

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 119

The Calling of Matthew

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 12th January, 1995**

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).*

Really, this work has been going on ever since: the gospel the power of God unto salvation, the power of God’s grace, not proposing or suggesting but effectually calling. “He arose, and followed Him.” Mind you, beloved friends, the way, the manner, the circumstances are so different – sometimes more powerful, sometimes more gentle; sometimes very suddenly, sometimes over a period of time – but the effect is the same: “And he arose, and followed Him.” We have all the marks of true repentance here, all the marks of a true call by grace, all the marks of true, spiritual conversion. It is the effect of it: “He arose, and followed Him.” You see, beloved friends, repentance is not just feeling sorry for our sins or sorry for our past life. The little children’s hymn comes very close:

“Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing them no more.”

A person may shed many bitter tears, but if that person’s life remains unchanged, unaltered, there is no repentance. If there is no forsaking of sin, no forsaking the world, then there is no repentance, however bitter the tears which are wept. But sometimes there is not the same pouring-out of bitter tears, but there is the gracious, clear effect seen, the leaving the world, the giving up all for Jesus’ sake. Now that is repentance. Of course, really there are the two things together: being sorry for sin and forsaking it. “He arose, and followed Him.”

We read here, “He (Jesus) saw a man named Matthew.” This, of course, was Matthew, one of the twelve apostles, Matthew who sometimes in the other gospels is called Levi. And we are told that he was a publican. He sat at the receipt of custom. Just a word on this. These publicans, these tax collectors who sat at the receipt of custom, were almost entirely

most deceitful, dishonest men and also extremely wealthy men. There were the two things that marked them. There is not the slightest reason to suggest Matthew was any different. The hated Roman invaders employed them, and these tax collectors paid a certain amount of money for the right to be a tax collector and then in return they could get as much back as they wanted. So there was the wickedness, the deceitfulness, and also the extreme wealth.

“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.” Such was the power of the word, such was its gracious effect, that he left his sins and his wicked life and gave them up, and gave them up for ever in obedience to the Lord’s commandment. Now this is repentance. A minister might speak of these things week after week, week after week, but let the Lord seal it home to a sinner’s heart and then there is the immediate effect, the true repentance. “And he arose, and followed Him.” He left his sins; he left them for ever. He left his past life; he left it for ever. He died to sin, died to his past life, died to self. That is repentance. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” If only the Lord would speak the word in our midst, “Follow Me,” then there would be many who would arise and follow Him.

But there was a second thing which marked his repentance and the reality of his religion. Not only did he forsake his sins and past life, but what did he give up for Jesus’ sake? The wealth, the profit, the position. And he gave it up in a moment. That is the power of grace in a sinner’s heart. He did it immediately. Do you believe it, that the Lord can change a heart, a life, immediately? We do not know, we are not told, but there is nothing to suggest that Matthew was any different before, but in a moment his life was changed and it was changed for ever.

“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 I wonder how many of you can trace that those two things have taken place in your lives, whether in a moment, or over a few or many years. First of all, you have been convinced of the wrongness, the sinfulness of your life, the things you do, the places you go, your sinful nature. And under the power of grace your life has been completely changed. You have had to leave the world. You have had to leave your past ways, your

past sins. Then secondly, along with it, what have you had to give up for Jesus' sake? Because, beloved friends, do not think the possession of repentance is contrary to love. A person can repent and love, and as he is blessed with true repentance and as he is blessed with faith in the Lord Jesus, so he is blessed with love. With this man Matthew, it was not just a leaving his sinful self and his sinful past life and the world, but it was a going forth after the Lord Jesus. "Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." Henceforth there was a personal relationship with the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." There was a going forth after the Lord Jesus. He wanted Him. He wanted to be with Him. It was for Jesus' sake that he was willing to part with sin and self and his past life. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

"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." There was more than the power of nature here. There was the power of grace here. There was divine power here. "Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him." Some follow a man; some follow the ways of the world; some follow fashion. The Lord Jesus says, "Follow *Me*." And the mark of the redeemed is given: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

"And he arose, and followed Him." I just want to say one or two things concerning Matthew, his life, his witness and his testimony. One thing which has been remarked is the humility which always shines forth whenever Matthew is mentioned – humble, self-abased. He is the only one who refers to himself in the list of the apostles as "Matthew the publican." He can never forget what he was, what he deserved, and what the Lord had done for him. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." Another thing has been noticed. Whenever the names of the apostles are given, Thomas is always mentioned along with Matthew. No doubt you have noticed this: every time the apostles are mentioned, it is two and two and two. It has been noticed that all the other evangelists or any other parts of Scripture always speak of Matthew and Thomas, except when Matthew is writing himself, and then he says, Thomas and Matthew.

Remarkably, apart from this account of his calling and what took place immediately afterwards, we know nothing whatsoever about Matthew. There are many, many traditions in the Christian church, but we know nothing surely. Both Mark and Luke tell us that immediately after his call by grace he made a great feast for the Lord Jesus and he invited his friends. In other words, he was not ashamed of the Saviour. He wanted to be identified with Him. He was willing to be openly identified with Him. Of course, it was at this wonderful gathering that the Lord Jesus spoke the well-known word, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." But throughout all the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles we do not read one word that Matthew spoke, one thing that he did. So many of the other disciples, we read of various things they said; not Matthew. He is just passed over in silence, in oblivion.

But there was one work the Lord had called him to and that was to write this wonderful gospel. That was Matthew's great work. Dear, honoured, favoured man, he was the one who wrote, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save his people from their sins." He was the one who wrote that Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Dear, honoured, favoured man, to be privileged to write by divine inspiration the first book of the New Testament. Yet we do not know anything about his life and throughout the Word of God we do not read of one thing he said. We see in this the mystery of divine sovereignty. God will use whom He will and He will use them in the way that He will. You do not read of anything remarkable, anything special, anything outstanding about Matthew, but he is the one God appoints to write this wonderful gospel. God will use whom He will. And some of the apostles in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they spoke some most beautiful words, some most wonderful words. Not Matthew; he is silent. But to him was entrusted something completely different. May we not try to do things the Lord has not appointed for us. Matthew was not, it seems, to be a great preacher, but he was a most blessed writer. Look at some of these other disciples, what you read about them, but they were never privileged to write part of the Word of God. We do not know what the Lord has appointed for us. It may be we expect one thing, but it is something else. The Lord is sovereign, sovereign in the way He gives

gifts, sovereign in the way He uses them, sovereign in the way in which He blesses His people.

“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.” Luke adds, “He *left all*, rose up, and followed Him.” The Lord Jesus still bids us follow Him today. The emphasis is, Follow *Me*, a glorious Person, a divine Person, Jesus the Son of God, Jesus who bled and died on Calvary’s cross, Jesus who rose triumphant, Jesus who ever lives and reigns in heaven. “Follow Me.” It centres in a Person. It is not just a creed, though there must be a creed. It is a Person, a glorious Person. It is this personal relationship with the Saviour. “Follow *Me*. And he arose, and followed Him.” We think of the hymn:

“Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult
Of this life’s tempestuous sea
Day by day His sweet voice calleth,
Saying, ‘Christian, follow *Me*.’“

“And he arose, and followed Him.” Beloved friends, there is first of all a following of the Lord Jesus by faith. As the Holy Spirit calls us and blesses us with true faith, there is a following of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith. We follow Him in His goings forth which are from of old, from everlasting, in His condescension, His mysterious incarnation, His holy life, His teaching, His miracles. And we follow Him by faith to the garden and the cross. We see Him agonise and bleed and die. We see the reason why, that sinners might be saved. We hear the triumphant cry, “It is finished.” We follow Him from the cross to the tomb and to the Mount of Olives and we see Him ascend into heaven, a once crucified, risen, exalted Saviour. Now faith delights to follow the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in all that He is and in all that He has done. And it is this: as the Holy Spirit enables you to follow Him by faith, then there is a drawing towards Him. There is a drawing after Him. There is a sweet attraction in Him. You feel, This is what I want; this is what I seek. You feel, This is my only hope. So faith goes after Him and it rests upon Him. It looks to Him for salvation. It looks to Him and Him alone. It ventures on Him. It depends completely on Him. It trusts in Him, His Person, His merit, His finished work, His great salvation. In a word it is this:

“Dear Jesus, my Saviour, Thy truth I embrace –
Thy name and Thy natures, Thy Spirit and grace;
And trace the pure footsteps of Jesus, my Lord,
And glory in Him whom proud sinners abhorred.”

“Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” Then you see also, and it is still by faith, as constrained by love, there is a following of the Lord Jesus in the narrow way which leads to eternal life. “He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” There is a taking up the cross; there is a counting the cost; but there is a going forth after the Lord Jesus as He has led the way to heaven.

“In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.”

“He arose.” It is an arising. It is a spiritual resurrection. It is the power of God. It is rising from your old life to a new. O but to be led forth by His Spirit in the narrow way which leads to heaven, following Jesus. “His track I see, and I’ll pursue the narrow way, till Him I view.” It is going forth after the Lord Jesus. It is following Him as He has gone before. “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” It is following His gracious example. It is following Him as He walked the pathway of sorrow and tribulation. Some of you are in it tonight, but in your sorrow, your tribulation, may you sweetly realise the privilege of following the Saviour. “For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” It is following the Lord Jesus with your eyes fixed upon Him. “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.” It is following the Lord Jesus, looking to Him, depending upon Him for all your help, all your supplies. It is following the Lord Jesus. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps.”

“He saith unto Him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.” There is a following Him in His despised ordinances. He still says, “This do in remembrance of Me.” O may those to whom the Lord Jesus

has made Himself precious, those who feel His love, O may you hear that word with power: “Follow *Me*. And he arose, and followed Him.”

Beloved friends the great thing here below is to be a follower of the Lamb. When we come to the end, this will be the one thing which really matters. So many things then will sink into insignificance. O but this: was I, were you, a follower of the Lamb? That little hymn, in my early days at Bethel we seemed to sing it a lot at the prayer meetings:

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

“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.”