

Series: Go Fish!

“Following and Fishing”

Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32

This morning we are in the second week of a new study called “Go Fish!” When I say, “Go fish,” I wonder what comes to mind. Some of us likely think of the childhood card game that we have played with friends or family where we strive to get matching cards. Others of us likely think of the process of going fishing. This is exactly what I think of when I hear the statement. One of my favorite statements to hear from my kids or my friends is, “Let’s go fish.” I enjoy getting outdoors, getting in a boat, going to a river, finding a good pond, and taking a few hours to catch as many fish as I can. Growing up in Alabama this was a way life and I have many fond memories of fishing. While I would love to spend a lot of time telling you fishing stories, that is not why we have gathered today. And, truthfully, I guarantee that my fishing stories may be amusing, but I assure you that they would not be life changing.

The fishing that we are talking about here today and throughout the course of this series is fishing for men. Jesus took the common practice of fishing and radically transformed its meaning when He called His first disciples. We are reminded this morning that the majority of His disciples were fishermen by trade. Being a fisherman was a common profession in biblical times. Fishermen in that day had their limitations. They were not the most talented or skilled laborers of the day. They weren’t the best decorated or trendy. They weren’t the up-and-coming financial advisors and businessmen. They weren’t considered the scholars of the day. Very few would think to ask a fisherman for counsel or advice. But, they were exactly who Jesus desired to be His first disciples. While they had their limitations, they also had some incredible strengths. Because of the nature of the job, fishermen were typically very courageous and strong individuals. Their work would constantly require great patience and determination. Their job required great perseverance and a “never quit” attitude. They had to work hard and they had to work together to accomplish the most good for all parties involved. They had to assess situations and make adjustments on the fly as they determined the locations and types of fish being caught. These, of course, would all be valuable assets to the Lord’s work. However, it isn’t just that Jesus called fishermen to follow Him, it’s that He took it a step further in what He called them to do. According to Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17, and Luke 5:10, Jesus specifically called them saying, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” So, Jesus addresses these fishermen where they are in their trade and occupation of exerting effort and energy into catching fish and then says, “Guys, follow Me, and I will give your life greater purpose and meaning. Follow Me, and I will teach you to catch men so that their lives are changed forever.” The picture for them and for us is powerful and dramatic.

The thing I want us to focus on this morning is the clear relationship between following Jesus and fishing for men. I said last week that there is a direct correlation between the two. That is easily seen with these first disciples who were fishermen. After Jesus called them to go fish for men in Luke 5:10, the very next verse, verse 11, explains, “When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.” So, they were called to catch men, they responded by following Jesus, and after walking with Him they would soon begin fishing for men and would

turn the world upside down. Today, we see this even further through the illustration of another man who was called to follow Jesus and who ended up fishing for men. This man wasn't a fisherman by trade, but he clearly understood that there was a direct relationship between following Jesus and fishing for men.

Read Text – Two Passages

This passage of Scripture that we read this morning is very simple. It gives us the account of a man that we simply know as Matthew. I, personally, am a little biased to him and like him, or at least his name, more than the other disciples. His name means, "Gift of God." This man would have likely lived and died without us ever knowing a single thing about him, had it not been for one specific day where his life was changed forever. On that day, he went from being a despised sinner to being a beloved saint. Today we will unpack this account and make several observations from the Scriptures.

I. **The Change that Jesus Brings (vs. 9)**

It is important for us to take some time to consider who Matthew really was. Matthew was not his original name. His original name according to the Gospels of Mark and Luke was "Levi" and he was the son of a Levite named Alphaeus. He was named this because He was a Jew from the tribe of Levi. You can study the Levites throughout all of the Old Testament and quickly find that they were a devout religious people who served to assist the priests. They helped the priests in their priestly roles in many ways. However, their role clearly took on a new direction in the New Testament. In fact, the Levites are only mentioned three times in the entire New Testament. While they still assisted the priests, the primary role of the Levites during Jesus' time was to know the Law, protect the Law, and enforce the Law. They were, basically, lawyers who were well-versed in the Law. We see this to be true throughout the Gospel of Matthew because no other Gospel writer quotes the Old Testament more or displays such a great mastery of Aramaic. In fact, he quotes and refers to the Old Testament 129 times in twenty-eight chapters. My point is that Matthew was from a religious family and was well-versed in the Jewish Law and religion. However, by the time we learn of him we find him doing something much less honorable. Though he has been raised and trained in a lineage of Levites, we don't see him in this noble profession. We see him, instead, as a tax collector.

Tax collectors in that day were some of the most despised people in society. Bible teacher **Warren Wiersbe** explains, "They were traitors to their own nation because they 'sold themselves' to the Romans to work for the government. Each tax collector purchased from Rome the right to gather taxes; and the more he gathered, the more he could keep. They were considered thieves as well as traitors; and their constant contact with Gentiles made them religiously suspect, if not unclean." This was Levi's job. So, he was despised by his fellow Jews because he was seen as a traitor and a servant of Rome. I believe he was likely very distant from his family. It seems that he had left the family path of serving as a Levite in order to make more money by taking advantage of the very same people that his ancestors had given their lives to serve. It is interesting to note that when inviting his closest friends to his house, we don't read of a single relative present. But, for him it gets even worse. Not only was he a tax collector but he was placed in an esteemed position by the

Roman government. He occupied a role called the “douanier”, which was like a customs officer. Commentator **John Phillips** explains, “The office of douanier gave the appointee great power to enrich himself, vent his spite on the people, play favorites, and inflict hardship. The customs official could force merchants to stop their journeys, unload their beasts, and open every bale and package; he could rifle through it all, read private letters, exact his dues, and generally make life miserable. They could levy taxes and tolls against the rich and the poor. There were bridge tolls, road taxes, harbor dues, property taxes – as many assessments as rapacious ingenuity could invent.” Are you seeing the picture? Levi was likely not a good dude. He had many more enemies than friends. And his family is nowhere in the picture. But, I am not here to beat the guy up. I am here to tell you what Jesus did in his life. Jesus changed the man completely. I want you to consider two things about this change.

A. What He Rejected

I want us to consider up to this point what Levi had. Yes, he was despised by many, but he didn't seem to care. He had several things that he enjoyed. He had wealth. In fact, the passages that describe his reception suggest that he had great wealth. The idea of this “big reception” in Luke 5 indicates more than just a big spread of food. It indicates that his house was massive and it was large enough to hold many, many people. This was far from normal in that day. In that culture, most homes were literally built on one another, similar to townhomes of our day. But the description here paints a picture of a large, free-standing home. He also had stability. His job was not in jeopardy. As long as he continued to charge taxes and force fees, Rome was happy. The Roman government didn't mind that he took some off the top because the more he charged the more they would get also. And, because of his high-ranking position, apparently Rome was pleased and the profits were good. He also had security. This guy was an asset to Rome and, as a result, they would both protect him and inflict harm on anyone who didn't adhere to his taxation requirements. So, he has wealth, stability, security, and even many friends. Life appeared to be good, but deep down something was still missing. It seems that Levi had everything that he wanted and could get his fill on everything the world had to offer, but that could not satisfy. Many people still do the same today, living their lives from one accomplishment to another, one experience to another, only to feel at the end that something is still missing. **ILL:** Aaron Rodgers after the Super Bowl asking, “Is this it?” There is a deeper longing in man's soul that nothing of this world alone can satisfy. This was certainly true for Levi.

Levi's longing would soon be filled by meeting Jesus. We aren't told of how Levi had learned about Jesus. Jesus had spoken and ministered at the nearby Sea of Galilee. Perhaps Levi had heard Him teach. By now, many were beginning to talk about Jesus' miracles, so maybe Levi was intrigued by what he heard. Perhaps as Peter, Andrew, James, and John paid their taxes they told Levi about Jesus. We aren't sure, but here's what we do know for sure. Jesus approached Levi while he was working at his tax collector's booth and called him saying, “Follow me.” Please understand that this was an invitation for a change. This was an invitation not only for a new way of life, but a new life all together. Jesus gave no preliminaries and no prolonged discussion. He simply invited Levi to follow Him. But he

couldn't stay where he was and go with Jesus at the same time. Following Jesus would mean rejecting something. Remember he has wealth, stability, and security, but Jesus was calling him to follow. What did he do? **Luke 5:28** says, "And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him." **Warren Wiersbe** summarized it well, "Levi did not argue or delay. He got up and followed Jesus, even though he knew that Rome would never give him back his job. He burned his bridges and left everything behind." To the world this decision sounds crazy. No doubt, this was a difficult decision to make. But, Levi understood that all these things and wealth of the world can't satisfy. Only God can satisfy the needs of our soul.

B. What He Received

I can see it my mind's eye. His fellow tax collectors were probably thinking, "Dude, what are you doing? This is crazy. Your whole life is going to change. How are you going to pay the bills and keep up with your house? This is foolish." But Levi wasn't concerned about what he was rejecting. He was simply focused on following Jesus. In following Jesus, he was receiving something. **First, he received the gift of salvation.** By believing in Jesus and following Him, Levi was forgiven of his sins and made right with God. **Ephesians 2:8-9**, "For by grace you have been saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Interestingly, what is the theme of Matthew 9 and Luke 5? The account of Levi's conversion is nestled right in between Jesus' account of bringing forgiveness of sins as a result of faith and bringing healing as a result of one's faith. The key is that Levi believed in Who Jesus was and the evidence is that he left his old life and began following Jesus. He was both forgiven of his sins and healed from his past. From Levi's perspective, Jesus was the King of kings and the only way to heaven. In fact, that is the theme of the entire book that he wrote. **Second, Jesus gave him a new life. 2 Corinthians 5:16a, 17**, "Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh...Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Levi was made a brand new person. His sins were cleansed. His life was changed. His past was gone. He was made new. **Third, Jesus gave him a new name.** Most of us here never knew his past. Most of us here never knew his original name. But, so radical was the change that Jesus gave him a new name, "Matthew", which means "Gift of God." We have seen this with others as Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, Saul's name to Paul, and now Levi to Matthew. The point is signifying the change that Jesus makes.

Let me ask you, "Have you been changed by Jesus?" Matthew was changed because he opened his heart to Jesus and was willing to follow Him.

II. The Concern that Jesus Brings (vs. 10)

Matthew opened his heart to Jesus and that brought change. But next we see Matthew's concerns were changed and this led him to also open his home to Jesus. It can be argued that before this moment, Matthew's main concern was his own well-being. He was concerned about money,

finances, and things. But, now that he has met Jesus and has believed in Him he has greater desires. These are things that he is now focused on. What are they?

A. The Desire to Honor Jesus

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark record that Matthew gave a big reception. But, the Gospel of Luke records a specific detail that I don't want us to miss. Remember, Luke was a physician. He was very in tune with the details of situations and records more details of nearly every account we read. Look closely at Luke 5:29. Who was this big reception for? This wasn't for Matthew as a new birth celebration. This wasn't even for his friends. We see here specifically that Matthew's main desire in throwing this reception was for Jesus. It was to honor Him, exalt Him, and celebrate what He was doing. In other words, Matthew's desire had changed from exalting himself to now exalting Jesus. Let me ask you this morning, "What is your greatest desire in life today?" There are many things we can pursue, strive for, and give ourselves to. They can even be good things like charity and even religious things like ministry. But if our desire is not truly for the Lord's glory, then something is terribly wrong. I believe that Paul summarizes what our desire should be in **2 Corinthians 5:9**, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." It should be the desire and heart of every follower of Christ to honor Him in all we do. This was clearly Matthew's desire.

B. The Determination to Bring Others to Jesus

Remember, there is a direct relationship between following Jesus and fishing for men. Did Jesus specifically command Matthew to fish for men? His command was directly to Peter, Andrew, James, and John. We don't read of a direct command to Matthew, but it is obvious that Matthew took it to heart. How do we see this? Because the very first thing that he did after committing his life to Christ was that he gave a big reception and invited other tax collectors and other well-known people to his home to meet Jesus. Please understand something very important. Matthew was strategic and could analyze situations, yet he did something very practical. He looked at his sphere of influence and started fishing there first. ****ILL:** When I started fishing as a child, I didn't start by going to a lake, a river, or the ocean. I started fishing in the pond that we had in our backyard. It was familiar, it was practical, and it was the best place to start. Sometimes when it comes to fishing for men, we have this idea that this means that we must go overseas to do this. Please understand that we are called to go to all nations, and in the coming year we will have more opportunities to do so as a church. However, it is a terrible mistake to look overseas before you look at your own sphere of influence. The reality is that there are people that God has placed in your life that you might influence and impact for the glory of God. When we share the good news of the Gospel with others, it is called "evangelism." To be clear, you can share the Good News of Christ anytime, anywhere, to anyone and God can use that to draw people to Himself. However, we are far more effective when we intentionally share the Gospel with our Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors. In fact, there is a term that has been derived in recent years called "FRANgelism."

“FRANgelism” is simply sharing the Gospel with our Friends, Relatives, Associates, & Neighbors.

We must be intentional about sharing the Gospel with our sphere of influence. **Alvin Reid** said it well, “We are Plan A to reach the world, and God hasn’t given us a Plan B.” We must step out of our comfort zone and share with others. This is exactly what Matthew is doing. He looks at his sphere of influence and he invites them all to his house in hopes that they, too, will meet Jesus and follow Him. He arranged to bring all of his old friends to meet all of his new friends. He specifically wanted them to meet Jesus. He has changed from a collector of taxes to now a fisher of men.

III. The Compassion that Jesus Shows (vs. 11-12)

It is obvious that Jesus’ actions were a surprise to some. In fact, after this event even the disciples of John the Baptist had some questions. What Jesus was doing wasn’t common among the religious Jews. But, I believe His actions reveal to us the heart of God as well as the priority of our own fishing efforts. Notice what Jesus did.

A. Jesus Met People Where They Were

Jesus didn’t boycott the reception. He didn’t say, “Well, there are going to be tax collectors and thieves and other shady characters, so I’m just going to stay home.” He knew what he had called Matthew out of. And, He knew who Matthew’s companions were. Before Matthew was changed he was a sinner and guess what sinners do. They act like sinners. Often times, Christians who have been in church for a long time have a tendency to force man-made rules and requirements upon people. But that isn’t at all what Jesus did. He met people where they were. Luke tells us that Jesus reclined at the table with them. The word “reclined” suggests a comfortable posture and environment. Jesus couldn’t have been more at home. These were the very people He was coming to give His life for.

B. Jesus Ministered to Them Where They Were

Of course, this scene wasn’t welcomed by the Pharisees at all. They were the religious group that tried to ensure that the people kept all the traditions of Scripture. They were meticulous in making sure that they kept all the laws – all 613 of them. In their eyes, these tax collectors and publicans were “sinners.” It was very obvious to them that these were the worst of the worst. They concluded that Matthew and all of his friends were condemned sinners and that if Jesus was truly a messenger of God then He would have no business with them. So, they criticize Jesus and go to the disciples, which by the way suggests that even the disciples weren’t comfortable in this situation. There was a house full of guests, yet the disciples all seem to be huddled together. Sounds like a few church functions I’ve been to before. ☺ They ask the disciples, “Why is your teacher eating with sinners?” IOW: Why is he keeping bad company? Please understand, they haven’t been able to deny His miracles so they are next trying to discredit His morals. Jesus knew what was going on and

immediately answered, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” In other words, Jesus saw these people who had been so quickly condemned by the self-righteous Pharisees as spiritually sick patients who greatly needed help and healing by the Physician. The illustration is clear. A doctor isn’t much of a doctor if he only goes to those who are healthy and whole. I have never known a doctor who goes into the profession to simply maintain the well-being of others. Doctors go into medicine to help where there is need. Can you imagine getting sick and calling your doctor to schedule an appointment and him saying, “Well, call me back later after you get better”? No, we call the physician when we are sick and in need. This is exactly Jesus’ point. He is the Great Physician Who has come to meet man’s greatest need. **Warren Wiersbe** said it this way, “Jesus is the Great Physician. He comes to us in our need; He makes a perfect diagnosis; He provides a final and complete cure; and He pays the bill! What a Physician!” He did that for Matthew. He did that for Matthew’s friends. And, He will do that for you today if you let Him.

IV. The Calling that Jesus Gives (vs. 13)

Please understand that when Jesus said that the healthy don’t need a physician, He was not in any suggesting that the self-righteous, religious Pharisees were spiritually healthy and without need. Jesus said this clearly, because they thought of themselves as healthy. It was easy for them to diagnose the sins of others, but they were blind to their own. **John Phillips** concludes, “The Lord’s critics, of course, thought themselves to be good people, and they classified publicans and tax collectors as bad people. They actually brought into focus one great fact of the Gospel – no one is too bad for the Lord Jesus to save, but many people think themselves to be too good to need salvation.” According to Jesus, the Pharisees were righteous on the outside but they were corrupt on the inside. So, Jesus concludes with one final call. He said, “Go and learn.” This was a common statement used by Jewish rabbis who were confronting superficial knowledge. This was Jesus calling them to go study and examine what this means. “Go and learn what this means: I desire compassion (mercy), and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (to repentance).” When Jesus said this, He was referring to an Old Testament passage from Hosea 6:6. This was a powerful illustration because in Hosea God used the unfaithfulness of a spouse to demonstrate how the Jews had been unfaithful and turned their back on Him. But God also used the faithful unconditional love and grace of a righteous man named Hosea to demonstrate how He had grace and mercy for those who would repent and come back to Him. The point couldn’t be any clearer. We aren’t made right with God by good works and sacrifices. We are made right with God by repenting of our sins and depending upon His mercy.

Close with **Luke 18:9-14**. The religious man tried to please God with his great sacrifices. He was saying, “I abstain from food, I pray, and I give my money to You God.” He is depending on his works to be right with God. But the tax collector simply admitted his sin and asked God for mercy. What was the result? Only one was justified. Where are you today? Have you been changed by Jesus? Do you have a relationship with Him? If you are following Him, who are you fishing for? Who is in your sphere of influence that you need to be strategically ministering to? Let’s learn from God’s Word and follow Matthew’s example of following Jesus and fishing for men.