

THE224 Christian Narrative 2 Redemption

Unit 2b The Call of Christ

Presented by the



For Use by the

Blue Letter Bible Institute

[Web: Study.Bible](http://Study.Bible)

A Ministry of the

Blue Letter Bible

[Web: BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)

Welcome to Session 2B of Christian Narrative 2. Today we will be talking about the call of Jesus. So here's our main teaching point today. Jesus calls people to follow him and respond to the gospel message. So what we've been doing over the past few lessons, both in Unit 1 and now in Unit 2, is we've been talking about Jesus and really a lot of what Jesus has to do related to our salvation. So we've been talking about Christology and soteriology in a very real way, and we've been talking about them in an interconnected way as well. Today we're going to talk about something that in my mind bridges both. It's Christological in nature, but it's also salvific in its subject matter. And that is the call of Jesus in the life of people. Jesus really calls every person to follow him, and without his call, we cannot follow him. And so it's difficult for us to say whether we're strictly talking about Christology, something about Christ, or soteriology, something related to salvation. This is a particular topic that really bridges the span between both. But we're going to talk about the nature and the impact of the call of Christ in the life of humanity.

The first thing that we need to see about the nature of the call of Jesus is that it is a call that is extended by Jesus alone. Now, if we step back into the world of Jesus, there is a time in our history where Jesus literally walked the earth and invited people to follow him. So we see the call of Jesus extended by himself, in his person. And Matthew 9:9 is a great example of this. There it says that "Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And so [Matthew] rose and followed him." Very real. Very practical. There's nothing that can be extrapolated from that, other than the fact that Jesus walked along the road, saw a man, and called this man to follow him. And indeed, he did. Now, Jesus no longer walks the earth like he did during Matthew's time. He is now in heaven. We talk about the ascension of Jesus when we look at that. He is no longer here but in heaven.

So the question must be asked, "How is the call of Jesus extended by Jesus today?" And there are two answers for this. First, we see that the call of Jesus is extended through his holy word and his holy church. The Scriptures and the church become the mechanism by which Jesus invites people, calls people to follow him, and this is done through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer or the would-be believer through the word and the church. But even though it is the word and the church that are now calling people, it is Jesus through these things that is calling. Jesus through the Holy Spirit and the medium of the word, Jesus through the Holy Spirit and the medium of his church, is calling people to follow him, to respond to the gospel message.

And one of the things that we have to recognize is that the call of Christ is first and foremost a real physical calling. What I mean by that is when we look back into Jesus' day and age, we see his first followers. They literally left things. So in that passage we read in Matthew 9:9, Matthew stands up and leaves his taxes. Peter leaves his nets behind and stops being a fisherman and now becomes a follower of Jesus. So too we have to recognize that to follow Jesus is a physical thing. We cannot simply ascend to him intellectually, but we must stand and follow him. Even if we look at Andrew, Andrew stood up and he followed Jesus. When an individual receives the call of Jesus, it is first a stand and follow call. It is a physical call. It speaks to our human bodies as much as it speaks to our eternal souls.

Next, we have to recognize that the call is also an absolute call because the call of Jesus is a call from God himself. In Christian Narrative 1, we talked about the Trinitarian nature of God, that there are three persons in the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Coequal in power, coequal in glory. The call of Jesus is nothing less than a call from God himself. And we have to recognize this at the

beginning that in Jesus' earthly ministry and his eternal ministry, he is calling people to follow him, and this is a call from God. As such, the call of Jesus cannot be hijacked. It cannot be used for its own purposes. And I want us to look at a passage in Luke 9 because this really helps us understand the nature of the call of Jesus well. Luke 9, starting in verse 57, and we'll read through 62. "As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' And Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to those at my home.' And Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

In a somewhat interesting passage here, we have three would-be followers of Jesus Christ. I say interesting because we don't often hear this type of language or this type of discussion in our modern Christian culture. What we're most used to hearing is that Jesus desires for everyone to be saved and there's very little you have to do. Just respond to Jesus. Follow Jesus. Right? We hear a lot of this language. And to be truthful, there's a lot in the Scriptures that talks about how Jesus has died for the world and that Jesus loves everyone and that Jesus desires for all to come into relationship with him. That is all true. But here in Luke 9, we have three people who are rejected by Jesus, three people who say, "I want to follow you," but ultimately who end up not following him because Jesus pushes them away. I want to look at why Jesus pushes each one of these away because this is critical because this has to do with the call of Jesus and the fact that the call of Jesus can never be hijacked.

In the first would-be follower presented to us, he says, "I will follow you wherever you go," but Jesus says, "Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to go." We have to first recognize that we cannot take initiative and act before we're called. We can't come to God, theologically speaking, because of the impact and effect of sin in our life. We can't say, "I'm ready to follow Jesus." It's simply an impossibility. Sin has so impacted and ruined our life that none of us, there are none that are righteous, there are none that seek good. And so it is an impossibility for us to preempt or come before and ask to follow God before Jesus calls us. This call of Jesus in our life is absolutely essential if we are to become children of God.

Now, to the second individual, now Jesus turns around and he says to another, "Follow me." But in this instance, the person says, "First, let me go and bury my father." And Jesus then responds, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." So another person that misses the opportunity to follow Jesus because we can't allow anything to stand between ourselves and the call of Jesus. This person allowed something to stand before his call and Jesus, and this is an absolute call. When the call of Jesus comes to us, we must respond wholly and fully because anything less is a rejection of the call that we have.

And then finally, we come to the third. Another one said, "I'll follow you, but first let me say farewell to those at my home." And Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." We can't set our own conditions upon the call of God in our life. We cannot say, "I will do it if..." or "I will do it when..." because that lessens it. The call of Christ is an absolute call on the life of an individual. It can only be responded to wholly because if it is partially responded to, in essence and in truth, it is fully rejected. So here with these three would-be followers, we learned something interesting

about the call of Jesus. It cannot be taken initiative, right? We cannot act before we're called. We can't allow things to stand between us and the call. And we cannot set our own conditions upon the call.

Here's something I want us to consider. The call of Jesus creates the potential for something new, and the call of Jesus actually creates the reality of something old. Let me try and visualize this for us using a simple diagram. Let's consider that life is a series of personal choices. You and I both live on this timeline. We are born. At some point in the future, we'll die. We haven't died yet, but life up to this point, do I want vanilla? Do I want chocolate? Am I going to wear a red shirt? Am I going to wear a black shirt? Am I going to become an accountant, or am I going to become a lawyer? We make all of these different choices throughout life. Some of them very menial. Some of them very significant. "I'm going to marry Susan." "I'm going to marry Teresa." We ask all of these different questions. But then and only when the call of Jesus Christ comes upon our life, everything changes. Our life can no longer simply be a life of personal choices because Christ has now given us the call. And this call, like we say above there, you see it creates the potential for something new and the reality of something old.

And if we were going to put a third bullet point up there, we have to say, "But it eliminates the possibility for things to stay the same" because the call of Jesus is an absolute call. When Jesus walked up to the tax collector's booth and saw Matthew and said, "Follow me," Matthew had the potential of something new and the reality of something old. And let me talk to you about what that is. There is the reality of rejection through disobedience. If Matthew said no, or if Matthew didn't respond, he would forever live in rejection, in disobedience. He would have forever disobeyed the call of Jesus in his life. But at that one moment when the call of Jesus came, it created the potential for him to experience justification through obedience to the call of the command of Jesus in his life. And so this is really important for us to grasp. The call of Jesus, when it comes to an individual, forever ceases that that individual can continue in an ordinary life. They must at that moment either reject and disobey the call or embrace and experience justification through obedience to the call of Christ. This is the only possibility that exists.

So let's consider on a deeper level for just a moment the response to the call of Jesus. There on your screen, you see Matthew 19:16-26. Let me read this passage, which will kind of help us look at all of these bullet points together. "And behold, a man came up to [Jesus], saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'All these I have kept. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go and sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.' When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

So here we have the rich young ruler who ultimately rejects the call of Jesus. But in his rejection and in this interaction that he has with Jesus, we can begin to discover some of the aspects of the content of

crisis in the call of Jesus. First, recognize that the content of the call of Jesus is Jesus alone. You see, the only way that the rich young ruler could have eternal was by obeying the command of Jesus in his life. This means that the proper response to the call of Jesus isn't respect. It's not admiration. It's not even honor of who Jesus is. You can respect, admire, and honor Jesus, and still disobey him. The proper response to the call of Jesus is simple obedience. This is why it's a real and physical calling because we must obey the call of Jesus that we receive. And for this rich man, it was a simple matter of obedience. His respect and admiration and honor were not proper responses. Only obedience. You see, the one who has heard the call of Jesus immediately enters a crisis of decision. One must now accept the potential of something new that they can be justified through the act of obedience, right? That this is life as now it can be, life with Jesus as supreme authority. The call of Jesus contains a unique command for every individual. Your call from Jesus was not the same as my call from Jesus. The rich young ruler needed to sell his possessions. Matthew needed to leave his tax booth. Peter needed to leave his nets. Then he needed to step out of the boat later on. Just like the call itself, obedience is always a physical response. And so what we recognize is that the call of Christ in our life creates a crisis of decision. Will I accept this call to obedience, or will I reject it and live forever in a place of rejection of what God has called me to do? So the content of Jesus' call is Jesus alone. The crisis is a crisis of decision.

But then we come to this interesting idea that the call of Jesus justifies the act of obedience. Here's the interesting thing. It's not so much the work of the rich young ruler of selling his possessions that gets him into heaven, right? That actually is not the case. What gets him into heaven is that he is obedient to Christ. But what we recognize is that there is an act. This act now becomes an act of justification for this ruler. It may sound challenging for those of us who haven't thought of it this way yet, but to move forward in our own power is impossible because works don't lead to salvation. This is why earlier we said we can't preempt the call of Jesus. We can't say, "I will obey everything that you call me to obey," not having received the call of Jesus and think that we will accomplish our ultimate goal which is to have relationship with God in eternity. All of our righteousness is as filthy rags. Yet if Christ has called us, if we experience the call, notice the rich man received the call. Jesus said, "Follow me." Then this call is actualized through obedience. And so our act of obedience to the call of Jesus becomes justification for us. It becomes the fruit of our obedience. It becomes the fruit of our decision to say yes to the call of Jesus in our life. And so the call of Jesus justifies our acts of obedience. Matthew getting up from his tax collector's booth became the act of obedience that justifies him before God because he's responding to the call of Jesus. Peter leaving his nets is the act that justifies him before God because he has embraced the call of Jesus.

It's a challenging thing to think about, but I want us to stretch our minds just a little bit in understanding the importance and the power and the potency of the call of Jesus in our life. Yet, and I see this at the bottom here, after Christ calls, one must either accept or reject Jesus Christ as savior. And as I said at the beginning, this is why this particular lesson, this particular session really is a bridge between soteriology, that is, the study of salvation, and Christology. That Christ is the one who calls, and he alone has the power to call, yet salvation is based on the call of Christ and only the called will be saved. These two things stand hand in hand, and yet we recognize there's a lot of stuff going on in these two worlds, right? That I have an act of obedience that can justify me because I've responded to Jesus Christ as my savior is something that stretches our minds.

Let's move from the response to the call. Those who respond to the call of Jesus are then saved. 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you

may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Second, the call of Jesus is sometimes called the effectual calling, which we can distinguish from a general calling. So now we’re stepping into, from a soteriological standpoint, you often have heard the phrase effectual calling. This is what we’re talking about in many ways. Some people can receive a gospel call. They can hear the gospel proclaimed and yet the call of Christ is not in there. Yet when people receive the call of Christ, they must respond in one way or another to that call.

Now, those who respond must pick up the cross of Jesus. This is another point that’s really important, and this really bridges us into the Christian life, right? That when we read in Mark 8:31, what Jesus tells us is that if we are to respond to his call, then we must pick up the cross. Starting in verse 31 of Mark 8, “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days he would rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels.’”

Bearing the cross is an absolute essential response to the call of Christ in our life. If we are going to respond in an affirmative to the call of Christ in our life, then we must next bear our cross because the cross is the true mark of discipleship, right? Matthew 10:24, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.” If Jesus was taking upon himself the cross and he called his disciples to take upon themselves the cross, then the cross becomes the mark of discipleship in the life of a Christian. Now, the cross is also the bridge to closeness with God. In Matthew 26:42, we see that Jesus in the garden, he goes out a second time and he prays. He says, “Father, if it cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” He says, “I don’t want to go to the cross, but if I must go to the cross, then I will. Drink it to the dregs. I will do this in order to be close to you.” Jesus recognized that to reject the cross was to reject the plan that the Father had for his life, and he was unwilling to do this. So the cross became that which kept him close with God. And then finally, Matthew 11:30, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” We read that verse and it’s kind of interesting that I would use that verse in talking about bearing our cross, yet the cross is the thing that brings us communion with Jesus Christ. It is the mark of discipleship and it’s what brings us closeness and community with our heavenly Father and with our eternal savior.

So let me come back to the image that we did just a little while ago talking about life as a series of personal choices. What we see is when we step up and respond to the call of Jesus in the affirmative, when we are justified through our obedience, then to the observing world, the cross of Christ becomes the mark of our Christianity, the bridge to a relationship and closeness with God and communion with Jesus Christ. This is what occurs when we bear the cross. Jesus calls people to follow him and respond to the gospel message. The call of Jesus is absolute. It is nothing less than a call from God. If we are to respond to the call, then we must justify ourselves through acts of obedience, responding to the call, bearing our cross. If we are going to reject the call of Jesus in our life, then we cannot expect that we’d go back to life the way it was. Rather, we stand in constant disobedience to the command of God in our

life. The call of Jesus is both part of Christology and soteriology. It is a real call that comes from Jesus alone, but it is the beginning of salvation in the life of a human being. Jesus calls people to follow him and respond to the gospel message.