

Who Will Follow Jesus? (Matthew 9:9-34)

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[0 : 00] This is God's word. Then John's disciples came and asked him, How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

Jesus answered, How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he was with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them.

Then they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out, and the new wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live. Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

[1 : 09] Just then, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.

Jesus turned and saw her. Take heart, daughter. He said, Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed from that moment.

When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said, Go away. The girl is not dead, but asleep. But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

News of this spread through all that region. As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, Have mercy on us, son of David. When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, Do you believe that I am able to do this?

Yes, Lord, they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, According to your faith, will it be done to you? And their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, See that no one knows about this.

[2 : 25] But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke.

The crowd was amazed and said, Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, It's by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.

This is the word of the Lord. All right, everybody. Keep your Bibles open or your phones there or whatever. It's really great.

And it's really wonderful to be able to spend this time with you all. And it's a shame. I was looking forward to actually being with you and getting to know you as a congregation a bit better. But there's always next time.

What I'm going to do before we get into it, I'm just going to pray for us as we think about God's word. So let's pray. Father, I thank you so much that even though we're separated at the moment, we're all in our homes, connected via our computers and devices and stuff like this.

[3 : 40] I thank you so much that in this situation, your word is still powerful and your word is still effective. Your Holy Spirit can still work in lives and change minds and hearts.

And so, Lord, I pray as we spend time now thinking about your words that that would happen, that even though we're distant from one another, that we'd be united around your word, having it work in us so that we become followers of the Lord Jesus.

And we follow all the closer and closer every day. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Now, I didn't think about all the options I'd have preaching over Zoom.

This is my first time doing it and I'm quite excited. So what we're going to do, I want you all to jump in the chat if you can find it. I know quite a few of you have. So jump in the chat and I'm going to throw you a situation and I'm going to get you to tell me what you do in this situation.

So imagine you're on TV and you're on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? I'm assuming people know what that is. That's one of these game shows where you answer questions and make money.

[4 : 54] So imagine you're on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? You're sitting in the seat and you've done super well. You've already made, you've answered all but one question.

You're sitting on \$500,000. You've done really well. There's one more question and if you get that question right, you get a million. So you're pumped.

The adrenaline's running. It's exciting. And at this point, at this crucial moment, you get given a choice. Your choice is either you stop here and you walk away with \$500,000 or you carry on and go to the final question.

Risk your \$500,000 but have the opportunity to make a million. That's your choice. Are you going to risk what you've already got for something way more or are you going to play it safe?

So what I want you to do, I want you to jump and chat and I want you to give me, I want you to type one if you would risk it and type two if you wouldn't. So jump and chat.

[6 : 01] I'm having a look. One if you'd risk it. Two if you wouldn't. I'm seeing a lot of ones. Oh, no, we've got a two. Risk it. There's a few people who play it safe.

Risk it from Rowan. That's what I like to hear. A lot of people would risk it. A lot of people would risk the \$500,000 for the million.

And the reason I bring that up is because I think that's the kind of situation we find ourselves in if we're reading Matthew. So, so far, what I notice as I go through this particular section of Matthew is that there's all kinds of people who follow him.

There's a centurion. There's sick people. There seems to be no limit of anyone can come in faith and follow this person. There's nothing that prohibits people from following him.

You don't have to be a certain race or a certain gender or a certain life stage or anything like that.

Anybody can be blessed by following Jesus. And yet, as we also see in this section, following Jesus can be incredibly costly.

[7 : 19] The disciples themselves face like literal storms as they follow Jesus. It's not a free and easy ride. Jesus warns us that we might have to give up family in order to follow him.

So it's a huge risk to follow Jesus. The stakes are really quite high. You can play it safe and have your family and have your career and have all the things that you have that's comfortable right now.

Or you can risk it and follow the Lord Jesus and potentially get something much better. And so I think the question that comes to me as I read this part of Matthew is who's going to take that risk?

Who's going to take the risk? Now, you've all shown that most of you are risk takers. You'd risk it for the million dollars. But are we the kind of people who will risk it for Jesus?

Are we going to risk what we have here and now to follow Jesus for something much better? What I'm going to do is I'm going to talk through this passage and I think we're going to see some things, some characteristics of people who will take the risk of following Jesus.

[8 : 33] I'm just going to read a couple of verses earlier than what William read because I want to talk about them as well. I'm just going to read from verse 9. So if you've got your Bible, please have it open there and I'll just read that.

Verse 9. As Jesus passed from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him.

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

But when he heard it, he said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. So what does that teach us about following Jesus? Why does that teach us about who's going to take that risk?

[9 : 39] That part, that verse is probably a little bit of an autobiography from Matthew about how he started following Jesus. And the fact that Matthew was a tax collector is really significant.

Type one in the chat. If you like paying your taxes, if you like the government coming and taking a chunk of your money away. I had a friend who worked in the IRD and he actually, I used to meet

with him at a coffee during a, we've got a two.

I used to meet with him for coffee near his workplace in his breaks, but he never told me where he works because they try to keep it a secret for the safety of the workers there because people don't like the IRD.

People don't like having their money taken away from them. And so the offices were kept a secret from the general public.

But in Jesus' day, tax collecting was even worse than that. It was even worse. In Jesus' day, the Romans were in control. They were who were gathering taxes.

[10:50] And tax collecting was a whole strategy that they had, a whole way of getting money off the people. What they'd do is they'd ask a local person to become a tax collector and to collect the taxes from their countrymen.

They were kind of asking someone to betray their country, to throw away their friendships and their relationships, to take the money for this Roman government.

And so this was the deal. You become a tax collector, you take what the Romans needed, but also you could take, you know, a salary for yourself.

You took as much as you wanted from these people. You sent some of it back to Rome and you kept some of it for yourself. And the way you're able to do that is that you had a Roman army at your back.

And if they didn't give you the money, if they didn't give you what you asked for, the Roman soldiers would come and enforce that. And so tax collectors made a lot of money.

[11:57] Matthew, the tax collector, would have made a lot of money, but he made it by taking it from countrymen. He made it by charging high taxes and working for Rome rather than his own people, his own neighbors and friends.

And so you can imagine the hostility that someone like Matthew would have faced. He's a rich man. He's a successful businessman, but he wouldn't have had many friends because he was taking these people's money.

He got rich off the back of others. Tax collectors in Jesus' day would have been like, you know, CEOs who give themselves massive bonuses while making thousands of employees redundant. Or they'd be like investment managers who let their schemes fail, costing their investors their life savings while they still walk away wealthy men.

Tax collectors weren't good people. And yet, despite that, Jesus calls Matthew, the tax collector, to follow him.

[13:09] And more than that, Jesus is going to dinner with these people. Jesus and his disciples are hanging out with tax collectors. How would you feel if William was being taken to dinner regularly by the CEO of Sky City?

Or how would you feel if you found out I had just come off a Zoom call with, you know, some massive investment firm person who was paying me or whatever?

It would be uncomfortable. It would be awkward. And the Pharisees feel that. You see the Pharisees come in. They see what Jesus is doing. And they think that's really not a good look.

That's really not good at all. Jesus is spending his downtime chilling out with tax collectors and sinners. And these squeaky clean religious leaders call Jesus out on his actions.

Why is this reputable teacher of righteousness hanging out with the scum of society? Hear Jesus' reply in verse 12.

[14:20] Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. And this reply is really brilliant. On the surface, he's responding really directly.

The Pharisees consider themselves to be righteous. They don't need anyone to teach them how to live. These people who Jesus is hanging with, they are unrighteous. They need a teacher of righteousness to tell them where they're going wrong.

But on another level, it's actually incredibly sharp. He quotes from Hosea 6. You see that in verse 13, where the prophet condemns people for practicing religion without any inward transformation.

And Jesus points to the Pharisees and says, go and figure this one out for yourself. It's a rebuke to them. They had the outward appearance of righteousness, while inwardly they were dead.

So Jesus is chipping away at their hypocrisy, showing him that they're sick people as well, who desperately need a physician, but they don't realize it.

[15 : 30] And I think this whole interaction, this whole situation gives us a really interesting answer to the question of who's going to take the risk of following Jesus.

If we were to look at it for ourselves, we might think that the Pharisees are going to be the people who take the risk of following Jesus. They were already living righteous lives.

They had already given up a lot of worldly wealth to be good people. They were practicing self-denial and fasting and all these kinds of things. They seem to be likely candidates, but it's not them.

It's not the religious. It's not those who are outwardly squeaky clean. Quite shockingly, it's sinners who take up the offer to follow Jesus.

It's tax collectors who have defrauded their way to wealth. People with riches, earthly wealth to lose. People who had a lot to risk, had a lot to lose.

[16 : 35] They're the people who realize they're sick. They're the people who realize they're sinners. This passage shows us that the people who will follow Jesus are the people who know that they're wrong.

We know that they're sick. We know that they're sinners. People who will admit that they have a problem. Morally, they're deficient. Not those who think they're pretty good, who are doing pretty well, better than most.

Not those who do religious things. It's the sick who will take the risk of following Jesus. It's the sinner who will take the risk of following Jesus. It's those who know they don't have a leg to stand on morally.

People who will take up Jesus' offer to leave behind worldly things and follow him to a new kingdom are those who are willing to admit that they are sinners.

Here this afternoon, if you wanted to be accepted by the great physician, you need to know that you're sick.

[17 : 42] If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, you need to know and admit that you're a sinner. Only those who understand that they have wronged the holy God with their actions and betrayed their creator in their lives will be willing to follow this savior.

So the question is, who's willing to own up to their sinfulness? Who of us will admit that they're a sinner in need of a physician? Because if we don't see our sin, if we don't see our sickness, if we cannot understand that we're wrong, then we cannot appreciate what Jesus offers.

It's forgiveness. Forgiveness is meaningless to someone who believes that they're good. But it's worth leaving everything for, for someone who believes they're a sinner. So we need to admit, we need to admit that we're a sinner so that we can see the astounding beauty of the grace that we have in the cross.

So here we see the person who knows their sin is a person who will follow Jesus. But then we move on. Verses 14 to 17, we get this really interesting question about fasting.

John's disciples are a bit confused because Jesus' disciples are breaking from what was religious norms. John's disciples and the Pharisees probably practiced fasting twice a week, maybe also on some special occasions as well.

[19 : 17] But Jesus' disciples didn't. They weren't fasting. They weren't going without food to seek the Lord. And this was an established religious norm, an established religious standard that Jesus and his followers were kind of disregarding.

And so the Pharisees, the religious people, John's disciples, who are also very good people, they want to know why. Why are you not doing the kinds of things that other religious people do?

And Jesus has two responses to that. He first is to say that for his disciples to fast now when they are with him, it would be like fasting at a wedding reception.

It would be like turning up to a wedding, watching a bride and groom getting married, being invited to the reception, being seated at a table. And all the things that go on, this big party, a time of joy, a time of celebration, but to say, no, I'm not going to eat any food.

I'm just going to sit here and fast. And it would be weird. It would be inappropriate. And so Jesus says that's what it would be like for his disciples to fast now when he is with them.

[20 : 32] Now is a time of joy. Now is a time of celebration because the Savior walks upon the earth. Times of hardship will come. Opportunities to fast will come. And so I think the point of what we're seeing is that following Jesus is about focusing on Jesus, on the Christ, on what Jesus is doing, rather than looking and thinking about what other people do.

This was a special time in history, a time when Jesus walked upon the earth and his followers responded to that by acting differently. They won't look to religious expectations. They'll look to their Savior. The second response takes things further. There are two illustrations. One's about sewing. One's about wineskins.

And neither of those is something I know anything about. Maybe you know about clothing and sewing. But apparently fabric shrinks. And if you sew a piece of unshrunk fabric onto a piece of shrunk fabric, you're in for a world of trouble.

It won't work. Wineskins, that one's even harder to understand. They were made from leather. It gets brittle when it gets old. And it cannot hold this kind of fresh, acidic wine in it anymore once it's got old.

[21 : 51] It might be more helpful if we think of a modern illustration. It's kind of a common theory that iPhone or Apple, when they update your phone, if you don't have the new one, the updates kind of slow your phone right down.

If you have an iPhone 7 and try update to the latest software, your phone's going to just stop working, going to go so slow and won't work properly because the new software is too good, too fast, too, takes too much memory or whatever it is for the old phone.

If you want the new software, if you want the latest iOS, you have to buy the new iPhone. You can't just live off your iPhone 7 anymore. So the point is clear.

Some things which were good in their time grow old and obsolete and cannot be used with the new. And Jesus is saying that he's bringing something new.

And those who follow him must accept a new kingdom. They cannot focus on things that have been done in the past, how things have always been. They must focus on the new kingdom that Jesus is bringing.

[23 : 07] Now, what does this mean? So particularly for us. Jesus is saying that he's bringing this new kingdom and it's something brand new. And this new kingdom isn't going to fit with the old properly.

The old ways, the old standards are not, don't necessarily apply to the new kingdom. He isn't saying that the old way is bad and the new way is good.

In fact, he isn't even saying that fasting is bad because he says that he predicts that his disciples will fast. What he's saying is that the worship and service of Jesus must be focused on Jesus himself.

And so you don't practice all the things from the old covenant because they were pointing to Jesus. And now that Jesus has come, we have the new thing.

Our worship, our worship, our service, followers of Jesus must focus on Jesus. And so I think people who are willing to take up the offer to follow Jesus and leave the world behind, leave the things of earth behind, the people who are willing to focus on Jesus and what Jesus is doing.

[24 : 22] People who are willing to focus on Jesus and what Jesus is doing, people who are willing to focus on Jesus and what Jesus is doing.

As we live as Christians, is it focused on Christ or is it focused on doing something else? The way we all do all kinds of ministry and all kinds of service and all kinds of worship.

Are we looking at the Savior, looking to what he has done and what he is doing, or are we looking just to replicate someone else or something else?

We must make sure we're focusing on the Christ. I think it's interesting when you look at church history that Christians have often been people who adapt, who innovate, and have shaped the world because of that.

A little over 500 years ago, no one would have imagined that every person could read, let alone that every person would own a book. But when the printing press was invented in the 15th century, Christians imagined putting a Bible into the home in the language that someone could speak of every person.

[25 : 57] And now we own lots of books, but in the beginning it was Christians who really drove printing of books because they wanted to put the Bible and they wanted to put Christian literature in everybody's hand.

And Christians are doing the same thing today. Christians all over the world are seeking to translate the Bible into different languages so people can understand it and read it for themselves.

When I was at Bible college, there was a guy who was working on this little USB thing so that he could spread USBs. He could drop them, he could throw them away, he could give away as many as possible, and then people could plug the USB in and hear the Bible in their own language. He was trying to innovate again to get the scripture into people's homes and into these people's lives. And so I think what we see in history is that Christians have often been innovative. They've thought about not what they've always done in maintaining things, although some Christians do do that, but often Christians have thought, how can we serve the Lord Jesus? [27 : 09] How can we get Bibles into hands? How can we get the gospel out? How can we use new exciting opportunities and technologies to share the message of Jesus?

And I think it's not because newer is always better. It's because as they look at Christ, they seize opportunities. They see and seize opportunities to worship him, adapt and change so that there'll be better servants, more able to proclaim him.

And I think that I'm challenged by that often. Am I just doing the things that I saw my dad do when I was growing up?

Or am I focusing on the Lord Jesus and willing to adapt and change if I can serve him better, proclaim him more clearly in another way?

Those who follow Christ are the ones who focus on him and adapt their lives to him, shape their lives around Jesus and not the expectations of others.

[28 : 21] And so we've seen these two things. They know if you want to follow Christ, the people are going to take this risk. They know that they're sinners. They're willing to look at Jesus and think about what he's doing.

But we see another thing. In verses 18 and following, we come to two incredible healings. A ruler comes and kneels before Jesus.

We know this man was some kind of official in the synagogue who was probably some sort of important religious figure in the community. And given his opportunity, and we already know that the Pharisees are against Jesus and they don't like him, this man would have had to be pretty desperate to come to Jesus.

And he is because his daughter is passing away. And so here's a desperate father doing whatever he can to save his daughter. As we're on the way to the ruler's house, we meet another desperate person, a woman who's been bleeding for 12 years, someone who is desperate to be healed, to be made well.

Now you could preach a whole sermon from these two healings. You could preach several sermons from these verses. But I want us to notice one thing.

[29 : 45] Notice that as these two people approach Jesus, there's the subtle repetition of the idea that Jesus is healing with a touch.

It might not stand out to you, but I think it should. Jesus touches both of these people, the daughter who has passed away and this woman who is bleeding.

And that's important because under Old Testament law, dead bodies and people with discharges of blood, they were unclean. You weren't meant to touch them.

You weren't meant to touch them. You weren't even meant to touch anything that touched them.

And if you weren't unclean, you were unable to participate in the temple worship of that time.

And so these two people are making enormous requests of Jesus. They're asking him to make himself unclean for them.

[30 : 40] They're asking him to defile himself for them. Not only do they come believing that Jesus can heal, that he can raise the dead, that he can do something amazing and incredible.

They also come believing that Jesus will do it at cost to himself. They believe that Jesus will do the unbelievable, the unthinkable, the incredible, and they believe that Jesus will bear the impurity that they have.

Who are the people who follow Jesus? It's the people who believe that Jesus will do something incredible at incredible cost to himself.

As we here today believe in Jesus, seek to follow him, we have to be the same. We become, we come believing that Jesus can raise us from the dead.

We're dead spiritually and Jesus can raise us to eternal life. We come trusting that Jesus can take away our sin. We come knowing that he's done it at incredible cost to himself.

[31 : 51] Bearing our impurity, bearing our sin, our uncleanness upon himself, upon the cross, dying in our place. If we come to Jesus, we have to acknowledge our great sin and we must kneel before him and ask him to bear that great sin.

No one who follows Jesus is asking him just for a leg up, just for a bit of help for the times that they've failed. Followers of Jesus are asking him to give his life for them, to exchange his life for theirs.

Those who are willing to follow Jesus will acknowledge their sin. Those who are willing to follow Jesus will focus on what he's done. Those who are willing to follow Jesus will ask him for life at great cost to himself.

That's the kind of person who will take the risk of following Jesus. Who sees their sin. Who sees the greatness of what Jesus has done and sees a man who is willing to give his life for them.

Finally and briefly, let's think about the last two healings that we see there. Some blind men and demon-possessed man.

[33 : 14] The two blind men came and say to Jesus, have mercy on us, son of David. These blind men know that they're needy. They know that they're broken. These blind men understand that Jesus is a promised son of David, the Messiah, coming to bring a new kingdom.

These blind men ask Jesus to do the incredible. And you'll see there at the end, it costs Jesus. Often through the gospel, Jesus asks people to stay quiet.

And that's what he does here. And one of the reasons he does that is probably because he's trying to keep a low profile. He's got enemies. He's got opposition from the religious leaders.

And that opposition grows and grows and grows until they put him to death. But instead of doing what Jesus tells them, instead of staying quiet, these men go around telling everybody what Jesus has done.

And in so doing, they increase the opposition against Jesus. And so here we have a picture of someone who is willing to follow Jesus. A needy person.

[34 : 21] Someone who knows they're broken and needy. A person who sees what Jesus is doing, what he's able to do, this new kingdom that has come. A person who asks Jesus for great things.

A person who costs Jesus. A person who asks Jesus for great things.

A person who asks Jesus for great things. A person who says, here are people who think they're righteous. People who are not looking at Jesus and are not concerned with the new kingdom that is coming, but are concerned with maintaining their religious standards.

Here are people who are unwilling to ask Jesus, who are unwilling to follow him, who don't think they need anything from Jesus. And I think in these two examples, we see the choice that lies before us today.

We see examples of people who are willing to take the risk of following Jesus and those who are not. Do we think we're basically good? Basically okay?

[35 : 48] In no real need? Are we looking to what other people expect and trying to keep up religious norms? Are we too proud to make big requests that cost Jesus?

Do we come in faith? Do we come in humility? Do we come knowing that we're sinful? Do we come in and what we're sinful?

Are we still looking for this incredibly costly but wonderful forgiveness? Do we come believing that Jesus gave his life because we're sinful and because we needed it?

it's interesting to notice in this passage who was willing to follow Jesus it was the Matthews the rich people with worldly wealth to lose and yet he saw his deep need for forgiveness he knew he was sick he knew he needed a savior it's the desperate people who know they have no other options but Jesus and once we see the depth of our need and our hopelessness and helplessness we come to realize the worth of Christ one sense where we're not like contestants in a who wants to be a millionaire show because there's no risk involved Jim Elliott said he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose and I think that's the attitude we see here to the extent to which we're willing to follow Jesus is the extent to which we see our neediness and our sinfulness see how desperately incapable we are of doing anything about the situation we've got ourselves into the extent to which we follow Jesus and the extent to which we will be willing to follow Jesus is the extent to which we are able to focus on what Christ has done focus on what Christ is doing see that he has given his life for us laying down his own life for our sin and through this we have we have entered into a new kingdom it's only when we see Christ lay down his life for us that we will be

the kind of followers who will lay down our lives for him let's pray father I thank you for this wonderful reminder of what Christ has done for us he has given his life for us because we are sinful and we are so desperately needy father help us to focus on Christ and what he has done for us and what he is doing in our world and that he'll come again and bring about a new heavens and a new earth help us to see that clearly in daily life so that we're not distracted by the things of this world and important as big as they are things like COVID and things happening abroad lord I pray that in the midst of that we'd be able to focus on what Christ has done we'd see ourselves as the sick who'd need a physician and I pray that would shape us and form us as we seek to follow you I pray that would help us to see that the things of this earth are not worth comparing to the glory of what we have in you I pray you do this so that Christ is lifted up and glorified in our lives as we follow him so that your name is praised because of Christ so in Christ's name we pray amen