

August 14, 2005  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Discipleship – The Call of God”  
Mark 2:13-17 NLT

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Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that gathered around him. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax-collection booth. "Come, be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

15 That night Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. (There were many people of this kind among the crowds that followed Jesus.) 16 But when some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with people like that, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."

I want to return today to our discussion on what must be the goal of our life: to become more like Jesus – to mature in our faith. The way to grow in our faith, and therefore, grow in Christlikeness is to do the things Jesus did. That would make sense wouldn't it? If we want to be like Jesus, we should do the things Jesus did. We have mentioned five things we should do because doing these things will put us in a place where God can pour His life changing power into us, for He is the One who changes us. Doing these disciplines will not change us, if they are not means to seeking God, Who changes us.

1. Devotions – private time alone with God. (This is so vital, yet so often neglected by Christians. We read many times that Jesus went alone to a private place to be with the Father – and if Jesus needed that time alone with the Father how much more do we? We need time to be in God's word, to praise God privately and to pray.)
2. Public Worship (we need not only private time with God but we need to show our devotion to God in a corporate or public worship experience – like we are today).
3. Discipleship
4. Witness
5. Service

Today we look at discipleship. We are called by Jesus to be His followers. Jesus' ministry was preaching and teaching, touching and forgiving, healing and befriending sinners and outcasts, and guess what: some liked it and many didn't. What He said and what He did liberated some and enraged others. In fact, today's scripture records a growing opposition to Jesus. The biggest opposition was to Jesus' rather bold outreach to those that most considered contemptible and worthless or that the religious considered "sinners." Jesus welcomed everyone; Jesus made no distinction between persons; Jesus

did not seem to be afraid of being around those that the “religious” people of His time would never be around. He accepted people as they were, but He did not leave them as He found them. NO WAY! He transformed them by God’s power and grace and made them His followers.

Today’s scripture is the brief account of Levi’s call (also known as Matthew), and he was a tax collector. There are 3 aspects of Christ’s calling that we see in the calling of Levi:

## I. A Call to Repentance

A. It is God’s intention that no one should perish because of sin, but that all should have everlasting life by coming to a place of repentance. Becoming a follower / disciple of Jesus begins with repentance and faith. Repentance means to turn, make an about-face (a sharp turn in the opposite direction) from sin to God.

B. In response to His critics, as He often did, Jesus makes a profound statement, one that reveals His intention and deepest longing: "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough." (Mark 1:17).

C. You see, the scribes and Pharisees truly wanted to remain pure and moral, and felt the best way to do that was by avoiding contact with “sinners.” But that wasn’t Jesus’ style. Rather than avoid certain people His approach was to befriend and reclaim the impure and immoral. The Pharisees looked down on sinners. Jesus looked for them.

D. By eating with sinners, Jesus didn’t condone sinful lifestyle. No. He was, however, convinced it could be transformed! So that’s why He kept calling sinners to repentance. He was very optimistic about the grace of God to redeem everyone.

E. Discipleship begins by knowing that Jesus loves you. He calls you to turn from a lifestyle that does not please God. God through Jesus will forgive you, accept you and give you new life, Eternal Life which begins when you accept Jesus and become His follower. And so His call is first to repentance.

## II. (Christ’s calling is) A Call to Discipleship

A. The Scripture says that we are to make disciples. How did Jesus make disciples? He called and gathered 12 people together in a small group for the purpose of sharing His words with them, prayer, mutual support, and accountability. Every person associated with our church needs to be in a small group, a church within the church, for the purpose of prayer, Bible discussion/learning, community building, and accountability. (We offer you several opportunities for this: Woman’s Home Fellowship; Young married HF; HF that is for anyone; 11 AM Bible Study – 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday at church; and, beginning in September on Wednesday evenings at 7 PM, Alpha – basics of Christianity; A study in Philippians, “A Life Worth Living” and a study in the Sermon on the Mount, “Challenging Lifestyle”).

B. We see from the passage that Jesus simply invited Levi to follow Him, to become part of His small group of followers. Following Jesus, obeying Jesus, being led by Jesus through this life; that is the essence of discipleship.

C. That was Jesus' earthly mission: to make disciples. The story tells us something very important about Jesus: even as He was walking along, He was looking, searching for disciples. As William Barclay suggests, "Jesus was never off duty." Making disciples was His mission and passion. Repentance, turning to Jesus for salvation from sin that's the start of being His disciple, but it is only the beginning of a life-long process of becoming like Jesus. A disciple is someone who knows Jesus, is growing in that knowledge, becoming more like Jesus - living as Jesus did, doing the will of God, and is making Jesus known by telling others and by living a holy life.

D. Let's not forget: the Great Commission is about making disciples. That is the end thing God is doing! And wants us to do!

E. Great quote from George Barna's *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*: "Highly effective churches maintain that if you are going to engage in evangelism at all, you have an obligation to finish the job. That means not only telling people the good news of Christ's atoning death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, but ensuring that through a personalized spiritual growth process people who make a "decision" to embrace Jesus also become converted to following Him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. These churches assert that you cannot separate evangelism from discipleship; the former without the latter is simply religious marketing, and the latter without the former builds on a foundation of sand."

### III. (Christ calling is) A Call to Reconciliation

A. I want you to notice something. in this story, Jesus is walking. Where? Beside the lake. And as He walks along, He comes in contact with Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting where? At the tax collector's booth!

B. What was he doing there? Collecting taxes as soon as the fishermen came off the lake!

C. So this may have been Jesus' first contact with Levi, the tax collector. But it certainly wasn't Peter's! (Now picture it: Peter a hard working fisherman. Many times he has been out all night lowering his nets and pulling in heavy nets full with fish. Then he would bring his boat in, the fish would be put in crates. He would clean the boat and the nets, sometimes having to mend the nets to get everything ready for the next day to do it all again. Then he would be ready to bring his catch to market to be compensated for all his hard work. He would not make much, he would not get rich, but he'd make enough to get by. It was hard work to eek out a living. And who is right there making sure he is the first one you see before you get to the market, who was there as soon as the fishermen came off the lake - the tax collector. Tax collectors were usually Jews hired to collect taxes for the enemy of the Jewish people, the oppressive Roman Government, making sure to charge more than they should so that they could make a nice profit. Remember

the Beatle song: I'll tell you how it's go'n a be...there's one for you 19 for me...cause I'm the tax man. If you drive a car I'll tax the street, if you get too cold I'll tax the heat, if you try to sit I'll tax your seat, if you take a walk I'll tax your feet – tax man!)

D. No wonder Levi and the other tax collectors were, well, not the most popular people.

E. Can you imagine how Peter felt when Jesus not only invited Levi to become a part of His inner circle, but then said “Yes” to Levi’s invitation to come over to his place for a party he was throwing for other tax collectors, prostitutes, other notorious sinners? What a scene that must have been!

Back in 1982, an Italian director named Frances Zeffirelli produced and directed a movie called Jesus of Nazareth. The clip you are about to see is from that film. Let me set it up. Jesus has called Levi to become one of His disciples. Peter and the rest of the disciples don’t like it, but Jesus said “Yes” to Levi’s party invitation. What Zeffirelli does with the scene is absolutely brilliant; listen to Jesus’ words, and how Levi and Peter respond.

Folks, Jesus is calling us, you and me, to repent of our sins, lay down our nets, leave everything and follow Him, and be reconciled to one another. Jesus is still calling. Jesus calls us!