship ([Matt 9:11](#)). When have you faced criticism for preaching the truth or sharing the gospel? How does Jesus’ response in [Matt 9:12-13](#) help you endure misunderstanding?

Association without Compromise – Scripture warns against joining in sin (e.g., [2 Cor 6:14](#)). How do we balance Jesus’ example of befriending sinners with the call to holiness? What safeguards help you engage the lost without drifting toward their lifestyle?

“I Desire Compassion, Not Sacrifice” – Quoting [Hosea 6:6](#), Jesus rebuked the Pharisees. In what ways can religious activity become empty sacrifice? Where might God be calling you to show concrete mercy this week?

Avoiding a Pharisaical Spirit – The Pharisees added burdens but offered no cure. What signs warn that we are slipping into self-righteousness? How can the gospel free us from judging others while still calling sin what it is?

Faith That Acts – [Hebrews 11](#) highlights Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Rahab who obeyed despite risk. Which example most challenges you to step out in faith?

Compassionate Reputation – The sermon closed by asking if people know us more for what we hate than for Christ’s love. How would your neighbors and your family describe your witness?

The Gospel

God

Created and owns everything

[Gen 1:1](#)—*In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth*

[Psalms 24:1](#)—*The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it.*

Is Perfectly Holy

[1 John 1:5](#)—*This is the message we heard from Him and announce to you that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.*

[Matt 5:48](#)—*Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Requires perfect obedience to His Law

[James 2:10](#)—*for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*

Man

Has broken God's law

[Rom 3:10,23](#)—*there is none righteous, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

Will pay the eternal penalty for his sin

[Rom. 6:23](#)—*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*

Cannot save himself by his good works

[Titus 3:5](#)—*He saved us not based on works which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*

Christ

Came to earth both as God and sinless man

[Col 2:9](#)—*For in Him the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form*

Demonstrated God's love by dying on the cross to pay sin's penalty

[Rom 5:8](#)—*But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*

[2 Cor 5:21](#)—*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Rose from the grave and is alive today

[1 Cor 15:4](#)—*And that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*

Sinners

Must repent of all that dishonors God

[Isa 55:7](#)—*Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*

[Luke 9:23](#)—*if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*

Must believe in Christ as Lord and Savior

[Rom 10:9](#)—*that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.*

Will you repent and believe in Christ?

[Acts 17:30](#)—*therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance God is declaring to men that all everywhere should repent.*

Don't hesitate to contact Pastor Brandon or Pastor Keith if you have any questions about this sermon or if you would like to know how to follow Christ.

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Additional Quotes

Jesus Christ never asks anyone to define his position or to understand a creed, but “Who am I to you?” Jesus Christ makes the whole of human destiny depend on a man’s relationship to himself. ~ **Oswald Chambers (Lecturer and Missionary)**

We all know what our own cross is. And if our Heavenly Father has appointed it for us, we must take it up and follow Christ! ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

When Jesus said, “I am the Way,” He clearly intended to exclude all other ways, so beware lest you perish in any one of them! ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

We talk about the joys and comforts of salvation; Jesus Christ talks about taking up the cross and following him. ~ **Oswald Chambers (Lecturer and Missionary)**

Thus, submitting to God and following Jesus means walking the road of rejection. ~ **Darrell L. Bock**

If something gets in the way of following Jesus, we must get rid of it. ~ **John Piper**

He had given his life to following Jesus. But he never gave Jesus his heart. ~ **John F. MacArthur**

God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. ~ **John Murray (Professor)**

The first work of the Holy Spirit is what theologians term “the effectual call.” ~ **James Montgomery Boice**

All who have heard the Gospel preached have been called to some extent. The Word of God calls every sinner to repent and trust the Savior, but that call brings nobody to Christ unless it is accompanied by the special effectual call of the Holy Spirit. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

The general call of the gospel is like the common “cluck” of the hen which she is always giving when her chickens are around her. But if there is any danger impending, then she gives a very peculiar call, quite different from the ordinary one, and the little chicks come running as fast as they can, and hide for safety under her wings. That is the call we want, God’s peculiar and effectual call to his own. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

Call” and its cognates are used by Paul to express an “effectual” calling. What is meant is not an “invitation” but the powerful and irresistible reaching out of God in grace to bring people into his kingdom. ~ **Douglas J. Moo**

Effectual calling, sometimes called the *internal call*, is this: God sovereignly, efficaciously summons (John Murray’s word) the elect into fellowship with Christ. ~ **John Frame**

They were set apart before they were created, they were legally set apart by the purchase of Christ, they are manifestly and visibly set apart by the effectual calling of the Spirit of grace. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

There is also an effectual call of God in the life of the believer. It is a call that brings about its desired effect. Effectual calling is related to the power of God in regenerating the sinner from spiritual death. It is sometimes referred to as “irresistible grace.” ~ **R. C. Sproul**

Many people will find themselves in hell eventually who have heard the general call. There are men who are living in sin and gloating in it who can tell you exactly what the gospel says. They can describe what the call to

repentance means, and what the offer of the gospel means. They have a general intellectual knowledge of it. They have heard the general call, but they have not responded to it; it has not been 'effectual' in their cases. ~ **David**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Welsh Preacher and Writer)

God's sovereignty in election, redemption, effectual calling, and regeneration does not render humans' response to the gospel irrelevant. Rather, God's initiating power makes our believing response possible by imparting life to the dead. ~ **R. C. Sproul**

The other kind of call is internal, specific, and effectual. That is, it not only issues the invitation, it also provides the ability or willingness to respond positively. It is God's drawing to himself or bringing to spiritual life the one who without that call would remain spiritually dead and far from him. ~ **James Montgomery Boice**

The preaching of the gospel represents the outward call of God. This call is heard audibly by both the elect and the nonelect. Human beings have the ability to resist and refuse the outward call. He will not respond to the outward call in faith unless or until the outward call is accompanied by the effectual inward call of the Holy Spirit. ~ **R. C. Sproul**

Effectual calling is the *sovereign summons* of God. ~ **Joel Beeke; Paul M. Smalley**

God "stirs up" the spirits of His elect when the effectual call comes to them, and not till then do they have any willingness to respond to the Divine proclamation. ~ **Arthur Walkington Pink**

The evidence of God's effectual call is a heart made willing to respond. Divine grace is able to subdue every lust, conquer every prejudice, surmount every difficulty. ~ **Arthur Walkington Pink**