

Genesis 18:1–15; Exodus 19:2–8a; Romans 5:1–8; Matthew 9:35–10:8

Opening: A House Ready for Mercy

Please open your Bibles to Matthew 9:35–10:8.

This morning, our verses give us a good biblical frame. Genesis gives us promise. Exodus gives us identity. Romans gives us the Gospel of God. Matthew gives us mission.

What is question we are looking at? It is **What is a call?**

Hear these words from Matthew’s Gospel.

[Read Matthew 9:35–10:8]

The Words of God for the people of God [Praise be to God].

Illustration: Coffin House

Imagine it is the middle of the night in Fountain City, Indiana. The house is quiet. The candles are low. The children are asleep. And then there is a knock at the door.

This is not a casual knock. Not a neighbor stopping by to borrow something. A frightened knock. A desperate knock. The kind of knock that carries hunger, fear, exhaustion, and hope all at once.

On the other side of that door is someone running toward freedom.

And in that moment, Levi and Catharine Coffin do not have time to write a philosophize about what to do. They do not have time to debate whether this is a “convenient time.” They do not have time to ask whether mercy fits their schedule right now or could they fit it in next week.

They have to decide whether the mercy they believe in will open the door.

That is why the Coffin House stays with me.

It was not just a house. It was a life arranged around mercy: A basement kitchen. An indoor well. Bread ready. Water nearby. Hidden spaces. A home built with compassion in mind. Their faith did not stay in Sunday worship. Their call became wood, stone, stairs, bread, water, risk, and welcome.

So here is the question that began working on me this week: **What kind of faith builds a house ready for frightened people in the night?** And Friends, that is not only a question about Levi and Catharine Coffin. **That is a question about us.**

Main Point: Forming

Because in Matthew 9, Jesus sees the crowds. He sees people “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NIV). He does not look away. He does not call them an inconvenience. He does not reduce them to a problem. He has compassion.

Then he calls ordinary disciples and sends them into the harvest.

The question is not only, “Am I called?”

The deeper question is this: **What kind of life is Christ forming in me, so mercy has somewhere to land?**

That is what calling is. My Call, your Call, our Calling is this... Christ forming a life with room for mercy.

And that is where many of us need the AHA moment. We may think calling belongs to pastors, missionaries, teachers, or people with dramatic stories. But Scripture gives us something deeper and wider. Every follower of Jesus has one call with three movements:

- we are called to belong to Christ,
- called to become holy in Christ,
- and called to bear witness to Christ.

So get this... Our Calling begins when Jesus says, “*Come to me*” (Matthew 11:28, NIV). It deepens when the Spirit forms our life into holiness. It becomes visible when mercy passes through us to someone else.

That means calling is not first about having a title. It is about becoming the kind of person whose life has room for the compassion of Jesus.

1. **We receive freely.**
2. **We are formed faithfully.**
3. **We are sent compassionately.**

And sometimes, by the grace of God, a whole life becomes a doorway where someone else finds mercy.

The Biblical Frame

So here is our Biblical Frame, **Genesis gives us promise:**

Sometimes when we look towards what next the future looks closed... Here is what I mean, Abraham and Sarah are old. The promise sounds impossible. Sarah laughs because the word of the Lord seems too big for the condition of her life. But God speaks life where life seems beyond reach.

Exodus gives us identity:

God brings Israel out of slavery, but deliverance is not the end of the story. The Lord says they will be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6, NIV). Rescue becomes identity. Grace becomes a way of life.

Romans gives us the Gospel Center, grace before worthiness.

Paul says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV). We are not called because we are strong, impressive, or finally useful enough for God. We are called by mercy.

And Matthew gives us mission, flowing from the compassion of Jesus:

Jesus sees. Jesus has compassion. Jesus calls. Jesus sends. The harvest belongs to the Lord, but the Lord of the harvest sends ordinary people into places where mercy must take flesh.

Illustration of those Unformed: Why This Call Matters Now

Friends, this is where calling stops being an abstract word.

We are not talking about a doctrine to define, nor a ministry category. It is not just something written on a certificate, recorded in minutes, or attached to a title.

Calling is what happens when Jesus lays claim to a life. And that matters because we are living in a world where unformed lives can do great harm.

I keep thinking about the grief of the past couple of weeks. A young man is dead. Another young man has lost decades of his life. Two families are shattered. A shove, a knife, a moment of rage, pride, fear, and reaction, and now everyone is living with what cannot be undone.

That is not just a news item. That is a discipleship crisis. And it connects directly to calling.

Because if the church cannot help **form people** whose anger is submitted to Christ, whose pride is **humbled**, whose **sense of respect** is shaped by love **instead of dominance**, and whose compassion is stronger than retaliation, then we are not talking about abstract theology anymore... **We are talking about life and death.**

This is why the call of Jesus matters.

He calls us into something deeper than attendance, correct belief, or religious activity. Nor does Jesus reserve calling for pastors, teachers, public ministers, or people with visible platforms while everyone else watches from the pew.

Every follower of Jesus has one call with three movements: we are called to belong to Christ, called to become holy in Christ, and called to bear witness to Christ.

The First Wave: Belonging Before Doing: Jesus calls unfinished people to himself.

Some may think they are not called because they feel ordinary, tired, unsure, too young, too old, too late, or too unfinished. Other may think a call belongs to people with titles, platforms, clear gifts, or dramatic stories.

But Jesus does not wait for impressive people before he calls. He calls fishermen while they are still learning. He calls tax collectors while they are still sitting at the booth. He calls disciples who will misunderstand him, argue about greatness, fall asleep in prayer, and run when courage gets costly.

The first call is not, “Go be impressive.” The first call is, “Belong to me.”

Before we were useful, we were loved. Before we were strong, we were received. Before we could carry mercy to anyone else, mercy came for us.

So the first question of calling is not, “What am I supposed to do?”

The first question is, “To whom do I belong?”

And the Christian answer is simple: I belong to Christ.

That may be the first AHA moment for a lot of people. You may not know your particular assignment yet. You may not know what God is going to do with your gifts, your story, your home, your grief, your retirement, or your concern. But if you belong to Christ, you are not uncalled.

You are already called. You are called to him.

The Second Wave: Formation After Rescue: Holiness is Christ making room in us for mercy.

God does not rescue people and leave them unchanged. In Exodus, the Lord brings Israel out of slavery, but deliverance is not the end of the story. God forms them into a people.

They are not only rescued **from** something.

They are rescued **for** something.

That is still true. Christ does not only forgive us. Christ forms us. He begins reordering our loves, healing our wounds, searching our motives, humbling our pride, and teaching us how to live as people who belong to God.

That is holiness.

And Friends, we need that kind of formation.

We need it in our homes. We need it in our children. We need it in our anger. We need it in the way we handle disrespect. We need it in the way we teach accountability. We need it in the way we respond when pride rises up and says, “You cannot let them talk to you that way.”

There is a kind of pride that dresses itself up as strength. There is a kind of anger that pretends to be courage. There is a kind of disrespect that calls itself honesty. There is a kind of retaliation that calls itself justice.

But Jesus calls his people into another way: He does not form people who have to win every moment. He forms people who can carry mercy. He forms people who can tell the truth without cruelty, hold accountability without hatred, practice courage without violence, and offer compassion without weakness.

In Colossians 3, Paul says, “*clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*” (Colossians 3:12, NIV). That is not soft religion. That is holy formation. That is what keeps anger from becoming lord, pride from writing the ending, and one terrible moment from becoming a lifetime of sorrow.

This is where the Coffin House helps us again.

Their faith did not stay in Sunday worship. It shaped their home, table, schedule, money, risk, and courage. Holiness became architecture. Holiness became bread ready in the night. Holiness became water drawn quietly from an indoor well. Holiness became a household arranged around mercy.

Christ may not be asking us to build a station on the Underground Railroad, but he is arranging something.

He is arranging our loves, habits, homes, speech, listening, leadership, resources, wounds, wisdom, and relationships.

Why?

So mercy has somewhere to land.

The Third Wave: Sent as Compassion: The call becomes visible when mercy takes flesh.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus sees the crowds. He sees people harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He does not look away. He does not call them a problem. He has compassion.

Then he calls his disciples and sends them.

That order matters. Jesus sees. Jesus has compassion. Jesus calls. Jesus sends.

The disciples are not sent because they are impressive. They are sent because Jesus is compassionate. The harvest does not belong to them. The harvest belongs to the Lord. But the Lord of the harvest sends ordinary people into places where compassion must take flesh.

And when Jesus sends them, he says, “*Freely you have received; freely give*” (Matthew 10:8, NIV).

The Heart of Calling

That is the heart of Christian calling: we do not serve in order to become important. We serve because mercy has reached us and now wants to move through us. Calling becomes visible in ordinary, embodied acts of faithfulness: a visit, a prayer, a meal, a classroom, a hospital room, jail ministry, a careful letter, forgiveness offered with trembling hands, a business conducted honestly, or a home where someone can breathe again.

This is what our world needs. Not religious performance dressed up as faithfulness. Not pride baptized in spiritual language. Not another room full of people trying to be right, win the argument, prove their strength, or defend their ego.

The world needs people formed by Jesus: people whose anger has been surrendered, whose pride has been humbled, whose compassion has been strengthened, and whose lives have room for mercy.

Because calling is Christ forming a life with room for mercy.

Closing: A Life with Room for Mercy

So what do we do with our call?

We receive it with humility, because grace comes first. We do not begin by proving ourselves. We begin by receiving mercy.

We surrender to formation, because the call to God becomes the call to holiness. Christ searches our motives, heals our wounds, reorders our loves, and forms us into people who can carry his compassion without turning it into control.

We practice faithfulness where we are, because most calling is lived before it is named. We do not need to wait for a title to obey Jesus. We can pray, serve, forgive, teach, visit, encourage, give, witness, and love now.

That is why I see the Levi and Catharine Coffin Household as a good illustration of our calling...

It is more than a historic home, it was a life arranged around mercy. Doors, bread, water, hidden spaces, and courage became a witness. It reminds us that calling does not have to become famous to become faithful, and it does not have to be dramatic to become holy. We do not have to control the harvest in order to serve the Lord of the harvest.

Jesus still sees the harassed and helpless. His compassion has not grown cold. He still calls ordinary disciples and says, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8, NIV).

So Friends, we have received freely, and now we are sent faithfully.

We go, not because we are strong, but because Christ is merciful. We go, not because we have everything figured out, but because the Spirit is still forming us. We go, not because the harvest belongs to us, but because the Lord of the harvest still sends laborers.

And we go because a wounded world still needs places where mercy can be found.

Open Worship

As we move into open worship, I invite you to hold this prayer before the Lord:

Lord Jesus, what part of my life are you arranging for mercy?

Maybe it is your home. Maybe it is your table. Maybe it is your time, your listening, your friendship, your retirement, your leadership, your resources, or your willingness to go. Maybe it is a concern the Spirit keeps bringing back to your heart. Maybe it is a person who needs room to breathe again.

And maybe, for some of us, it is also this:

Lord Jesus, what part of my anger, pride, fear, or need to be respected still needs to be surrendered to you?

Lord Jesus, what part of my life are you arranging for mercy?

Friends, may we receive freely.

May we be formed faithfully.

May we be sent compassionately.

And may our lives become places where the mercy of Christ can be found, even in the night.

Amen.