

## THE CALL TO SALVATION – Matt. 9:9-13

### The Call of God #1

Gardiner Hubbard was an attorney in Boston. He had a beautiful house, a successful practice, a standing invitation to any social gathering that he wanted to attend in town. To all outward appearances, Gardiner Hubbard had everything that a person could possibly ask for in life. Only Gardiner's closest friends knew an inner desire that he had, a desire so strong that he would have traded everything else that he owned just to have this longing filled.

Gardiner's inner desire was to be able to communicate freely with his daughter, Mabel. Mabel had contracted scarlet fever as a young child. As a result of this disease, Mabel had lost her ability to hear. Now Mabel was given every advantage that money could buy. She went to the finest school in Boston that specialized in teaching the hearing impaired. She was fluent in sign language and could read lips. But she couldn't hear. How Gardiner longed for Mabel to be able to hear the sound of his voice as her father.

It was Gardiner's desire for his daughter to hear his voice when he called that has dramatically affected each of our lives today. For Gardiner Hubbard heard of a man who was working on a machine that he thought would enable the hearing impaired to be able to communicate more freely with their loved ones. This man had been trained as a teacher of the hearing impaired, as had been his father and grandfather before him. They had written textbooks on teaching the hearing impaired and had invented what they called "Visible Speech". When Gardiner talked with him the very first time and heard his ideas, hope sprung up within his heart. So Gardiner Hubbard committed himself to financially back this man with such novel ideas in hopes that one day his daughter would be able to hear him call her name. Who knows how much money Gardiner gave over the years? Sadly, Gardiner's dream was never realized for the apparatus never did fulfill its originally intended design. But it has become a pretty handy tool for business and personal life. I would guess that almost every one of us has at least one of these in our homes and places of business. Many of us are carrying one of these with us right now. I just hope that none of them become activated during my message – the invention of a speech therapist named Alexander Graham Bell – the telephone.

The telephone has become such an indispensable part of our daily routine that the very word "call" today has become so associated with our phones that if we are told that we have received a call, we just naturally assume that someone has dialed us up on the telephone. Some of our young people might even be tempted to think that the word "call" was coined just for telephone usage. But the word "call" is in fact a very ancient word. Our English word is actually derived from the Greek "Kaleo". The word "call" occurs in the Bible

more than 600 times. And many of these occurrences have to do with God calling those whom He has created in His own likeness and image.

The Bible tells us that God originally created human beings in order to have fellowship with them. Genesis 3:8 speaks of God coming down to walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. It is God's desire for those of the human race to know Him and fellowship with Him. He has also placed a desire in each one of our hearts to know our Creator and have relationship with Him. In order to facilitate this, the Bible often speaks of God's call to us. When someone calls, he has a message to convey and desires a response in return. So it is that God calls us in various aspects of our life.

Now many are concerned with what God has called them to do in a specific area of their lives. Perhaps it is their vocation. What job has God called me to do? Perhaps it is in marriage. Who has God called me to marry? Perhaps it involves a location. Where has God called me to live? Some become obsessed with wondering if they are doing what God has called them to do or married to who God has called them to be with or living where God has called them to locate. Obviously, none of us can turn to a passage of the Scripture and find a specific directive for any of these areas in our lives. But God does give specific calls that apply to all of us in his Word. As we are willing to heed these calls in our lives, we find God's clear leading into the other specific areas that we desire to know as well.

We are going to begin a series this morning looking at some of these calls of God that are given to us in the Bible. In following weeks if the Lord wills, we plan to look at God's call to be His saints, God's call to be His children, God's call to service, God's call to peace, God's call into light, God's call to fellowship, God's call to glory and God's final call to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. But this morning we begin by looking at the most basic, foundational call of God – the call of God to salvation. This is where we must start if we are to have a personal relationship with God at all.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, we find the Lord Jesus Christ in a very interesting setting. The general locale is probably just outside of the city of Capernaum, near the Sea of Galilee. The exact location is a spot that most people tried to avoid at all costs – a tax collector's booth. Now one thread that has tied all cultures together is the paradox of paying taxes. On the one hand we all know that taxes are necessary and for the good of society. Very few of us would want to live in a completely tax-free society where we had no police or armies for protection, no paved roads to travel on, no schools to educate our children, no beautiful parks to visit and camp in, and all of the other conveniences that come from paying taxes. But on the other hand, nobody really enjoys paying taxes. Most of us would echo the late Arthur Godfrey's sentiments when he once said, "I feel honored to pay taxes to my country. But I think that I probably would feel just as honored for about half the price." Benjamin Franklin has been credited with the saying, "In this world nothing is certain

but death and taxes.” Supposedly someone responded to his saying once by adding, “Death and taxes may always be with us, but at least death doesn’t get any worse.”

Well, we find quite an unusual scene in Matthew 9:9-13. We often forget the personal elements that are found in Scripture passages such as this one.

This must have been a very intimate passage for Matthew to record- I am sure that he had some very strong emotions attached to it. Perhaps there were even tears in his eyes as he now, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records for all posterity the Lord Jesus Christ calling him to be one of His apostles. But Matthew also undoubtedly remembered very intensely the objections that were raised at his joining the apostolic band. And these probably hurt Matthew very much when they were originally raised by the Pharisees. Notice this very special passage with me once again.

MT 9:9 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.

MT 9:10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?"

MT 9:12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what this means: `I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Just as an aside, I have always felt that the gospel of Matthew is one of the great overlooked evidences for the divine inspiration of the Bible. Just look at the brevity and clarity of Matthew’s account of his conversion to follow Christ – just 30 words. If an IRS agent today were to write an account of someone’s life, it would probably be hundreds of pages long and so complicated that you couldn’t understand it at all. That is how the government seems to work, isn’t it? The Lord’s Prayer is 56 words. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is 118 words. Lincoln’s Gettysburg address is 226 words. The 10 commandments are 296 words. The United States Department of Agriculture directive on setting the price of cabbage is 15,629 words. The simple fact that Matthew being a first century IRS agent could write such a clear, concise biographical account is nothing short of miraculous indeed.

Well, I have chosen this passage in part to discuss God’s call to salvation because there are 2 types of calls that God extends to humans. We could designate one of these types to be a specific call. Theologians like to use the term efficacious call. (I guess they are a little bit like divine IRS agents). A specific call occurs when God extends an invitation to a chosen individual. And we have such a call in this passage. Jesus is rounding out His apostolic band. He is in the process of choosing 12 people to have a special relationship with

Him for 3 years. Jesus is going to spend a great deal of time with these 12 and is going to train them to be the foundation of the church that will be born after He leaves this earth to return back to heaven. In choosing these 12, Jesus did not put an ad in the Jerusalem Post or hang a sign on the bulletin board in the temple asking for volunteers. Instead Jesus approached 12 different people whom he had prayerfully chosen and called them specifically and individually to be His followers. Matthew was one of these individuals. He certainly appears to be a strange choice to us being a tax-collector, but He was Christ's choice. So Jesus walked up to Matthew and invited him to "follow me". This is a specific call. This is the same type of call that Abraham received from God. God didn't just advertise for anyone who wanted to become a nation to apply at nationsRus.com. He chose Abram to be the father of the Jewish people. This is the same type of call that David received from God. God specifically led His prophet, Samuel, to anoint David to be King over Israel. God is God. He has the right and authority to call whoever He wills for the tasks that He chooses. And God continues to this day to specifically call members into His family and people for tasks of His choice.

But there is another call that is also found in this passage. This is a call that is extended to all. We might designate this a general call. This call is found in the last sentence of the passage that we read where Jesus says, "For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." This is the call that I would like to discuss with you this morning – the general call to salvation.

Why is this call to salvation necessary? Why would the Lord Jesus Christ give such an invitation? Our passage answers these questions in 2 ways. The call to salvation is necessary both because of our spiritual need as human beings and because of God's divine nature.

**Let's look first, at our spiritual need.**

Now Jesus uses an illustration from the medical realm in this passage. And it's very important that we see the point that He is making here because we all have a natural tendency to think a bit like the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very religious people. They valued good works and tried their best to do them. They loved to compare themselves with other people. As long as they were doing better than those around them, they felt that they would be acceptable to God. You see, the Pharisees believed that God graded on a curve. As long as they were in the top half of the class, they would be all right. And compared to tax collectors, the Pharisees felt confident that they were in a much better standing before God. Jesus felt compelled to remind them that all have fallen short of the glory of God. And he first does this by emphasizing His mission in coming to this earth as a spiritual physician.

I have not been trained in the medical field, but I have spent a great deal of time in hospitals visiting people. As one walks down the halls of a hospital, he sees many degrees of illness. Some people feel very well really- but they have broken a bone, so they have just had their leg set and put in a cast. Others don't feel

very well at all. They have fevers and infections. But the virus that they have is a temporary one and is being treated by antibiotics thru an I.V. Still others perhaps will never leave the hospital. They are critically ill with their lives hanging in the balance. And hospitals recognize this. They have sections devoted to intensive care, acute care, intermediate care, and general care. But despite the differences in degrees, everyone in the hospital needs medical help, or else they wouldn't be there at all. A person doesn't go to the hospital for a vacation; he goes there because he is sick; there is something wrong with his body. A person who denies the fact that he needs medical help when his body is failing and fails to seek the help that he needs is making a serious mistake that will likely result in severe consequences in the future.

Now the Pharisees here were making a fatal mistake, and this mistake was keeping them from receiving the spiritual help from Jesus that he was able to give to them. The Pharisees recognized the sinful condition of the tax collectors, but they failed to recognize their own sinful condition. This is brought out in their question to the disciples. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The question itself implies that they are the sinners, we are not. You see, the Pharisees failed to see the fact that Jesus Christ came as a spiritual physician to those who are spiritually sick. Because we are all spiritually sick, he therefore came as a spiritual physician to all of us.

**But let's move on now to see the second necessity of the call to salvation.** God offers a call to salvation because of His merciful nature.

. One of the key statements that Jesus makes in this passage is actually a quote from the Old Testament prophet, Hosea. Notice it again in verse 13 as I read verses 12 and 13 again.

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Now in order to understand this critical statement- "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" - we must go and learn from its source in Hosea 6. This is the entirety of that quote that Jesus chose to just take a part of. Remember, the Pharisees were the experts in the Old Testament. They knew the Old Testament well and even taught it to others. They would likely have known this statement and its context. Or at the very least, they would have known how to look it up so that they would have been able to heed Christ's instructions to "Go and learn what this means."

READ Hosea 6:6- "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings."

It is important to see this verse in its context in Hosea because the second half of this verse helps to explain the first part. This verse was written in Hebrew poetry. Very often in the structure of Hebrew poetry, there

are 2 phrases that are complementary to each other, that help to complete the meaning of each other. Linguists call this parallelism. And such is the case here. Jesus quotes the first half of Hosea 6:6, probably assuming the Pharisees knowledge of it. The last half helps us to understand what he is meaning here.

Do you see the parallel statements here? "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings."

Mercy corresponds to acknowledgement of God; sacrifice corresponds to burnt offerings. This helps us to understand what Jesus is saying here.

The Pharisees like many of those in Hosea's day, were relying upon their sacrifices to try to please God. If only I do enough good things, if only I obey enough commandments, if only I faithfully offer my sacrifices on the altar and pay my tithes to the Lord, then I will become acceptable in his sight. The righteousness that they were seeking was a self-righteousness, a righteousness that was earned by their sacrifices. But God didn't desire that, because He knew that it could never be attained. Nobody can ever do enough good to satisfy a perfect God; it just can't be done. No amount of obedience can make up for even one act of disobedience before God.

No, what God desired was mercy, the mercy that corresponded with the acknowledgement of God. You see as a person acknowledges who God is and what God has done for him, then God showers His mercy on that individual. Like a child who is having difficulty with a task and finally comes to the parent to ask for help, so a person who acknowledges who God is and what God has done puts himself in a position where God can shower His mercy upon him. As a person acknowledges who God is, holy and righteous, loving and gracious, God is then freed to bestow mercy upon that individual. Not mercy that is earned or merited, for that is not mercy at all. But mercy that is freely given out of the fullness of his grace. God is a merciful being. So while He recognizes that we can never fulfill His perfectly righteous standards, He has made available for us the righteousness that we need. That was the reason Jesus was standing on the earth talking to Matthew and the other tax collectors and the Pharisees in the first place. The Bible tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son. The Lord Jesus Christ came and provided the payment necessary to satisfy God's holy demands for sin. This was a demonstration of God's merciful nature.

Having received God's mercy and having been born again into His family, the child of God is now able to become more and more like His heavenly father. One of the ways that we know we have been born again into the family of God is by our reflecting God's nature and character in our lives. Just as a baby begins to reflect the characteristics and personality of his parents as he begins to grow and develop, so God's children begin to reflect God's characteristics and personality in their lives as they grow in their faith. One of God's major attributes is His mercy. God is a merciful God. So if these Pharisees were really God's children, they

should be reflecting His mercy. But they weren't, were they? They were looking down their noses on Matthew and these other tax collectors with whom Jesus was sharing God's mercy.

These tax collectors recognized that they were sinful before God. They knew in their hearts that what they were doing was wrong, was greedy, was not kind to their fellow man. As they acknowledged who Jesus Christ was as the Messiah sent from God, they were opening the door for God's mercy to be able to flow forth to them. But, on the other hand, the Pharisees were not recognizing Jesus Christ as the Messiah sent from God. In fact, they weren't even recognizing God at all as he really was. They had made up a God that they could buy, buy with their sacrifices and good deeds. The Pharisees didn't see themselves as sinners at all- they saw themselves as the righteous ones. This was shown clearly by their lack of mercy for others.

So then the call to salvation is a call to recognize the fact that we have failed to satisfy God's holy demands in our own strength – for Jesus said that he did not come to call the righteous but sinners. We must first admit our sinful condition before God and resist the temptation to try to stand before him in our self-righteousness. And then the call to salvation is a call to follow Him. To accept the Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice as God's atonement for our sin and to commit our lives to a growing relationship with our Creator to find that intimacy of fellowship that we were made to enjoy. As we grow in the character and personality of our Heavenly Father, we will become more and more like Him. We will become more merciful to others, along with becoming more loving and honest and fair and faithful and merciful and all of the other attributes that God Himself possesses.

This is God's call to salvation. Have you heard God's call to you? Have you responded to His call to you?