

Sermon on "Follow Me"

Lessons: Luke 5:27-35

Luke 18:18-30

Apocalypse Explained 864

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After these things (Jesus) went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "**Follow Me.**"
And he left all, rose up, and followed Him. (Luke 5:27-28)

The story of the Lord's calling Levi, the tax collector, to follow Him is told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke with just minor variations. Notably, in the gospel of Matthew, the tax collector is named Matthew, and many have concluded that this is because the Apostle Matthew was the tax collector named Levi. It was not unknown for people in the New Testament to be known by two names. Consider for example, Simon called Peter. Also the apostle called Thaddeus in the Gospels is named Judas the son of James in the other Gospels. And in the book of Acts, there is John Mark, as well as Paul, who was first called Saul.

What is certain is that Matthew or Levi was a tax collector. He earned his living by collecting money for the Romans. And as a tax collector collecting money for the Romans he would have been despised, especially by the Jewish rulers. So consider what happens here. Jesus passes by, He sees Levi sitting at the tax office, and says to him, "**Follow Me.**" What was Levi's response? "**He left all, rose up, and followed Him.**" Essentially he just got up and walked away from his job, and continued to go with Jesus wherever He went, becoming one of His disciples.

Further, according to the gospel story, after leaving his job as a tax collector to follow Jesus, what was the first thing that Levi did? "Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house." And a great number of tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with them. Of course the scribes and Pharisees saw all of this and complained to his disciples asking, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" In response to which Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

But let us consider further Levi's response to Jesus calling him to "**Follow Me.**" Put yourself in Levi's place; how would you respond if the Lord said the same to you? And the Lord does in fact ask us that. Take as an

example, the story about the rich young ruler who asked the Lord, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "You know the commandments: '*Do not commit adultery, 'Do not murder, 'Do not steal, 'Do not bear false witness, 'Do not defraud, 'Honor your father and your mother.*' " To this the young man replied, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." And then we are told 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.*" Here again the Lord was asking a person to leave everything behind and "**Follow Me.**" But as we are told, the rich young man "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Here was a young man who was living according to all the Lord's commandments, yet he could not give his **ALL** to the Lord. He was too attached to his possessions.

So when the Lord comes to us and asks us to leave **all** and "**Follow Me,**" as he asked that young man, what would we be thinking about – – what is it that we would have great difficulty in giving up? Perhaps we might want to wait a little, you know, sort of like saying, "I am willing to follow you fully, Lord, but there are a few things I need to take care of first." Well, the Lord knows this and He addressed this very issue in one of His parables. In that parable,

"A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.'

But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'

And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'

Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'" (Luke 14:16-20)

Now when you look at it, these are not really unreasonable excuses for not attending a supper. Nor, on the surface, is the refusal of the rich young man to sell all his possessions and follow the Lord. When we put ourselves in their place, when we put ourselves in the gospel story and realize that it is the Lord who is speaking to us through His Word, then we can see that all stories and parables serve to illustrate the point that we all have possessions and excuses that we put in the way of leaving all and following the Lord.

Now there was one of the Lord's disciples who indeed said to the Lord, "See, we have left all and followed You." Yet it was this same disciple who would later, out of fear of being identified as a follower of Jesus, deny the Lord three times. Further, none of the disciples fully believed that the Lord had risen from the dead until they saw Him with their own eyes. This was because they could not fully leave their ideas that the Lord had died on the cross and was dead like any other man. They could not fully bring themselves leave their preconceived ideas about death and follow what the Lord had been telling them -- that He would rise again on the third day. So it is not just worldly possessions and activities that can get away of our following the Lord, but it can also be our beliefs that stand in the way. We all have possessions and excuses, whether they be physical or mental, things we are so attached to that we put them in the way of leaving all and following the Lord.

When the Lord said to his disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life," (Mark 10:29-30) it was not just members of our family and property that he was talking about. He was talking about anything that we value more than Him and the teachings of His Word. It is these possessions and excuses that we must leave in order to obey the Lord's call to "**Follow Me.**" And chief among these possessions, the hardest thing for us to give up, is our desire to lead ourselves, to be led by self. So we conclude by reading from Apocalypse Explained 864:

*To "follow the Lord" is to be led by Him and not by self; as only those who are not led by self can be led by the Lord. Everyone is led by self who does not shun evils because they are contrary to the Word and thus contrary to God; consequently because they are sins and are from hell. Everyone who does not shun and turn away from evils is led by self... . But it is otherwise when evils have been removed, which is done when a person shuns them because they are infernal. Then the Lord enters with truths and goods from heaven, and leads him. From this it is evident that a person's love or affection is reformed only by a spiritual shunning of evils and turning away from them, which is shunning them and turning away from them because they are infernal. From all this it can now be seen what it is "to follow the Lord wherever He goes." (Apocalypse Explained 864: 6) **Amen.***

Prayer:

*Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of trouble.
The LORD will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance.
For judgment will again be righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.
If we should say, "My foot slips," Your mercy, O LORD, will hold us up.*
(Psalm 94:12-18)

Lesson I

Luke 5:27-35

²⁷ After these things (Jesus) went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me."

²⁸ And he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

²⁹ Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.

³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

³² I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

³³ Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?"

³⁴ And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?"

³⁵ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

Lesson II

Luke 18:18-30 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God.

²⁰ You know the commandments: '*Do not commit adultery,*' '*Do not murder,*' '*Do not steal,*' '*Do not bear false witness,*' '*Honor your father and your mother.*' "

²¹ And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

²² So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in

heaven; and come, follow Me."

²³ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

²⁴ And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!

²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

²⁸ Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

²⁹ So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,

³⁰ who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Lesson III

AE 864. "To follow the Lord" has a similar signification as "to go or to walk after Him." ... "to go or walk after the Lord," signifies to acknowledge, to obey, and to act and live from Him and with Him... . This is the signification of "following the Lord," because no one can follow the Lord from self, but only from the Lord Himself. The Lord draws after Him those who from freedom will to follow. He can draw no one who does not will to follow Him. The Lord works in this way with a person so that he may follow Him as if of himself; thus does the Lord flow into a person's freedom. He does this for the sake of the reception and implantation of truth and good within a person and consequent reformation and regeneration.

Unless it appeared to a person that he followed the Lord as if of himself, that is, acknowledged His Divine and did His commandments as if of himself, there would be no appropriation and conjunction, and thus no reformation and regeneration.

Everything enters into a person and becomes as if it were his own that he receives in freedom, that is, as if of himself, whether it be what he thinks and speaks or what he wills and does as if of himself. Yet, person ought to believe, as the matter in itself really is, that he does these things not from himself but from the Lord; and this is why it is said that he must act not of himself but as if of himself. Another reason for this is that a person has no perception of the Lord's operation into his will and into his thought therefrom; for a person knows nothing about his conjunction with angels; consequently he supposes that whatever he

wills and thinks he wills and thinks from himself. Therefore he cannot know otherwise than that this is done by himself; and yet all good flows in, that which he thinks, that which he wills, and that which he consequently does. And as he knows this from the doctrine of the church, namely, that all good is from God, he ought to believe that he does not do good of himself, although he does it as if of himself.

[2] To acknowledge the Lord's Divine Human and to do His commandments is to follow Him, because only those who do this can be conjoined to the Lord. That everyone is conjoined to the Lord according to the acknowledgment and confession of Him from the heart and according to the life, can be seen from this, that all the angels of heaven acknowledge no other Divine than the Divine of the Lord, and all angels of the heavens live according to the laws of order, which are His commandments, that is, they live in the Divine that proceeds from the Lord, which is called the Divine truth. Because they so live they live in a heavenly aura, or in a heavenly ether, into which none can be admitted except those who are in life from the Lord.

[5] In the Gospels:
"To go after the Lord and to follow Him" is to deny self; and to deny self is to be led not by self but by the Lord; and he denies self who shuns and turns away from evils because they are sins; and when a person turns away from evils he is led by the Lord; for he does the Lord's commandments, not from self but from the Lord. "To follow the Lord" has this same signification elsewhere (as in Mark 2:14, 15; 10:21, 28, 29; Luke 18:22, 28).

[6] This makes clear that to "follow the Lord" is to be led by Him and not by self; as only those who are not led by self can be led by the Lord. Everyone is led by self who does not shun evils because they are contrary to the Word and thus contrary to God; consequently because they are sins and are from hell. Everyone who does not thus shun and turn away from evils is led by self... . But it is otherwise when evils have been removed, which is done when he shuns them because they are infernal. Then the Lord enters with truths and goods from heaven, and leads him. From this it is evident that a person's love or affection is reformed only by a spiritual shunning of evils and turning away from them, which is shunning them and turning away from them because they are infernal. From all this it can now be seen what it is "to follow the Lord wherever He goes."

AMEN