

**GR6-35**  
**000716AM**

## Following Jesus

Revelation 17 - Why I'm Not A Roman Catholic

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Those two words, so full of power, are **FOLLOWING JESUS**. This morning I encourage you to look at Christ's call of Matthew in Mark 2:13-17, and see if you also are willing to Follow Jesus! Working by the Port of Capernaum was a beautiful job. This picturesque fishing village was an ideal spot for the tax booth Matthew ran on behalf of Rome's puppet, Herod Antipas. From his seat he saw the world passing by. Galilee [1] was the land bridge between Europe and Africa; all land traffic must go through her. The Land at this time was divided up. Judaea was a Roman province under a Roman procurator; Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great; to the east the territory which included Gaulonitis, Trachonitis and Batanaea was ruled by Philip, another of Herod's sons. On the way from Philip's territory to Herod's domains, Capernaum was the first town to which the traveler came. It was by its very nature a frontier town; because of that it was a customs' center. In those days there were import and export taxes and Capernaum must have been the place where they were collected. And that is where Matthew worked. From regiments to caravans they slowly flowed up and down the Roman Road that stretched from Roman Egypt to Roman Babylon. Some traffic even slipped over from the great Roman highway to Damascus. Along these main arteries came caravans carrying the wealth of the nations. Gold, silver, precious spices, cloth, silk, ivory, and many more desirable commodities were brought in abundance, and this presented a tremendous opportunity for the tax gatherers to become wealthy. Determined to reach a financial harvest, Caesar had commissioned his tax gatherers to get as much money as possible from everybody. The officials were given a franchise; they were expected to reach a certain quota, but anything in excess of the stated figure, they kept. Many of the more unscrupulous tax gatherers had become wealthy at the expense of their victims. Everybody detested the tax collectors, for the officials were experts at swindling their own people. Yet, there was not much that ordinary folk could do about the matter, for the tramp of soldiers was a constant reminder that the power of Rome was there to suppress insurrection. One of the detested tax gatherers was named Levi. So the call Jesus gave in v. 14 to Levi (Matthew) has only two words: FOLLOW ME. Those two words encompass all there is to the Christian Life.

This morning we have come to the record of Christ's call of Matthew. This morning we look again through the eyes of Peter, and read the story written down under the Holy Spirit's guidance by the pen of Mark in the Gospel by Mark 2:13-17.

- Serving God is **FOLLOWING JESUS**.
- Loving God is **FOLLOWING JESUS**.
- Trusting God is **FOLLOWING JESUS**.
- Obeying God is **FOLLOWING JESUS**.
- Worshiping God is **FOLLOWING JESUS**.

### **Are You FOLLOWING JESUS?**

- Following Jesus is the description Jesus gave of His call to Salvation:

Mark 8:34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, **and follow Me**. (Also cited in Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23)

John 10:27-29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and **they follow Me**.<sup>28</sup> "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.<sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

- Following Jesus is the description Jesus gave of the road to Eternal Life  
Mark 10:17, 21 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” 21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, **and follow Me.**”

- Following Jesus is the description Paul gave to describe his own salvation and Christian Life  
Philippians 3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: **but I follow after**, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (KJV)

- Following Jesus is the description Paul gave Timothy for how he was to be a good servant of Christ  
1 Timothy 6:11-12 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; **and follow after** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (KJV)  
2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: **but follow** righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (KJV)

- Following Jesus is the description Peter gave to describe our call to the Christian Life  
1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye **should follow His steps**:

- Following Jesus is the description Jesus gave of how we face the End of Life  
Psalm 23:1-6 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...He leads me ... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me. . . And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

- Following Jesus is the description Jesus gave of our Eternal Joy in Heaven  
Revelation 14:1, 4 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him ... **the ones who follow the Lamb** wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Following Jesus is the hallmark of the life of a man we know as Matthew. This morning we are looking at one of the clearest and most dramatic conversions in the New Testament. Matthew [2] the publican-tax collector, resided in Capernaum. This makes it absolutely certain that he knew of Jesus before he was called. No man could live in that town in those days without hearing of “mighty works” done in and around it. Heaven had been opened right above Capernaum, in view of all, and the angels had been thronging down upon the Son of man. Lepers were cleansed, and demoniacs dispossessed; blind men received their sight, and palsied men the use of their limbs; one woman was cured of a chronic malady, and another, daughter of a distinguished citizen,—Jairus, ruler of the synagogue,—was brought back to life from the dead. These things were done publicly, made a great noise, and were much remarked on. The Gospels relate how the people “were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him;” how they glorified God, saying, “We never saw it on this fashion,” or, “we have seen strange things today.” Matthew himself concludes his account of the raising of Jairus’ daughter with the remark: “The fame hereof went abroad into all that land.”

So here in Matthew’s own back yard had sprung up the Headquarters of the Man from Nazareth. Here the crowds had surged, the sounds of their excited voices had filled the roads. And here, sitting, listening, and observing was Levi, known to us as Matthew. Abandoning his tribal opportunity to serve as a Levite, he had a career. Branded with the title of publican, he was associated with the lowest, vilest, and most despised.

Miracles of themselves could make no man a believer, otherwise all the people of Capernaum should have believed. Of this city He said bitterly: “Thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Christ’s complaint against the inhabitants of these favored cities was that they did not *repent*, that is, make the kingdom of heaven their chief good and chief end. They wondered sufficiently at His miracles, and talked abundantly of them, and ran hurriedly after Him to see more works of the same kind, and enjoyed amazedly the sensation of Christ’s works; but after a while they relapsed into their old stupidity and listlessness, and remained morally as they had been before He came among them, not children of the kingdom, but children of this world.

**It was not so with the collector of customs. He not merely wondered and talked, but he “repented.”** And from that tax collector’s booth one day, rose a man to follow Jesus whose life would produce the first of the

Four Gospels in your Bible, the second longest, and by far the most amazing. Let's meet Matthew, a sinner who heard and followed Jesus. Look again at Matthew **following Jesus** in Mark 2:14. From the Life of Matthew we can conclude three truths:

- FOLLOWING JESUS has it's REQUIREMENTS
- FOLLOWING JESUS has it's PRICE
- FOLLOWING JESUS has it's REWARDS

v First of all what was the **requirement** for Matthew's FOLLOWING JESUS? There are only two: hearing and obeying.

One day near Capernaum, Jesus said to a Publican, tax collector sitting in his toll booth, "Follow Me." In an instant, and with no hesitation, Matthew obeyed. What had Jesus asked him to do?

Following Jesus meant Matthew had to resist the crowd around him. Sitting at the official, Roman backed toll booth, Matthew was a well-known businessman in the city. When Matthew opened his heart to Jesus Christ he became a new person. With what we have learned about Capernaum, this was not an easy decision for him to make. He lived in Capernaum, and those he knew the best had rejected the Lord (Matt. 11:23).

Following Jesus meant Matthew had to resist the culture he was raised in. The Roman taxation system of Matthew's day consisted of two categories of taxes. The noted Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim reports that a Jewish *tax collector* was barred from the synagogue and was forbidden to have any religious or social contact with his fellow Jews. He was ranked with the unclean animals, which a devout Jew would not so much as touch. He was in the class of swine, and because he was held to be a traitor and a congenial liar, he was ranked with robbers and murderers and was forbidden to give testimony in any Jewish court. So Capernaum [3] was an important commercial cross roads. The Romans thought it important enough to establish a customs house there. Roman troops were also garrisoned near the town—at least one hundred. A high-ranking government official called a Centurion, apparently resided there, although we are not made aware of his functions. Numbered among the town's prominent people was Matthew who ran the tax office, Zebedee the fisherman, whose sons, James and John, became disciples of Jesus. Peter also maintained a home there.

Edersheim states that there were two categories of *tax collectors*. First, men the Jews called *gabbei*, were the collectors of the clearly stated taxes in which there little room for extortion [4] .

The second type of tax collector was called a *mokhes*, who collected a wide variety of use taxes—taxes similar to our import duties, tollway fees, boat docking fees, business license fees, and the like. The *mokhes* had almost unlimited latitude in their taxing powers and could attach a tax to virtually any article or activity. They could, for instance, levy a tax on a person's boat, on the fish he caught with it, and on the dock where he unloaded it. They could tax a traveler's donkey, his slaves and servants, and his goods. They had authority to open private letters to see if a taxable business of some sort might be related to the correspondence.

There were two kinds of *mokhes*. One kind, called the great *mokhes*, hired other men to collect taxes for them and, by virtue of partial anonymity, protected at least some of their reputation among their fellow countrymen. The other kind, called small *mokhes*, did their own assessing and collecting and therefore were in constant contact with members of the community as well as with all travelers who passed their way. The *publicani* were despised, the great *mokhes* were more despised, and the small *mokhes* were despised most.

Matthew was obviously a small *mokhes*, because he himself was sitting in the tax office as Jesus passed through the outskirts of Capernaum. It was to that man, the most despised of the despicable, to whom Jesus said, Follow Me! It was clear to early readers of Matthew's gospel, as it was clear to those who witnessed this amazing encounter, that Jesus extended His forgiveness even to the outcasts [5] of society.

So Matthew heard Christ's call and obeyed! When a person is truly converted, he cannot leave his old life fast enough. His old habits, standards, and practices no longer appeal to him and he gladly longs to leave them behind. Edersheim says of Matthew, "He said not a word, for his soul was in the speechless surprise of unexpected grace." Far from being depressed about what he left behind, his heart overflowed with joy. He lost a career but gained a destiny, lost his material possessions but gained a spiritual fortune, lost his temporal security but gained eternal life.

In one of her loveliest poems Amy Carmichael wrote,

*I hear Him call, "Come, follow";  
That was all!*

*My gold grew dim.  
My heart went after Him.  
I rose and followed,  
That was all.  
Would you not follow,  
If you heard Him call?*

That was Christ's requirement - Follow Me!

v Secondly, what was the **price** for Matthew's FOLLOWING JESUS?

Matthew lost his old friends. Turning to Christ most likely meant his old friends would probably persecute him. Whether or not that was the case, Matthew lost most of his income when he left all to follow Christ. Matthew lost a career but he found a destiny. He left behind a temporary security for an eternal one. His old job was gone, but the ministry he offered to Christ has touched every one of us in this room who have ever read the story of Christ's birth, temptation, miracles, death, or resurrection. Matthew gained what he could never lose. That is what happens to all who follow Jesus.

v Thirdly, what was the **reward** for Matthew's FOLLOWING JESUS?

In Capernaum, Mathew was a well-hated man by any observant Jew of his day. Matthew as he sat at his toll booth that day, must have been a man who at that moment had an awful emptiness aching in his heart. As we read this story, we see of all the disciples, Mathew gave up most. But from his decision Matthew got at least three things:

1. He GOT A NEW NAME because at last he was forgiven, now his heart and his hands were clean.
2. HE GOT A NEW JOB. He lost one job with temporal security but he got a far bigger one with eternal security.
3. HE GOT ETERNAL WEALTH. He went from being stuck in a booth by a village road, to immortality and world-wide fame.

He got a new name! Jesus calls Levi by a new [6] name - Matthew. In a few minutes the whole town knew about low-life Levi's decision, and they could not believe it! Would it last? they wondered. Little did they know. Levi, as he is called here in Mark 2:14, was becoming Matthew, later to be a Gospel writer.

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him" (Matthew 9:9).

When Levi began to be called Matthew, we do not know for sure. But, many students of God's Word believe that just as Simon was named Peter ("the rock") by the Lord, Jacob ("the cheat") to Israel ("the prince"), and Saul was later called Paul, so Levi was likewise renamed Matthew ("gift of God") by Jesus.

This name change can even be a form of divine poetry, because this covetuous, tax collecting "rip-off" artist would become as his new name suggested: a gift of God to his people. What an unbelievable conversion for of all the people to see in Capernaum, Levi was the most unacceptable citizen to be one of Christ's disciples! Jesus sought out the man no one else wanted, the one everyone else wished would fall under the immediate wrath of God. This, of course, was to become one of the trademarks of Jesus' ministry, as such notables as Mary Magdalene and many other nameless men and women would attest. Jesus saw a man in Levi, not a category, and he knew what that man could become.

HE GOT A NEW JOB. As Michaelangelo saw the worth of the block of marble rejected by a galaxy of great sculptors (DaVinci among them) so Jesus saw in the lowliest of Capernaum, in the flawed life of Levi (tax collector) a Matthew (writer and evangelist). And that is exactly what He sees every day as we point men and women to Jesus. He sees as the Scripture says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). He sees in us what no one else sees.

HE GOT ETERNAL WEALTH. Levi's life was revolutionized. So he decided to sponsor a reception in Jesus' honor, as verse 15 describes: "While Jesus was having dinner (dinner is literally to recline synanekeinto) at

Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' [7] were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him."

### Why the Reception?

First of all, Matthew wanted to honor Christ. That is the natural reflex of the soul which has received his touch, as we see from Genesis to Revelation.

*As the Physician [8], He came to bring spiritual health to sick sinners. As the Bridegroom, He came to give spiritual joy. The Christian life is a feast, not a funeral. Jesus did not come to renovate Moses or even mix Law and grace. He came with new life!*

Also, this was a spontaneous celebration of Levi's new life. Jesus was certainly all for this, for he described the prodigal's father as saying, "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32).

Secondly, Matthew wanted to open his own home and share Christ with his friends. Luke says it was a "great banquet" (5:29), and our text says "many" were there. Levi evidently had a big place, and it was packed out. He knew that most, if not all, of his old friends would drop him when he began to follow Jesus Christ; so Matthew took advantage of the situation and invited them to meet Jesus. The guests were "tax collectors". The **tax-gatherers** no doubt included the local *gabbai* of Capernaum and perhaps even some fellow mokhes from neighboring communities. "And 'sinners'"—"sinners" being a technical term for people who the Pharisees felt were inferior because they had no interest in scribal tradition. They were especially despised because they did not eat their food in a state of ceremonial cleanness. These "sinners" even consorted with Gentiles. Those sinners doubtlessly included robbers, murderers, drunkards, prostitutes, and other irreligious and ungodly people. They were the riffraff of the area and must have been intrigued and touched by the prospect of dining with Jesus, whom they knew to be a teacher of righteousness, and His disciples. So the offscouring of Capernaum—despised, social pariahs, came to Matthew's house where pure Jesus reclined in their midst—eating, drinking, and conversing with these lawless, materialistic compromisers. It was probably because of this banquet that Jesus first gained the reputation among His opponents as "a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners" (Matt. 11:19; cf. Luke 15:2). Most religious Jews, and especially the proud and self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, could not conceive of any Jew socializing with such a group of **sinners** unless he were one of their own kind.

Do we really want to Follow Jesus and share Him with our friends? Perhaps none of us espouse such Pharisaical beliefs. Actually, most of us would loathe them. But many of us live them out nevertheless. We come to Christ, and in our desire to be godly we seek out people "like us." Ultimately we arrange our lives so that we are with nonbelievers as little as possible. We attend Bible studies that are 100 percent Christian, a Sunday school that is 100 percent Christian, prayer meetings that are 100 percent Christian. We play tennis with Christians and eat dinner with Christians. We have Christian doctors, Christian dentists, Christian plumbers, Christian veterinarians, and even our dogs are Christian. The result is, we pass by hundreds without ever noticing them or positively influencing them for Christ. None of us are Pharisees philosophically, but we may be practically.

We need to reach out to the people with whom we work—go to dinner with them, attend sporting events together, have them over. We need to extend ourselves to those we know are hurting—provide a room for an unwed mother, minister to the multiple cultures around us, volunteer in the local prisons, get involved in the community, even if it means resigning a church job to do it. Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

So, Matthew not only opened his heart and home, but he also opened his hands and worked for Christ. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh once said that, when Matthew left his job to follow Christ, he brought his pen with him! Little did this ex-publican realize that the Holy Spirit would one day use him to write the first of the four Gospels in the New Testament.

According to tradition [9], Matthew ministered in Palestine for several years after the Lord's return to heaven, and then made missionary journeys to the Jews who were dispersed among the Gentiles. His work is associated with Persia, Ethiopia, and Syria, and some traditions associate him with Greece. The New Testament is silent on his life, but this we do know: Wherever the Scriptures travel in this world, the Gospel written by Matthew continues to minister to hearts.

### From the Life of Matthew we concluded three truths:

- FOLLOWING JESUS has it's REQUIREMENTS
  - FOLLOWING JESUS has it's PRICE
  - FOLLOWING JESUS has it's REWARDS
1. He GOT A NEW NAME because at last he was forgiven, now his heart and his hands were clean.
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Are you following Jesus tonight? He started by opening his heart, have you? He showed he was following Jesus as he opened his home to bring others to Jesus, are you? And finally, Matthew stayed on following Jesus, opening his hands to what ever work Christ had for him, are you and I so willing?

### The Life of Matthew

Matthew, formerly called Levi, one of the twelve apostles, was originally a publican or taxgatherer at Capernaum, and hence well acquainted with Greek and Hebrew in bilingual Galilee, and accustomed to keep accounts. This occupation prepared him for writing a Gospel in topical order in both languages. In the three Synoptic lists of the apostles he is associated with Thomas, and forms with him the fourth pair; in Mark and Luke he precedes Thomas, in his own Gospel he is placed after him (perhaps from modesty). Hence the conjecture that he was a twin brother of Thomas (Didymus, *i.e.*, Twin), or associated with him in work. Thomas was an honest and earnest doubter, of a melancholy disposition, yet fully convinced at last when he saw the risen Lord; Matthew was a strong and resolute believer.

Of his apostolic labors we have no certain information. Palestine, Ethiopia, Macedonia, the country of the Euphrates, Persia, and Media are variously assigned to him as missionary fields. He died a natural death according to the oldest tradition, while later accounts make him a martyr. When called, while sitting in Oriental fashion at his tollbooth, to follow Jesus, he "forsook all, rose up, and followed Him," whom he at once recognized and trusted as the true king of Israel. No one can do more than leave his "all," no matter how much or how little this may be; and no one can do better than to "follow Christ." [10]

Luke is the largest, with 72 pages (in Westcott and Hort's Greek Testament); Matthew comes next, with 68 pages; Mark last, with 42 pages. (John has 55 pages.) Number of words in: Matthew has 18,222; Mark has 11,158; Luke has 19,209; Total words in the Synoptics is 48,589.

Matthew served King Herod Antipas in Capernaum of Galilee collecting tariffs on goods passing on the road from Damascus to the Mediterranean Sea. To function in this capacity Matthew would have been an educated man, acquainted with the Greek language as well as the native Aramaic, thus qualifying him to write the Gospel of Matthew. As a tax collector Matthew may have been a man of wealth, but this occupation also caused him to be despised by the Jews and considered among the lowest of people. The Pharisees consistently spoke of tax collectors in the same breath with sinners (Matt. 11:19; Mark 2:16; Luke 7:34; 15:1).

This Levi is here said to be *the son of Alpheus* or *Cleophas*, husband to that Mary who was sister or near kinswoman to the virgin Mary and if so, he was own brother to James the less, and Jude, and Simon the Canaanite, so that there were four brothers of them apostles, It is probable that Matthew was but a loose extravagant young man, or else, being a Jew, he would never have been a publican. However, Christ called him to *follow him*. Paul, though a Pharisee, had been one of the chief of sinners, and yet was called to be an apostle. With God, through Christ, there is mercy to pardon the greatest sins, and grace to sanctify the greatest sinners. Matthew, that had been a publican, became an evangelist, the *first* that put pen to paper, and the *fullest* in writing the life of Christ. Great sin and scandal before conversion, are no bar to great gifts, graces, and advancements, after; nay, God may be the more glorified. Christ prevented him with this call; in bodily cures, ordinarily, he was *sought unto*, but in these spiritual cures, he was *found of them that sought him not*. For this is the great evil and peril of the disease of sin, that those who are under it, desire not to be *made whole*. [11]

Capernaum: (a) draught of fishes Luke 5:1-11; (b) demoniac healed Mark 1:21-28; (c) Sermon on the Mount Matt. 5-7; (d) Peters mother-in-law healed Matt. 8:14-15; (e) centurions servant healed Matt. 8:5-13; (f) paralytic healed Mark 2:1-12; (g) woman with issue of blood healed Mark 5:25-34; (h) Jairus' daughter raised Luke 8:40-

56; (i) two blind men healed Matt. 9:27-31; (j) dumb demoniac healed Matt. 9:32-34; (k) man with withered hand healed Matt. 12:9-13; (l) blind and dumb demoniac healed Matt. 12:22-37; (m) tribute provided Matt. 17:24-27; (n) Bread of Life discourse John 6:22-59.