

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
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Key Verse: Matthew 9:9-10

What it Means to follow Jesus

Good morning!

Last week, I introduced the “My Hope America with Billy Graham” outreach campaign. This is a campaign wherein families or individuals invite friends and neighbors and whoever to their homes to watch a program on TV or DVD. The program will feature Billy Graham talking about how to have hope in a world that is filled with fear and hopelessness because of wars, violence, natural disasters, economic problems, etc. I’m sure many of us are affected by this. Especially with all the lay-offs and government shutdown. If we Christians are affected, how much more those who don’t know Christ? Our neighbors may look like they have it all together but do we know what’s really going in their lives? God may have placed us where we are in times like these to offer hope to people.

How many of you have visited the “My Hope America” web site? For those of you who haven’t yet, the web site is <http://myhopewithbillygraham.org/>. How many did the online training? How many wrote down the names of those people you’ll pray for and invite to your homes?

The event will happen on Nov. 7, 8, and 9. Click on the tab “Watch Programs” and you can select how you want to watch it – online, DVD, download, TV broadcast. Now, if somehow these dates are not good for you,

you can still choose to do it in the future at a date that is most convenient for you.

If you're joining this campaign, you are a Matthew. Matthew was the writer of the first gospel in the New Testament. And he was one of the 12 apostles. Let's read Matthew 9:9-10 together.

“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. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.”

Note the hospitality of Matthew, he prepared a banquet and invited friends to hear Jesus. That's the reason why My Hope America chose Matthew as the poster boy of friendship evangelism. And today as we continue our series on “Heroes” I chose to talk about Matthew because in those two verses we read, we can learn what it means to follow Jesus.

Now, a little background on Matthew. Before he became a follower of Jesus, Matthew was a tax collector. As a tax collector, he was hated by his own people. No one loves a tax collector, do you? But during the time of Matthew, tax collectors were really despised and were treated as outcasts by Jews because these tax collectors were known to be dishonest and worse, they worked for the Romans who ruled over Israel. And so, they were regarded as betrayers or traitors. But they were rich. And I guess they didn't mind all the venom they got from people because of the perks and benefits they received from their Roman benefactors.

Matthew is also known as Levi. In Luke 5 and Mark 2, there is a similar story and the tax collector's name is Levi. There's no doubt it's the same person. In fact, some scholars say that his original name is Levi. And when he became a follower of Jesus, Jesus changed his name to Matthew which means "Gift of God". Much like when Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter. That's why in the accounts of Luke and Mark, when they mentioned all the twelve apostles by name after Levi came to know Jesus, they referred to him as Matthew and not as Levi to emphasize his changed life. That's just speculation but it may be true.

Matthew chose a not-so-good profession. He had a profession that probably made his own parents want to disown him. He was dishonest, a man no one trusted. Why he became like this no one knows. Probably he hung out with the wrong crowd. Perhaps he was just materialistic and wanted to get rich fast. Maybe he got disappointed with God. The Jews who hated him so much and others like him would say that he was a hopeless case. But we see in his story that no one is beyond the reach of God. And that's one lesson we can glean from the life of Matthew. As the saying goes, "Hope is eternal".

I like the text that was printed on the shirts worn by those who came to the Light the Night Walk last week. It says, "Hey E, never place a dot where God had placed a comma." That's a play on words because Edot is Ellison's nickname. That's also a clever way of rephrasing the saying, "Don't put a period where God put a comma." In other words, the situation may seem bleak but we should never give up. And when it comes to people who we think are hopeless cases, God is not finished with them yet. We cannot

give up on people. God has a plan and purpose for each of us. As the Bible says in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

In fact, if we're honest enough, many of us were hopeless cases before. Then, Jesus called us to him and gave us hope. And now that he has called us to him, do we really know what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

This morning, let me share with you what it means to follow Jesus as we look at an episode in the life of Matthew.

1. Following Jesus means leaving everything behind.

Let me read again verse 9, *“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.”*

Note that when Jesus said to him “Follow me” he got up immediately. He didn't dilly-dally. It was instant. He made up his mind right away. Why would he do that? Was it because of Jesus' commanding presence and the power of his voice? And he couldn't just ignore it? No doubt about that. But I believe what is happening here is something that involves the emotions of Matthew. What I see here is that Matthew was waiting for this moment. Matthew was waiting for someone to make him feel wanted. Matthew was waiting for someone to love him. Matthew was waiting for someone to rescue him.

You see, in the phrase “he saw a man named Matthew”, the word “saw” in the original Greek doesn't just mean a casual glance but looking at

someone with care and attention. So, when Jesus looked at him, he looked at him with compassion.

I'm sure Matthew had heard about Jesus. In fact, before he met him, Jesus had already performed a lot of miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, calming the storm. Perhaps, he even heard Jesus' sermon on the mount, about how one can be blessed. And in that moment, when their eyes met, he felt like he was being lifted up or comforted. Being someone who was despised and treated like dirt by people, he just had an experience that was something entirely different. "At last, someone is looking at me with love instead of hatred." And so, when Jesus said, "Follow me", how could he not follow him. He wouldn't pass up this chance. He got up and followed him. And left everything behind. He left his high-paying job, his old lifestyle, and his unpleasant past.

That's what it means to follow Jesus. You will leave everything that will stand in the way of following him. It may be something that you hold most dear to your heart. But if it will stand in the way, you leave it, you forsake it. Jesus means more than anything in this world.

Following Jesus means total devotion to him. What will make us lose our devotion to Jesus?

First is materialism. Trying to earn too much money in order to amass things will make you lose your devotion to Jesus. Focusing on material things will make you lose your focus on Jesus. Sometimes, instead of meditating on the Word of God, we meditate on the Best Buy Guide or department store advertisements.

Nothing wrong with buying stuff but if we're not careful, material things will possess us instead of us possessing material things. Jesus warn us, *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* (Matthew 6:24)

Second is putting others before Jesus. Loving others before loving Jesus of course makes us lose our devotion to Jesus. For example, you may be the only Christian in your family and it's causing tension and friction between you and other members of the family. If you give in, then you lose your devotion to Jesus. Jesus warns, *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* (Matthew 10:37)

Third is self-gratification. This is the hardest test of our devotion to Jesus. Are we willing to give up many of the comforts of life for our faith? If Jesus calls us to serve somewhere in the jungles of Africa, are we willing to do that? Years ago, when God called me to be a part of a missionary group that went to Russia for outreach, I thought I was making a sacrifice. I realized that the American missionaries were the ones who were making a real sacrifice. It's because where we stayed in Russia, there were no dishwashers, no washing machines, no clothes dryers, no modern amenities. That was a situation that was common to me in the Philippines. Not for the Americans, of course. But they didn't complain.

So, are we willing to make sacrifices to follow Jesus? Are we even willing to die for Jesus? I think that's the ultimate test for a follower of Jesus. You go to the web site of this organization called The Voice of the Martyrs

and you will read stories after stories of Christians in persecuted countries like Nigeria, Iran, Vietnam, China, putting their lives on the line because they're standing up for Jesus. We should pray for them.

Sadly, some Christians will only follow to a point. When push comes to shove, they give up and lose their faith. Jesus says, *"And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."* (Matthew 10:38 ESV)

These are hard sayings from Jesus but he is Lord and deserves all our respect and devotion. And yet he is not a taskmaster because he promises *"Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."* (Luke 18:29-30 NASB)

We must leave everything behind as we follow Jesus so we can look forward to a life that is blessed and eternal. One thing is sure. God is faithful. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

VIDEO - Hephzibah

I like what she said in the end. God will take care of you. He gave his own son Jesus to die for you, what else could he not do for you? As Romans 8:31b-31 says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"*

Matthew left everything behind and never looked back. And God gave him the privilege of writing the life of Jesus in a book named after him. His book is even first in the New Testament. He got first billing. But what is

important is the lives that have been changed as a result of people reading his book.

Following Jesus means leaving everything behind. It also means

2. Following Jesus means giving him our best.

Let me read verse 10 again, *“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.”*

You would think that this was a casual dinner but it’s not. First of all, Matthew had many guests so he must have prepared a lot of food. Luke tells us that Matthew or Levi actually *“held a great banquet for Jesus at his home”*. (Luke 5:29 NIV) In the ESV and KJV, it says, “ a great feast”. In the NASB, it says, “ a great reception.” So, this is a really huge banquet.

It’s hard to imagine the abundance of food that he had prepared. Probably, much more than the great banquet we sometimes hold here during special occasions. Well, he could prepare a great banquet, of course, because he was rich. Remember, he was a tax collector. He must have a big house, too, to accommodate all his guests.

But what I want us to see here is that Matthew gave his best for his Lord. He must have been so overwhelmed by the love of Jesus that he went all out to express his thankfulness. It looks like that he had the gift of hospitality and cooking that he was able to accomplish all this. Maybe he had a wife who helped him. The Bible doesn’t say that he had a wife. I’m guessing he didn’t have a wife because with a background like his, despised and an outcast, who would like to get married to him? Madonna, perhaps. The material girl.

Anyway, he gave his best to honor Jesus. Can we say that about ourselves? Do we give our best to honor Jesus? Or are we content to just stay saved and not grow from there?

All of us who are followers of Jesus have been given talents and spiritual gifts by God. God wants us to use them to the best of our abilities in order to build up his people and to glorify him.

In this church, we want you to grow and we want you to be equipped. Because that's God will for each of us. He wants "*to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*" (Ephesians 4:12) That's why we have IMPACT Class, we have home groups, we send you to trainings and seminars and we have the Discovery Classes composed of Class 101, 201, 301, 401. 101 is all about discovering church membership. 201 is about discovering spiritual maturity. 301 is about discovering my ministry, and 401 is about discovering my mission in life. We will have Class 401 beginning next Sunday for two Sundays.

If you have finished 101, 201, 301, you can take 401 and then you graduate and we give you Levi's 501. Seriously, those who finish the Discovery Classes will get a special plaque and a gift.

Why am I saying this? It's because I believe it's one way of growing as a Christian. And growing as a Christian is a sign that you want to give your best to Jesus.

Let me also make clear that you can give your best to Jesus wherever you may be. Not only in church but at home, at work, in school, if you're doing your best, that's giving honor to Jesus. Jesus is glorified when you're doing an excellent job. People will notice and they will take note that Jesus is

your Lord. The reverse is true. If you're lousy and lazy, it brings disgrace to the name of Jesus. Colossians 3:23 (MSG) says, *"Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God"*.

If you do your best, Jesus is honored.

3. Following Jesus means making Him known to others.

So, Matthew prepares a great banquet. And he had plenty of guests. He invited all these guests so he can brag about his house and his cooking.

No, he invited them because he wants them to know Jesus, too. His life was so radically changed that he wants others to hear as well the life-changing message of Jesus.

He was a new Christian. And so, he was full of enthusiasm. He was full on for the Lord. He didn't wait to be trained. And the best way he knew how was to invite his friends, tax collectors like him, who needed the Savior. He started with those like him because they were closest to him and they all have the same condition in life.

When was the last time we talked to someone about Jesus? A week ago? A month ago? A year ago? Remember when you first became a Christian?

Like Matthew, you were full of joy and enthusiasm and you were so eager to talk to anyone about Jesus. Almost every day you found someone who you shared Jesus with. You didn't have to be prodded or egged on or convinced about. You did it on your own. But what happened? Where's the old fire? I think this is a common situation among many Christians. We become complacent and fall back to our old ways and take things for granted. We have lost the passion and compassion for lost souls. Sometimes,

we just feel so comfortable in our own support group of Christians that we lose sight of those outside our group who need the Savior.

Jesus told us to love one another and care for each other as his followers but our main task is to do the Great Commission, “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations*”. (Matthew 28:19) Are we making disciples? Are we making him known to others?

I must confess that I have fallen also into the trap of not making Jesus known to others as often as I should. And so, when I heard about the My Hope America campaign, I thought that this was a good way of stoking that fire of evangelism in my heart.

I have written down some names that I would invite to our house in November. I have started to pray for them.

You, too, can do it. It doesn't take a lot of effort. It doesn't cost a lot. In fact, all materials are free. You can download them from the web site or you can request copies. And you don't have to prepare a great banquet for your guests. Refreshments are all that's needed.

Church, there's a lot of lost people out there who will die without Jesus. They need Jesus. Some of them are just waiting for an invitation like Matthew.

I remember a story told by a missionary named Doug Stell when we attended the E412 Equipping Conference a few weeks back. He was going to Bulgaria and we prayed for him. He was in Thailand before with his family.

He said that one time he watched on TV while the Prime Minister of Thailand was being interviewed. The interviewer asked about the Prime Minister's background and upbringing and the Prime Minister replied that

he studied in a Catholic school while growing up. Thailand is primarily a Buddhist country and so the interviewer was surprised about this revelation from the Prime Minister. Then, he asked the Prime Minister, “Didn’t you ever want to become a Christian?” The Prime Minister replied, “Nobody ever asked me.”

Folks, as followers of Christ, we need to make him know to others. We also need to leave everything behind. And, we have to give him our best.