



“Follow Me!”

Hosea 6:1-7 Matthew 9:9-13 Ephesians 4:1-7

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The word “*conversion*” is a Latin word that means to “*turn around*”; in theology it means *the turning of sinners to God*.

Only God can *convert* sinners. Only the Lord can take someone without faith in Christ and give them faith in Christ. Conversion is God's work alone through His powerful Word.

That is how you came to faith. At some point in your life, God found you – personally, and as an individual -- GOD FOUND YOU. But He found you in sin; He found you not knowing Christ or believing in Him. He found you spiritually dead with no hope of eternal salvation.

But God loves you, and He is merciful to you! GOD FOUND YOU and worked in your life with His powerful Word.

† For most of us, God's powerful Word was at work in the water of **Holy Baptism** for the first time. Holy Baptism was your “*conversion*”, where God turned you from sin and gave you faith in the Lord Jesus. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was applied to you, and your sins were forgiven, and you were given eternal life.

† For others of you, God brought someone into your life at some point to share the Gospel with you, *and it may have been many people over the course of time*. But you learned through the Word of God about Jesus’ death and resurrection that rescues you from sin, guilt and death, and as you learned, God created faith within you. God converted you through His powerful Word and turned you away from the world and sin and to Himself through faith.

Conversion is **movement**: it is God moving you **AWAY** from sin, guilt, death and the world and **BRINGING YOU INTO** His kingdom of forgiveness, peace, and eternal life. **Conversion** is the turning of sinners to God, and **conversion** is the work of God *alone* through His powerful Word.

Today we heard the story of **Matthew's**¹ conversion.

Matthew was a tax collector for the Romans, and because of that, he was *despised* by the Jews. Tax collectors were notorious thieves. They collected more than the Romans required and kept the difference for themselves. They were seen as both **collaborators** and **criminals**. They are frequently listed in the same breath as harlots and sinners: *Matthew would not have been a well-liked man of moral character!*

But yet, Jesus finds Matthew. Jesus intentionally goes to where Matthew is collecting taxes and **converts** him. With His powerful Word, Jesus simply says, “**Follow Me!**”, and faith is created in his heart and Matthew immediately leaves his life of sin and follows Jesus.

It is a **dramatic story** of **conversion**. The focus is on the powerful Word of Jesus that can **move** a person from sin, guilt and death and bring them into His Kingdom of forgiveness, peace and life.

Two things to note about Matthew's **conversion**.

First, Jesus tells Matthew to “**follow Him**”. The word “follow” means to *walk together with Jesus*; it has the idea of *going to same way as Jesus*. In the Bible, the idea of “*walking with God*” means that you **TRUST in Him** and **OBEY His Word**.

¹ **Matthew** is also called **Levi** in the Gospels. His conversion story is told three times; in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. *Matthew* is his Greek (Gentile) name and *Levi* was his Hebrew (Israelite) name. As a tax collector, Matthew worked for Greek-speaking Romans; however he gathered taxes from Hebrew-speaking Jews. Having two names was common in New Testament times; such as Simon also known as Peter; and Saul also known as Paul, *et al.*

Like Matthew, Jesus has called you to “*follow Him*”. God did not find you and *convert* you with His powerful Word so that you can continue to live in sin according to the ways of the world! *Conversion* changes you; you have been “moved” away from sin and brought into God’s Kingdom. You no longer “follow” after the way of the world, but you “follow” after Jesus and His Word. **Live your life that way!**

Following Jesus means...

- † Renouncing the world and having nothing to do with its dark and evil ways
- † Studying and learning throughout your life what Jesus teaches in His Word so that you can *know Him better*
- † That you know, understand, and obey the 10 Commandments
- † That you intentionally nurture the Fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Faith is described as “*following Jesus.*” You can follow Him because God has worked through His powerful Word to *convert* you! God has moved you *away from* sin and brought you *into* His Kingdom.

A second thing about Matthew’s conversion: did you notice this verse?

As Jesus reclined at table in the house, **BEHOLD**, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. MATTHEW 9:10

In the New Testament, “**BEHOLD!**” is a word that calls you to pay particular attention to something. It has the idea that something important is about to happen.

In this case, **YOU ARE TO PAY ATTENTION** to the fact that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Matthew held a dinner and *invited his co-workers and friends to meet Jesus!* (Luke 5:29).

**When you truly understand
what God did for you in your *conversion*,
then you cannot help but tell other people about it.**

***Why would you NOT tell your family, friends, and co-workers
about the forgiveness of sin, peace with God,
and eternal life in Heaven?***

Conversion to Christ is the most important thing that happens to us in our lives. There is nothing that compares to it, there is nothing that has such eternal **life and death** consequences attached to it.

Like Matthew, you can share Christ with people in your life. You do not have to have a doctorate in theology to share Christ! Matthew shared Christ the very first day of his conversion! He simply invited them to meet Jesus and have a meal with Him.

You can do the same thing. Find a way to tell others about Jesus. Look for opportunities. Share your story. Invite your family and friends to Church with you. Find a way for the people in your life to hear the Gospel, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that brings forgiveness, peace and life!

Conversion means *the turning of sinners to God*. Only God can convert sinners, and He uses His powerful Word to do so.

He did it for Matthew the tax collector;

He did it for you at some point in your life;

And we pray that the Lord works through each of us to *convert* those we know as we share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with them.

Amen!