

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 80

Follow Me

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 9th February, 1992**

Text: *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him” (Matthew 9. 9).*

With what beautiful simplicity does the Apostle Matthew give this account of his own call by grace. I think you will notice that there always is this humility with Matthew. Look how he describes himself: “a man named Matthew.” Of course, in the other Gospels, Matthew is referred to by another name, Levi. If you compare the references to Matthew or Levi, when Matthew writes himself or when the other Gospel writers write, you will notice there is a difference. You will notice that Matthew always humbles himself. *They* speak about Levi or Matthew; *he* speaks about himself as “Matthew the publican.” As you know, the disciples are always mentioned in twos, Matthew and Thomas together. All the other Gospels speak about Matthew and Thomas. Matthew himself does not; he says, Thomas and Matthew.

But there is such a beautiful simplicity here. The grace of God, beloved friends, will humble us, will make us take the lowest place. This is one of the chief marks of real religion, of the Holy Spirit's work. It will humble us. We shall not put ourselves in a good light. We shall be made willing to take the lowest place, to acknowledge our complete sinfulness, our complete unworthiness.

“A man named Matthew.” This was one of the apostles of the Lamb. But look at the simplicity of his calling. There he is, a publican, a tax gatherer, sitting at the receipt of custom, and the Lord Jesus passes by. He speaks two words: “Follow Me.” “And he arose and followed Him.” That is the power of grace. That is what we mean by effectual calling. But the simplicity of it! Never chalk down lines and expect the Lord to walk between, especially in the way you are going to be called, the way you are going to be delivered, the way you are going to be led. Sometimes we read these old books, and read some remarkable experience, and we think, I would like it to be something like that with me. But sometimes the

Lord deals so simply. Yet the point that matters is the blessed reality of it, and the effect of it, and the enduring of it. “Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.” There is such a thing as spiritual pride, to seek some great thing; if only I could go before the church and tell them such an experience! “Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.” O how simply the Lord sometimes deals! But the point is the reality, first of all, and secondly, the effect, and thirdly, the endurance of it. If the Lord deals, and He is a sovereign, there will always be the three things: the reality, and the effect, and it will last.

“He saw a man, named Matthew, and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Matthew looks back. He can never forget the first meeting he had with the Lord, when the Lord began to deal with him. Can some of you look back and remember that first meeting, the time the Lord began to deal with you? The point is this: as the Lord Jesus passed forth from thence, He found Matthew, He found him out. Can you go back to that time when the Lord first found you out, when His Word found you out, when the preaching found you out, and showed you where you were, a lost sinner on the brink of a never-ending eternity? It is a wonderful thing when the Lord finds us. “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.” But has the Lord found you, has His Word found you, has it found you out? Is there one here this morning who from an honest heart can say,

“Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God”?

Perhaps some of you can go on:

“He, to save my soul from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.”

Well, can you go back to how the Lord found you out? Matthew could never forget his first sight of the Saviour, his first knowledge of the dear Saviour, the attraction he saw in Him. Now,

“Dost mind the place, the spot of ground,
Where Jesus did thee meet?”

When you first by faith saw the Lord Jesus, when you first had a little glimpse of Him, when He was first made attractive to you.

“He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Now here, we see the almighty power of the Lord Jesus in salvation. This was a hard case, a most unlikely case, “a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom.” That is, he was gathering in the taxes in this busy little town of Capernaum. I think I have explained to you when speaking of Zacchaeus what these publicans, these tax gatherers were. The Roman government was bitterly hated, but these men undertook to collect the taxes for the Roman government, and in return, they paid a sum of money. They did not just get back the sum of money they paid. They would get back twice as much, ten times as much, by dishonesty, by cruel extortion. So a publican became a name for a notorious sinner, dishonest, unscrupulous, taken up with earthly riches, seeking only this world’s goods. And Matthew was one of them.

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Matthew was a chosen sheep. Matthew was a sheep redeemed by blood. And,

“There is a period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in.”

Jesus is a mighty Saviour, not just in the Bible, not just in the hymnbook, but in reality. He does not try to save; He does not propose salvation; He powerfully, sovereignly saves. He says, “Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.”

There is hope here, there is encouragement, as we pray for our children, our young people, for the dead in sin in our congregation. There is hope for our preaching. There is not any sinner beyond the power of God. It is an easy thing for the Lord to save the vilest of sinners, the most hard-hearted of sinners. For,

“The vilest of sinners forgiveness have found,
For Jesus was humbled that grace might abound.”

“He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me” – the same voice which in creation

said, "Let there be light," and there was light. So it is when a sinner is called by grace, that same divine word, Let there be light, and divine light flows into a sinner's heart, shows him the vanity of the world, the emptiness of it, his lost condition. Let there be light, and there was light. It is the same voice that spoke in creation that here said, "Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." "My sheep hear My voice." Have you heard it? "And I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

"He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." Just an observation in passing. Matthew was one of the most honoured men who ever lived. What do I mean? He was the one who was chosen by God to write the first book of the New Testament, the first of the Gospels. Why Matthew? Why a man who had been a publican? Out of the twelve disciples, there were just two of them who were chosen to write Gospels. Then the Lord went outside. We do not know why Mark should be chosen, nor Luke. But out of the twelve disciples, as you read through the accounts of them, which two would you have chosen? You say, the beloved John, that seems obvious. Well, the Lord chose him. But of the others, Matthew, we hear next to nothing of him, we read next to nothing of him, but this is the one God has appointed from all eternity to write the opening book of the New Testament. The Lord will find him out and the Lord will call him and the Lord will prepare him and the Lord will use him. When the Lord needs a man, that man will never be wanting. He may be a monk, sunk in Romanism as Luther was, but if he is the one the Lord is going to use, then,

"His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfil some deep design."

"He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." The evidence of the reality of this very simple work of calling is his repentance. That is what repentance is: "He arose, and followed Him." You see, there is a following of the Lord Jesus in a way of repentance, a

way that leads right out of the world, a way that forsakes sin and self, a way which dies to your past life. There is no hope, no salvation, no heaven without repentance. And a great part of repentance is this: Follow Me. It is a leaving the world, a leaving your former ways and your past life and your former sins and associations. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” – that willingness to leave all and follow Him. Jesus said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” “And he arose, and followed Him.”

“As of old apostles heard Him,
By the Galilean lake;
Turned from home and friends and kindred,
Leaving all for His dear sake.”

“And he arose, and followed Him.” He is worthy to be followed. He deserves to be followed. Satan does not deserve to be followed. The world does not deserve to be followed. Sin does not deserve to be followed. Now the Lord Jesus is well worthy of being followed. Whenever the gospel is being preached, there is that outward call of the gospel. The lives of godly people bear witness to it. Every affliction bears witness to it, and every bereavement bears witness to it, and every time you read the Word of God it bears witness to it, the vital need, the vital necessity of following the Lord Jesus. O but it is that personal call, that effectual call, when the Lord Jesus comes right where you are, and lays His almighty hand upon you, and says unto you, “Follow Me.” I am not suggesting that the majority of people who are called by grace are called according to these details, that it is that literal word that the Lord Jesus drops in their heart; but what I am sure of is that when the Holy Ghost works and when He calls a sinner by grace, when the new birth takes place, when repentance is given, then there always is a rising up and a following of Him. “He arose.” It was a resurrection for Matthew, and it will be a resurrection for you. It was a new life for Matthew; it will be a new life for you. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” O but the power of the Holy Spirit’s work when He calls by grace! But there will be that new life, and there will be an arising and a following of the Lord Jesus.

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Now first of all there is a following of the Lord Jesus as a disciple. We

find from Scripture that a disciple and a real Christian and a follower of the Lord Jesus are one and the same thing. What is a disciple? One who follows the Lord Jesus, to be graciously taught by Him. “He arose, and followed Him.” There must be a following of the Lord Jesus as His disciple if our religion is real. He says, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” That is following Him as a disciple. “Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” We shall feel that need of being taught, of being instructed by the Lord. Our prayer will be, “Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths.” A follower of the Lord Jesus, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, is one brought to sit at His feet and to learn of Him. O the lessons we need to learn: our own sinfulness, our own unworthiness and guilt, our own helplessness, the riches of mercy, the riches of grace, the power of the Saviour to save, the preciousness of His blood, the wonders of His righteousness, the value of His all-prevailing intercession. We need to learn these things.

“Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him” – a true disciple, sitting at the Saviour’s feet, to be taught by Him, to learn of Him. However much we know, we know very little. But “they shall be all taught of God.” We do need to be true disciples like Matthew, and we do need to follow after the Lord, and to follow on to know the Lord. And we do need to be graciously led and taught by Him. That is a beautiful word, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye.” O to be taught lessons concerning the love of the Lord Jesus, lessons concerning Calvary, lessons concerning His power to save, His power to deliver, His power to keep, His power to hear and answer prayer!

So there is a following of the Lord Jesus as His disciples, that we might know Him and learn of Him, be taught by Him, because we are so feeble, sinful, ignorant, there is so much we do not know, so much we need to know. That is a good prayer for the followers of the Lamb: “That which I see not teach Thou me.” In my own heart, in providence, in the way I have to go – “That which I see not teach Thou me.”

“He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” And then beloved friends, if the Lord has dealings with us, there will be a following of the Lord Jesus by faith. I think of that word,

“Dear Jesus, my Saviour, Thy truth I embrace –
Thy name and Thy natures, Thy Spirit and grace,”

– now this is it:

“And trace the pure footsteps of Jesus, my Lord.”

There will be a following of the Lord Jesus by faith. You will follow Him in His eternal glory, the Son of God from everlasting. You will follow Him in His covenant engagements from eternity. You will follow Him as He became Man, as He became incarnate in the fulness of time, “made of a woman, made under the law.” And you will follow Him throughout the whole of His earthly life. Do you ever contemplate this, meditate on it? Follow Him by faith, follow Him to Jordan where He was baptized by John, follow Him in the wilderness, tempted by the devil; follow Him in his gracious teaching, and the miracles He performed? Do you by faith think of Gethsemane where He sweat great drops of blood, and the judgment hall, and then Calvary?

“Conduct, blest Guide, Thy sinner-train
To Calvary, where the Lamb was slain.”

Do you think of His great love, His bitter sufferings, His death, the reason for it? Do you follow Him to the tomb? “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” In His glorious resurrection and ascension, do you follow Him to heaven, a Lamb as it had been slain in the midst of the throne?

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” There is a following of the Lord Jesus in His goings forth from everlasting to everlasting. The effect of it will be this: from an honest heart you will say, “Thou, O Christ, art all I want.” You will find there all you want as you follow the Lord Jesus, as by faith you follow the pure footsteps of Jesus your Lord. You will say, “There is all my hope, my salvation, my foundation. If ever my poor soul be saved, then this must be the way.”

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” And then there is a following Him in the narrow way which leads to life, a following of Him in your pilgrimage. When He calls His own sheep by name, He leads them forth and the sheep follow Him. It is in that narrow way which leads to heaven. “Go thy way forth by the footsteps, of the flock.” So there will be that following Him in your pilgrimage. O the great point is to be a follower of the Lamb. “Jesus also, that He might

sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” Now there is a following of the Lord Jesus. There is a walking it out, a leaving the world, a going after Him in that narrow way which leads to heaven.

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” And then there is a following of the Lord Jesus in His despised ordinances.

“Jesus says, ‘Let each believer
Be baptized in My name.’
He Himself, in Jordan’s river,
Was immersed beneath the stream.”

“And he saith unto him, Follow Me.” Now there are many things in believers’ baptism. It is a making of an open profession, a profession to die to sin and your past life, and to live unto God, to rise again to newness of life, a profession that your only hope as a sinner – and it is an ordinance for sinners – your only hope is built on the death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God. Now it *is* that, but there is also something very beautiful in this: it is a following of the Lord Jesus. Some of us have felt what a sacred privilege to be permitted to follow the Lord Jesus. O that amazing scene when Jesus cometh to Jordan to be baptized of John! He did not send for John. He did not summon him. He came to Jordan to John to be baptized of him. You can see how John shrank from it; it was too much for him. He said, “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?” “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us” – not just *Me* – “it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him.” And that matchless display of love and mercy and divine approbation in the River Jordan: there the dear eternal Son of God incarnate, taken by John and immersed beneath Jordan’s stream, and the Holy Ghost descending like a sacred Dove upon His head, and the voice of the eternal Father from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And so the Lord Jesus in love and humility and condescension set the example for all His people – His people’s pattern. “And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.”

“And He saith unto him, Follow Me.” “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” “And His commandments are not grievous.” Now you

remember how in the closing chapter of John, after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus had so many things to say to His immediate disciples. Peter pointed to John and said, “What shall this man do?” Now the answer of the Lord Jesus was a tender, loving rebuke. He said, “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.” Some of us have had to know something of that. You have to leave all these other things. “What is that to thee?” Other people and other things. You say, look at this one, so godly; he has not followed the Lord. “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.” You say, look at this other one, he did follow the Lord. Look what has happened to him. Look what he has done. “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.” Then you say, look at some people who are actually in the church and how far short they come in that profession. Now you are not looking for a perfect church, are you? You will never find one, or if you do find one, do not join it, because if you do, it will not be perfect any longer. Jesus says, “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.”

“And he arose, and followed Him.” Then you see, there is a following of the Lord Jesus in our Christian life, His example – a higher standard than the law of works. You young people, sometimes you wonder whether something is right or wrong, whether it is permitted, whether you can do it or whether it would be better if you do not. The Lord Jesus says, “Follow Me.” In other words, do you think the Lord Jesus would have done it? If not you would be better not doing it. “He saith unto him, Follow Me.” It is the standard for the whole of our Christian life, to follow the loving example of the Lord Jesus, to follow His teaching, to follow His commandments. “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” This is it: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”

“He saith unto him, Follow Me.” Now some people follow a man. Some people follow custom. Some people follow fashion. Some people follow the world. “He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Beloved friends, the character of the redeemed is given like this: “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” It is that second half: “These are they which follow the Lamb” – you say, so far, so good; I do – *“whithersoever He goeth.”*

“He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Beloved friends, the greatest honour you and I can ever have is to be a follower of the Lamb, a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus. It transcends all earthly honours, to be a follower of the Lord Jesus. Also, beloved friends, it is the one thing that really matters. When we come to the end, other things will not matter, but this will. Was I ever made a true Christian through the new birth? Was I ever made a real disciple? Was I ever enabled to take up my cross and follow Him in the narrow way which leads to heaven? This is the only thing that matters, to be a follower of the Lord Jesus. And in the last great day, when time is no more, when the earth melts in flames, when the heavens are rolled up as a scroll, the only thing that will matter for you and me will be this: was I a follower of the Lamb? Was I made a real Christian?

“When He reveals the Book of Life,
O may I find my name
Among the chosen of His love,
The followers of the Lamb!”

It is the only thing that matters. “And He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.”