

What's in a name? Have you ever wondered what your first name means? I looked some up and found some interesting things: for example Derek comes from the Old German Theoderic meaning 'power of the tribe', or 'ruler of the people'; Barbara from the Latin means 'foreign woman'; Craig comes from the Scottish Gaelic word meaning 'rock'; Margaret comes from Greek meaning 'pearl'. Interesting, eh?

How about these? Jonathan, from Hebrew Yehonatan – 'Yahweh has given, God has given'. And this one's great– Rafael, again from Hebrew – 'God has healed'. So apt, even prophetic.

We can only wonder why on earth the parents of the **following** children gave them **their** names:

- Actress Gwyneth Paltrow named her daughter **Apple**, perhaps she liked the taste of sweet apples, or perhaps she had an Apple Mac **computer**!
- A Philippino senator was named **Joker**, because his father was a passionate **cards** player; Joker's brother was called **Jack**, but even **more** strange, Joker called his **daughter** Joker too!
- 1970s rock singer Marc Bolan called his son **Rolan** – Rolan Bolan; and David Bowie called his son **Zowie**!
- A Vietnamese man named his son 'Mai Phat Sau Nghin Ruoi', (apologies for pronunciation) which translates as 'Fined 6500', the fine the father had to pay for ignoring Vietnam's 2-child policy!

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Special names, full of meaning, most given by loving parents, no doubt. Of special significance, to the name-**giver**.

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The Bible tells us of a man sitting doing his job one day when along came a **special** man who spoke to him. From that time on his life was **changed**, turned upside down. The man was called **Levi**, doing his job, collecting taxes. Along came Jesus, who gave him a **new** name, Matthew, which means 'gift of God'. And from **that** day, God's **used** this God-given gift to speak to people in every generation, in every country. **He** wrote the account of Jesus' life on earth that appears **first** in the New Testament. Let's read from Matthew 9:9-13.

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So let's look first – verse 9 - at **the specific calling of Levi**. Here he was, sitting at his desk, doing his job, collecting taxes, just another day at the office. Along comes a man, who says '**Follow** me', and he ups and **goes** – as easy as that! Or **is** it? I don't think so – there's **more** to this than meets the eye. .

Levi was among the most hated people in Israel then – a tax collector, and **nobody** likes a tax collector do they? (Nothing personal, any tax collectors listening!) It was well-known that tax collectors at that time (I'm saying nothing about today!), **then** they overcharged so they could take commission, they kept the profit for **themselves**. Even **worse** was that they worked for the Romans (nothing personal any Romans listening!) who were oppressing the Jews. **Everyone** knew tax collectors were corrupt, rich and hated.

Another day. More taxes taken. More money made – business was **good**. Just another normal working day for Levi.

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Jesus says 'Follow **me**' and he gets up and follows him.

I don't think this is the first Levi knows of Jesus. He'll have **heard** of Jesus – everyone had to pay taxes and everyone will have been talking about this man Jesus. They'll have been talking about all the miraculous things they'd seen him do. He'd have heard them talking about people he'd **healed**. As he sat there at his booth overlooking the Sea of Galilee, he'll have heard people talking about how this Jesus had even calmed a **storm**. He'll have heard all about it. There was no Evening Argus, but **everyone** will have been talking about this amazing man.

He may even have witnessed some of Jesus' teaching and healing **himself**. With Jesus was where the **action** was. Did Levi's days have to go on the same way? I think he was already thinking about his way of life. I think God had already been **speaking** to Levi, preparing his heart, **showing** him that he was on a path travelling **away** from God, so that when Jesus walks past and says to him 'Follow **me**', Matthew **knows** it's right, Levi **knows** his life is going **nowhere** without Jesus. So he got up and followed him.

Huge **crowds** were following Jesus; but there was something **different** about Jesus' call here – this is **personal; this is an individual call** – this is a call to Levi – 'I know you're **ready**, follow me', Jesus says.

And that's what it's **like** with Jesus, isn't it? Levi's heart was **hard** – it **had** to be for him to do his job properly. Taking money from people without thinking about the impact it was having on their lives. So hard-hearted. But God softened even **this** man's heart. God can soften **anyone's** heart – even the most hardened criminal, even the most ruthless and unfeeling murderer, can be **softened** by God. Never give up on **anybody** – **God** doesn't.

That's what the good news of Jesus does. He softens your heart. He shows where we're going **wrong**. He lets us know how we can go the **right** way. He speaks through the **Bible**, he speaks through our **consciences** – we all know when we're going the wrong way, don't we? – he speaks to us through Christian people. Jesus speaks today, and he softens our hearts, it may take longer for some than others. But then one day he stands in **front** of us and says 'Follow **me**'; he knows we're ready, and **we just have to respond**, we **have** to get up and follow him. Levi didn't say 'Business is good at the moment, come back later, Jesus, and I'll reconsider.' No. He was **ready**, he just **had** to follow.

Is **your** heart still hard towards things of God? Do **you** still need convincing that following Jesus is the right way? Has God still got a work to do in softening your heart to **accept** him? That's what he **wants**. Jesus wants you to see that he has the words of eternal **life**, to see that following **him** leads you on a path to eternity.

Are **you** like Levi was, sitting there, just doing the same old things, day in day out, knowing deep down there **must** be something better than this. This **can't** be all there is, surely. If you're feeling that way, you know **something** of the softening of your heart that God does. There **is** something better. This **isn't** all there is. There's so much **more**. And it's in **Jesus**, in relationship with **Jesus**, the son of God. He says 'Follow **me**'.

Levi **had** to get up and follow Jesus. **Straight away**. No discussion. No arguments. He hears Jesus' voice, he knows it's right, and he follows him. Are **we** like that? Or do we **delay**? Do we get up and do whatever God tells us to do? Or do we use delaying tactics? 'Just have to check that message, get all the commentaries out, make sure I'm hearing this right. - Perhaps I'll **sleep** on it. - Better check it **over** with someone who's got a better **understanding** than I've got.'

I'm not saying those things are **wrong** – they're **good** things. But not **always**; **sometimes** they're just delaying us doing something for the Lord. **Levi** got up **immediately** and followed Jesus. How quick are **you** to answer God's call? We have to make sure we get up when Jesus says, and follow him before he's so far in front and disappearing in the **distance**. Is there something God's asking **you** to do, but you're **delaying**, you're not **sure**, or you're too happy where you **are**, thank you very much?

**Luke's** account tells us he **left everything** - he left his old life behind, **everything**. His **old** way of life was the **problem**. He was going the way of the world. He was getting on, making money, living the good life, probably. But he knew it wasn't the **right** way. - He gave it all up. He left it all behind to follow Jesus. His life **changed**. He started living a **new** life. Jesus gave him a new **name**, Matthew, 'gift of God'. How amazing is that?! To be given a new name by **Jesus**, the Son of **God**. New name, new life, new meaning, new priorities from the day Jesus said, 'Follow me'.

How's it with **you**? Have you left the old life **behind**? If **so**, you have a new name - 'child of God'. If **so**, you have a new **life** in Jesus Christ. If **so**, God wants to use the gifts he's given **you** to share the good news with others. Amazing isn't it? How hard's **your** heart? Even as Christians our hearts can be harder than they **should** be. Perhaps we haven't quite left **everything** behind. Perhaps we're still clinging **on** to our old habits and desires. Perhaps we just don't **want** to see some of those earthly pleasures disappear from our lives. Is that true of **you**?

We can't be a part-**time** child of God. We can't be his only on a Sunday. We **can't** live lives no different from non-believers during the week. We **can't** switch it on and off. **Levi** left **everything** behind - **Jesus** was his **focus**, **Jesus** was his priority, knowing Jesus was **everything** to him. - Is it like that for **us**? Is it like that for **you**? It **must** be, if you're to be called 'child of God'.

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(include if only Christians present)

Matthew - 'gift of God' - God's used the gift he gave to Matthew ever since that day - his gift of recording accurately, not **taxes** any more, but Jesus' life on earth. As writer of the first gospel about Jesus in the New Testament, in the most read book in history, the name of **Matthew** has become better known than many kings. God's **blessed** him, and many people **through** him. It was important in God's purposes for Matthew to **record** these things.

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But you might not think it's **important** to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. You might be sitting there thinking 'I'm doing OK as I **am**, thanks. My life's fine. I'm surviving OK as I am. Good job, lovely family, great kids. Why do I need to follow him any **closer**?'

It all comes down to **the importance of Jesus' call** - **Who** does Jesus call? And **why** does Jesus call?

First question - [Who does Jesus call?](#) Verses 10-11.

Matthew held a party for Jesus at his house. He's wants all his friends to get to know the man who's changed his **life**. He wants to **share** what God's done for him. This is the effect Jesus has on people when he calls them to **follow** him, you just want to tell others about him.

Of course all Matthew's old friends were what **he** used to be, tax-collectors and sinners, in other words, those who weren't going God's way and who were living for **themselves**, totally selfish lives. Not the most respected kind of people. But Jesus met, ate, sat and talked with these people. He was seemingly **comfortable** with them, and they seemed OK with it **too**.

'Shock, horror!' the Pharisees think. '**Disgraceful!** Eating with sinners? Mixing with plebs? The dregs of society? How could Jesus **do** that? No-one religious should be seen doing **that!**

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This wasn't a religious man like **they** were – this was **Jesus**, the Son of **God**, come down to earth, not to be religious and to go round all 'holier than thou', but he came to call sinners to repentance; to ask those who were going the **wrong** way, to turn around and follow **him** and go **his** way.

Jesus said he came to seek and save the **lost**, those going the wrong way, their **own** way. There's a lovely story Jesus told about the shepherd who had 100 sheep in his care; one of them wandered off and got lost; the shepherd left the 99 safe ones to go and fetch the lost one back. That's what **Jesus** does. He rescues the lost, the wanderers, the sinners, those not going God's way.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth, and in chapter 6 he lists the kind of people who **won't** be in heaven if they don't come to Jesus; he writes, '*Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves, nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*' Probably the people regarded as the lowest in **our** society.

But Paul then goes **on** to say, '*And that is what some of **you** were.*' Some of those in the church had **been** that kind of people, until Jesus had said to **them** 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' – 'follow me.'

Jesus **calls** these people. There's **no-one** that God can't reach. **No-one's** beyond the reach of God. Jesus meets with sinners.

Let me make it clear what the Bible **means** by sinner: have you gone God's way? No – that's sin. Have you put God **first** in your life and lived to please him? No – that's sin. Have you neglected God and done only what's brought you pleasure, in other words lived for yourself? Yes – that's sin. Have you thought you can be the only one in control of your life? Yes – that's sin.

In fact, we've **all** sinned, we've **all** gone our own way. We're **all** sinners. We're **all** in need of Jesus' call to follow him. **All** of us. There's only **one** man who's walked this earth and led a sinless life, and that was Jesus himself, because he's the Son of God. The **rest** of us fall short, we all miss the mark. Every **one** of us is the type of person that Jesus came to talk to. He came to call **you**. He calls all sinners to repentance – to turn from their own way and start going **his** way. That includes you and me and everyone in this whole wide world in every generation. **You're** no different. Jesus calls all of us – he calls **you**.

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Second question - **why does Jesus call?** Verse 12.

**Why** does Jesus call? 2 things – firstly, **he knows what we are without him**: We're sick! We're **sick**! We need **healing** from our old way of life, and making healthy enough to live a **new** life, a **holy** life, a **heavenly** life, a life for **God**. That's why Jesus **came**, to heal the **sick**. Earlier in Matthew's gospel, we've seen Jesus visibly healing sick people. This passage is sandwiched between stories where people came to Jesus and were physically healed.

But more important than **that** is what Jesus says **here**: he didn't come just to show that he can heal **physically** sick people, it's **more** important that we should be healed **spiritually**. It's good to have a **physically** well body, but you're still not going to heaven unless you're **spiritually** well. We're spiritually **sick**, and we need healing. We need a doctor who'll heal us **spiritually**, who'll put us right with God – there's only one – his name is **Jesus**.

I've recently had pains in my **knee**, but I didn't start bashing it about and opening it up and fixing it myself, because – clever as I **am** – I don't know what's **wrong** and how to **fix** it. I need a **doctor** to fix it.

Likewise **spiritually** – I can't get myself right spiritually, because I don't know what's wrong and how to **fix** it. I can't go to other **people**, because we're all in the same boat, and unfortunately it's got the name Titanic!

That's where **Jesus** comes in. Jesus calls because he knows we're sick spiritually. He knows what we are, and how to fix it. We come to Jesus. He calls us to follow him, to be **healed** and go his way.

Paul doesn't use the word 'sick' for how we are, he has **another** word for it in Ephesians 2 – **dead**! He says that if we're following the ways of this world and not going God's way, we're '*dead in transgressions and sins*'. Without Christ we're **dead** spiritually. And a **dead** person can't heal himself. Jesus calls, because he knows we're sick and need healing. This is **serious**!

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Jesus calls because he knows what we are – **sick**. Secondly, he calls because **he knows where we're heading without him**.

The Bible's very clear that as well as a destination called **heaven**, there's also a destination called **hell**. And it says that those who are God's children are going to heaven, whereas those who don't know God through **Jesus** are going to hell. And I know straight away some people won't like me mentioning it. 'Just stick to talking about heaven, please. Talk about hell makes me feel uncomfortable. It's not nice.'

You're **right**. It's **not** nice. **Jesus** describes it as a place where there's **weeping**, and **wailing** and **gnashing** of teeth, a lake of **fire**. It's no **Butlins**! It's **not** nice – it's **scary**! But we have to see the **seriousness** of sin. We have to **realise** how serious our situation **is**, if we're neglecting God. You may say, 'Oh, it's not that serious – I'm getting on fine.' Let me tell you – it **is** that serious! The wages of sin is eternal **death** – live without God **now**, you live without God **forever** – and it **won't** be nice, I tell you!

Jesus knows where we're heading without him – to **death** and hell. And you may say, 'Well that's very cruel of him to come and tell us that we're headed for a very hot and scary place.' Yes, it **would** be, except that he comes and he calls you to **follow** him. He calls because he's the only one who **can** call you out of the situation you're in.

We need healing. The Bible calls it **salvation**. Jesus says we need to be **saved**. Which brings us back to where we **started** this evening - looking at names. The very name given to the Son of God, **Jesus**, means 'He saves. Saviour. God brings salvation'. Jesus saves from sin and death. We need healing; we need **salvation**; we need **Jesus**.

That's why Jesus calls, because he knows we're lost, insisting on going down the road to hell, and he knows we need **rescuing**, and he's the only one who can save us. Jesus calls those who recognise they're sick, need healing, need saving to follow **him**.

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All this demands a response. **What does God want?**

Verse 13 tells us he doesn't want sacrifice, he doesn't want our empty religious rituals, he doesn't want us to work our way to heaven. We **can't**. Like Matthew, we have to respond with **obedience** to the call 'Follow me.' God wants our believing, trusting, obedient hearts. He wants our **heart**. He wants us to **love** him.

(ending 1 - Christians)

We have to come to Jesus, and **follow** him. We live for **him**, for his **glory**. We leave the old life behind – hard as that may be – there's no going back. Matthew couldn't go back to collecting taxes once he'd left. But look at what we've got to look **forward** to - the reward is **heaven**.

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God wants your **heart**. He wants you to follow him. This **is** possible. You **can**. **You** can. Listen to Jesus' call. He's calling you because he wants you to enjoy your new **identity** in Christ. He wants you to have a new **name** – 'child of **God**'. He wants to give you new life, with him, in heaven, forever.

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Matthew got up and left everything and followed Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, and he says his sheep know his voice, and they follow him. Are **you** following as you ought?

Think about it – it's **vitaly** important.

That's why Jesus calls, because he knows we're lost, insisting on going down the road to hell, and he knows we need **rescuing**, and he's the only one who can save us. Jesus calls those who recognise they're sick, need healing, need saving to follow **him**.

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(ending 2 - non-Christians)

It cost God a lot to make this salvation possible. It cost the death of Jesus on the cross. You see, our sin deserves that someone pays with death. It should have been **us**. But God in his infinite, immeasurable, amazing, undeserved love, decided that **Jesus** would die the death we deserved. He did **that** for **us**. He died on the **cross** that we can have our sins forgiven. He took our **place**. How amazing is that?! We can be **forgiven**.

But we have to come to Jesus, and follow him, recognising we've gone our own way and not God's way; it means asking for his forgiveness for our sin; it means understanding that only because Jesus died and rose again can we be saved from **hell**; it means saying to Jesus 'I want to go **your** way. I want to **trust** you. I want to live for your **glory**'; it means leaving the old life behind – difficult as that may be – but entering into the **wonderful** life that is knowing God forever.

God wants your heart. He wants you to follow him. This **is** possible. You **can**. **You** can. Listen to Jesus' call. He's calling you because he wants you to enjoy your new **identity** in **Christ**. He wants you to have a new **name** – 'child of **God**'. He wants to give you new **life**, with him, in heaven, forever.

Are you following as you ought?

Think about it – it's vitally important.