

**Reprint of Sermon
Delivered Sunday by
Rev. Joseph Taylor**

In response to numerous requests from friends who have wished to see one of the Rev. Joseph H. Taylor's sermons reproduced in print for preservation, we take pleasure in publishing the following, which was delivered Sunday morning, Aug. 25, at the Highland Park Presbyterian Church.

**The Challenge
Matthew 9:9-19**

These two verses record different events. The first tells the familiar story of Matthew the publican: As he sat at the seat of custom one day, that was like all other days, taking in the hateful Roman tax from sullen crowds of Jews and buying nothing but contempt with the dismal little coins that clinked for his soul's hire, into the bag at his girdle, he looked up and saw a face. It was a face with something in it that men dream of when for a while they have forgotten the fever of life, something about the freshness of laughter.

As he passed by Jesus saw a man named Matthew and said, Follow me. I wonder if it would not be interesting to wander down some of these roads and see where they lead.

For instance, there is the road of man's age-old search for God. Where does that come out? Why is it that no one feels it necessary to do any more traveling as though God was not found when once he has honestly come up with this Son of Mary? Humanity for thousands of years—they tell us now for millions—had been casting about for that veiled mysterious being back of all created things. They called him by a hundred names. They gave him a hundred attributes.

They had their prophets and their seers. Sometimes they reached out with a staggering sort of intuition and laid hold of the whispered word—Father. But ever and again the word and the vision faded and down in the dark valleys or on the hill tops rose the cruel smoke of their sacrifices and the shrill cries of sheep—yes and of men and women and children—cut dreadfully short by the priest's knife and the gurgling sound of death. No one had seen. Then a band of publicans and fishermen began looking steadily into the face of man and came away at the end of the days with quickened breath and staring eyes and set features as though all the while they had been looking steadily into the face of God.

And what have we learned since. Certainly we must be conscious of the fact that God reveals himself unceasingly through the years. You and I this morning understand life better than Matthew or Peter or James or John and have looked farther into its mysteries. We understand man better and we know the fashion of his long creation. We understand the world better and those far-fung stars. We have learned much, and yet how far have we gone beyond this great soul that came out of Bethlehem and Nazareth. I don't know where else you will go to find God now. I can't send you with any confidence to what philosophers have said. I can't send you to the page of history and be sure that you will make any discovery. I can't send you out into the wide realms of science and rest content that you will look upon One who seems rather to withdraw behind the miracles of life. But I can take you to Capernaum by the shore of

a lake or to mountainside in Galilee or a well in Samaria or a hill beyond the walls of Jerusalem and leave you there alone with the light of the Glory of God in the face of JESUS CHRIST.

Shall we follow another road just for a moment to see where it leads. It is the road to man's serious quest for the truth and the beauty and the goodness that have always seemed to him to lie hidden away somehow in his soul. Somebody has said that Matthew was like one of those beautiful vases that women like to stand on tables and mantelpieces with nicks to the wall but there were so many nicks that they were coming around in front again and he couldn't hide his condition any longer not even from himself. He would drape a little religion over himself on the Sabbath if he could but the next day—well he knew in his heart he needed watching. And then one morning, that face at the window and with all the cover, he set out for what he had seen. It is odd how people who have been haunted by the challenge of the best begin to turn their steps sometimes quite unconsciously toward Jesus. There is the story of Russell Conwell's life, preacher, lecturer, educator, builder of a university, philanthropist. He was a captain in the Civil War and was leading a company in retreat across a burning bridge. In his haste he had left his sword. There had been no moment to lose if the men were to be saved. Suddenly a tall young lad from Vermont dashed through the flames. The sword in his hand. He had gone back for it—and his clothing was burned off and he died in a few days. It was then that Russell Conwell faced his best that lad all aflame with the sword lifted high above a transfigured face, and a silent vow went up that if he were saved he would live his own life and the life of all John Ring Thorew. This was the only way he gave himself to the Nazarene. When young men dream dreams and old men have visions they come to him—that's all. For a while we may turn our faces away toward some Damascus as Paul turned his but something—the music of a name the loveliness of a life? Some kind of celestial radiance dawning across the features of Stephen stories of one whose footfall on the streets is somehow more than a memory. And then the face and the voice and a man named Matthew and Jesus said, "Follow me."

Matchless Jesus Christ
A Task To Match God's Power
But here is another soul equally bewildered yet full of a strange and undiscouraged faith beckoning this carpenter out of Nazareth to a task that can match God's power. My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him in the first, God is challenging a man follow me in the second, a man without faltering—though he has brought up face to face with one of life's staring stark impossibilities—is issuing his challenge to God: Come—thy hand.

We overlook that aspect of the Christian Gospel as we go about our daily business, it is from our side we see religion. Beauty of that life, the surge of answering faith, and love the road of duty running away out of sight and all the while there is something that we forget. We forget it when we pray and again we get up from our knees alone. We forget it when we leave Church and go back home alone. That's why Christianity, vivid and alluring as it should be, gets to be such a dull thing sometimes. We forget that God stands ready to take far greater hazards with us than he ever asks us to take with him. We forget that after every enlistment in

Who Is This Man That Called Matthew
Jesus the outstanding miracle of the ages,
Literature's loftiest ideal
Philosophy's highest personality
Criticism's supremest problem
Theology's fundamental doctrine and
Spiritual religion's cardinal necessity,
Personally, socially, politically, religiously, educationally, scientifically, Jesus stands as the supreme center of human interest today.
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God's affairs there is a plus sign in religion which stands for God's enlistment in human affairs. And that's the heart of the Gospel. I speak with a good deal of feeling because it's just here that we begin to play false with it. Christianity isn't so much a way of life. The secret doesn't lie in what we can do. It's the way into life and the secret lies in what God can do.

If that is visionary and idealistic then there is nothing in the New Testament from cover to cover but comfortable fiction.

When life closes one of its great, stout doors if a man can't turn to God himself and say, Come, thy hand, then Christianity is utterly meaningless. And if this simple record of the Christ, "Jesus arose and followed him" isn't the pledge of an eternal response to that gesture, then Christianity is worse than meaningless. It's untrue.

Here then is the technique of applied Christianity. And by the way, there isn't any other kind of Christianity. Is there? The scientists make a distinction between pure and applied science, the one to put it crudely, dealing with theory and the other with practice, the one with principles and the other with application. Some of us seem to think that we can achieve the same sort of classification in religion. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the farther is this to keep our Christlike principles from getting in any way mixed up with living. I don't know anything about the Christianity that isn't applied Christianity. If any of it is incapable of application it belongs in the wastebasket. I say here is the technique of applied Christianity. "Come, thy hand. And JESUS arose and followed him."

The approach of faith, I wonder if that isn't where most of our failing begins. We became Christians as Matthew did by entering upon an adventure in the fellowship of Christ. But there is a day when experiment must turn into assurance

or something is radically wrong. We can't go on forever in the attitude of people who are cautiously testing the truth of God to see if it works. The hour strikes when we ought to march out on it away beyond the careful little safety zones where we hartly dreamed of going, but we ought to march without trembling. The soul that comes at last to believe in Christ has done with supposing and beating the bushes and seeing how the wind blows or how the land lies. There is something forthright about it.

They came to Jesus with a dispute that had sprung up between two brothers about an inheritance and it did not challenge him—no use—to match a thing like that with God and they came to make him a king with an army at his back. They came asking questions and demanding signs. His own disciples came requesting permission to sit at his right hand in the Kingdom. And none of it challenged I wasn't worthwhile to match such things with God. But Lord if thou wilt—clean. There was a cry that stirred him and he went out with all his power to meet that halting prayer. Do you suppose we get so

I wish we could learn to plan our lives on some grander scale—such strength and breadth so that we might know quite well that we could not manage. There might then be room for the Galilean in such a life. John says, "In Him was life."

little because we ask no better? It just doesn't seem that some of us that it takes God to do. We exhaust our own resources and only when ours are exhausted do his become available to us when we can't go on and that is God's starting point.

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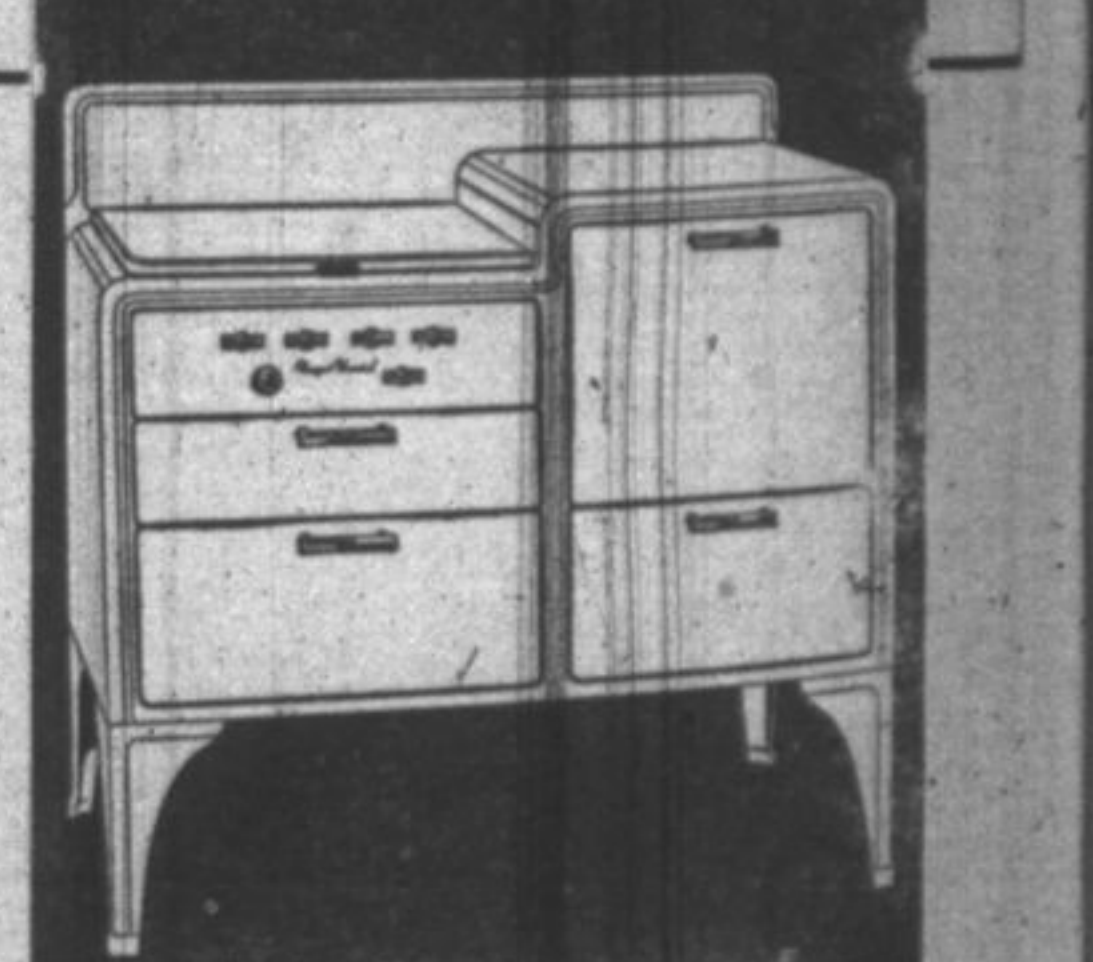
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