

MATTHEW 9:9-17
TRAVELLING LIGHT!

The Adventure Show is an occasional programme on BBC Scotland; it was broadcast on Sun evening, and I recorded it and watched it later – of course, I was at Church! It is the closest I'll ever get to some of the most arduous activities people get up to. On Sunday, the main feature was a race along the length of the West Highland Way, all the way from Milngavie to Fort William; the first man home did it in just over 16 hours. Cameron McNeish is a climber who takes us onto some of the wildest parts of Scotland and makes it look so easy and on Sunday as part of his piece he showed us his pack; all he needed to be outdoors in Scotland for a week. He showed us his food, his sleeping bag, his cooker, his spare clothes, his waterproofs, and his tent – you would think that it was a huge pack and weighed 50/60lbs; the total weight was 12lbs! Here is a man who has learned to travel light on his journeys up the mountains of Scotland.

I was part of a conversation last month about the future of the Church in Scotland – can the Church learn to travel lightly? Every Church has its ways of doing things, its rules and regulations and some of these are very necessary at times, but there are other times when churches get bogged down in these, and the rules and regulations shape Church life and the ways in which Churches live and behave! Sometimes, as people we get bogged down in all kinds of things, life weighs very heavily on our shoulders and we're so caught up in hundreds of different activities that sometimes we lose sight of the important ones! Then we feel guilty about neglecting things that we think are important and that makes things even worse. Then we long for a life that would be simple and light!

We read the story of Matthew's encounter with Jesus - see how simple the whole thing is! Matthew tells his own story and even when he tells it himself, it is simple and short! Matthew was a tax-collector; he was probably more a collector of tolls or excise duty. He would sit at the side of the road and as people came past, he would charge them a toll to pass through the town or along the road, a bit like the tolls we used to pay to cross the Forth or Tay bridges. He was not the most popular man in Capernaum; tax-collectors were either employed by the occupying Roman army, or in this case, he was more likely employed by the hated King Herod; they were treated as traitors. More often than not, they were also thieves because they would charge over the odds, give the King his tax and keep the rest for themselves and so make themselves rich at other people's expense. So they were hated even more.

Matthew is sitting in his tax-booth beside the road, when Jesus comes along. "*Follow me*" says JC; that's it! There is nothing more than that. Two words: "*Follow me.*" Matthew did. He left everything behind him - he left his work, his home, to follow Jesus. He was to go where Jesus went, watch what Jesus did, listen to Him teach; we don't really see very much more of Matthew ever in the Bible, but he wrote down what he saw and heard and we have it in the Bible book that bears his name. Two simple little words were enough to change Matthew's life forever; two little words and no great explanation about what might be involved; no great complicated set of rules and regulations to follow, just "*Follow me*" and off he went. He was so happy that he threw a party for his friends, so that his friends could meet Jesus as well and Jesus went to the party with all of Matthew's friends and for Jesus to eat with them was a sign of His acceptance of them and His friendship with them.

Some wanted to make it more complicated than this: "these are not right kind of people for any self-respecting rabbi to eat with! These people have broken all kinds of rules and regulations and are not fit to be friends of a rabbi!" "*On hearing...*" (9:12f)

Some people get very worked up about the word 'sinner' and somehow think that it doesn't apply to us. Is anyone here perfect? No! Then word applies to all of us; it simply means people who are not yet perfect, people who have faults and failings, people who have made mistakes, people who have their shortcomings – that's what the word means. So Jesus says that He has come to save people who are not perfect. The Pharisees thought they were perfect; they thought they had life sorted by keeping hundreds of rules and regulations every day and life was a great burden to them in case they forgot one! Jesus says to Matthew "Follow me!"

There is no shorter or simpler way to sum up what being Christian is all about; it's all about following Jesus. That means something different for us because we're not able to do what Matthew did and literally follow Jesus everywhere, but following Jesus means some quite simple things:

listening to His teaching and putting it into practice – what are the most important things in life, according to Jesus? Love God, and love other people! Jesus said some very profound and telling things about life, and has a great deal of wisdom to offer about how to live life well and how to get out of the mess we sometimes make of life. He has things to say about the quality of life, about relationships, about all sorts of issues over which we wrestle today. Listen to Him and learn from Him

Copying His example – He is the perfect example of a human being that we've ever seen on the planet. Most of us look for role models in life, people that we want to be like, and we aspire to emulate their success or the quality of their life; we long to be like them. Jesus is the best, the supreme role model for the world. Learn from Him; see His attitudes and copy them! Copy His faith, trusting God in everything, copy His love for others; copy Him in so many ways and so learn to follow His example.

Keeping company with Him. Matthew went everywhere with Jesus; he kept company with Him. In a different way, we learn that wherever we go, Jesus goes with us and so we can keep company with Him all the way through life. No matter what we face, He is with us to help us, to give us strength and courage to face up to our circumstances! We don't see Him, but Jesus is there with us always and everywhere. So we keep company with Jesus all way through life.

It is simple really! Jesus said "*Follow me*" Matthew did that and he did not do it alone; he followed Jesus along with others. That's why the Church is here: we are people who together are learning to follow Jesus; we don't have all the answers; we will not do it perfectly; we still make mistakes, we still get things wrong, we still make a mess of life, but we are a group of people, together, who are trying to follow Jesus. The Bible, prayer, and worship together are all to help us follow Jesus. It is so easy to lose sight of that and make life so much more complicated; to be a Church that is more concerned about hundreds of rules and regulations about this, that and the other and how to get all of these in right order and in right place; and we create a burden to weigh ourselves down and guilt when we fail. Remember Cameron McNeish and his 12lb pack; travelling lightly through the Scottish hills and learn to travel lightly through the world. Follow Jesus and let that touch your family life, your work, your priorities, your church, all kinds of things; listening to Jesus' teaching, copying His example, keeping company with Him; it's simple really!