

# The Calling of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today's chapter is called called by God called by God. And so we're going to be talking about how God calls Christians.

It's a very common word in the New Testament. It's a very common word in the entire Bible. We're going to begin in an interesting place where this word pops up in Revelation 17.

You don't have to turn there. I just want you to have your imaginations turned on. Revelation 17 pictures this woman in purple and in scarlet, and she's riding atop a beast.

And her name is Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes. It's a picture of the world.

It's a picture of Rome. It's a picture of every sort of luxurious empire living in adultery and luxury. And she's riding atop a beast. And I think it's a picture of military might and human kingdoms.

[ 1 : 08 ] It's also a picture. So it's a picture of Rome. It's a picture of any sort of manifestation of that. And it's a picture of of that last whatever that's going to look like, that last empire with its wealth and military might that lives in luxury, that lives for luxury, that hates God and hates his people.

And this is where this idea of called now comes in, because Revelation 17, 14 says that they, this woman, this beast, these kingdoms of men, they will make war against the lamb.

But the lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and king of kings. And with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

Revelation is painting this picture of this juxtaposition of these two very distinct, the separation, this war of two sides.

And on one side is this violent, luxury, loving, lustful, loving woman and her beast and the lamb and his called ones, his called ones.

[ 2 : 25 ] Peter says, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood. We already talked about that. A holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So why do we have this ministry of priesthood that I was just talking about where we're to declare his praises, where to be praying? It's because God called us to this.

He summoned us to this. We were once in darkness. We were once with that prostitute and the beast. We were on their side. We were against the lamb. We didn't love his people.

And God yet called us out of the darkness. He summoned us. He sent forth a commanding word. He called us by name. And so we were, we were once dead like Lazarus.

You have that picture. Remember, Lazarus is in the tomb for four days. Darkness, death, decay. And the Lord comes to the face of the tomb and he calls out Lazarus.

[ 3 : 33 ] And Lazarus comes out with all the bandages on and everything out into the daylight. We were living like pagans in a pagan world like Abraham was. And God called us and said, now come to the place that I will show you.

And so we were summoned. I want you to think about that. I want you to think about this personally because all of these things are, we don't want to talk about them generically. We want to talk about them very personally because these are the things that happen to you.

These are the things that happen to every Christian. But if you're a Christian, this is what happened to you. You were summoned. You were named. You were commanded. You were called. And so he knew our names just like Jesus knew the name of Lazarus.

And he called us out of the darkness. And so he said to me, come to me, Jason. And I came. I had to.

Now we're going to sing it this morning. Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin in nature's night.

[ 4 : 42 ] Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. Now that means God sent forth a life giving ray of light. I woke.

The dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed thee. That's that's a picture of the call. It's a picture of the new birth.

It's a picture of conviction. It's a picture of a lot of things. But it's a picture of God calling us out of the night, out of the darkness, out of our sleep, out of our death. And that's the call of God.

So how did I become a Christian? He spoke. He called me. He summoned me. He said my name. And he created life and light in my soul. Now, Jesus said, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

[ 5 : 42 ] Now, that's not to say that there's only a particular sort of section of humanity that God calls. But it is saying that that God summons his address to people.

It really locks in on. And. And a dress and locks in on the hearts of men who are aware of their sinfulness and of their need.

They're the ones that have these ears newly made that hear his voice that. Oh, I'm a sinner and I need him. And so many are.

He's come to call not the righteous, but sinners. So Christ says to them, come, come to me. now. Others hear it and they're deaf to it. They hear it and they follow him. Or listen to how Jesus put it in John chapter 10. I've asked Ben Heaney to read John chapter 10, 2 through 5.

[ 6 : 59 ] The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow but they will flee from him for they do not know the voice of strangers.

Okay. So Jesus gathering his people he compares it to a shepherd calling his sheep. He calls them by name and they hear his voice and they recognize it and they follow him.

So if you are a Christian you know what Jesus is talking about here in this passage because it's happened to you.

It happened to you one time and it's continually happened to you. Where you have heard his voice through the preaching of the word and you have followed him.

And it happened one time at the beginning as well for the first time. And so it's happened to you and it's happened to me. Where for the first time I heard the shepherd's voice.

[ 8 : 17 ] voice. So I sat under the preaching of God's word for years and years but it didn't mean anything. Sermons were something to endure to just get through.

But then something happened. Quite unexpected. Quite unlooked for. Suddenly someone was talking to me. And it was from another place.

It was from another like not inside of my own little dark room. That word that Pastor John or Pastor Bob was going on about that had no effect on me before now suddenly was talking to me.

Now I don't remember exactly a particular Sunday. Maybe you do remember that. I don't remember a particular Sunday when it happened but there was a Sunday all of a sudden maybe I wasn't even aware of it at the time but all of a sudden that word was to me.

It was locked in on me. Now the week before it hadn't been. But then it was. Someone was talking to me. The shepherd was calling me. He was saying my name and I was hearing him.

[ 9 : 32 ] And so it wasn't Pastor Bob or Pastor John talking anymore. They quite disappeared. And that's actually how pastors want it.

When we step back into the shadows and the Lord comes and speaks and so his word wasn't coming with just the words of men not anymore and he was saying follow me.

This is true about you. This is true about me. He was saying follow me. And what happens is that I couldn't help myself. I had to go.

I had to come. And so I went and I followed him. Now Christian that's what's happened to you didn't it? Maybe you remember the exact day when that happened for the first time.

Maybe you don't. But but there was a day when that word suddenly locked in on your heart and you were awake to it and your ears were alive to it and you heard and you once had been just completely stationary but now you're getting up and you're following and he calls his sheep by name.

[ 10 : 47 ] That's what Ben read. Isn't that such a gracious word? By name. So you can say he called me he called Jason he called Stan he called Donnie he called us by name.

He knew our names. We weren't just this indistinctive mass. He knew our names and he called us one by one. And so that's what we're going to talk about.

He summoned us to himself and now we belong to him and that's what we want to talk about this morning. And so we want to first talk about the Old Testament background. The Old Testament background.

So the Old Testament background of this word that we translate call has these two interlinking ideas.

Sort of overlapping mutually connected ideas. This idea of to call. The first is to name. And that's really quite obvious, isn't it?

[ 11 : 53 ] When you call something something, you're naming it, aren't you? And that's actually an important thing. Genesis 1, verse 5, God calls the light day and he calls the darkness night.

Now, there's a lot of other verses where it's the same thing. So naming, calling, in Genesis and in the Bible in general is about claiming dominion over something.

About saying I am ruling over this, over something. It's staking your ownership. That's an important thing. And you're saying, well, where do I see that?

Why was it that Adam got to name all the animals? Well, because he had dominion over them. And he was expressing his dominion over the rest of the animals in Genesis 2 by naming them.

And it says that Adam named the animals and that whatever the man, whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. That's what it was.

[ 13 : 03 ] He decided what they were called. He decided what they were going to be and that's what their names were. So he was telling them what they were. Now, he was exercising his dominion.

He was expressing his control over them. You see the same sort of thing in maybe a negative way in Daniel. Do you remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not their original names.

Nebuchadnezzar gave them those names. He gave Daniel a new name. His name was Belteshazzar, I believe. I don't remember. I didn't look it up off the top of my head.

But there, Daniel and his three friends were renamed. Why? Well, it was Nebuchadnezzar's way of saying, now you're mine. That old you, that old name, that old way of living is done.

Now you're going to be mine and you belong to me. He was claiming ownership over their lives. God renamed Abram.

[ 14 : 10 ] He named him Abraham to say that this is what you're going to be. He renamed Jacob, which meant deceiver to Israel to say this is what you are from now on.

You've wrestled with the Lord and you've overcome. And so when God calls you, he's taking ownership of you. He's expressing in a new way his dominion over you in a living way.

He's taking over your life and saying from now on, this is what you are. Now we see this coming into the New Testament in a couple of ways, but maybe the most wonderful way is 1 John where it says, Behold how great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God and that is what we are.

We were not children, but then God said you are children and that is what we are. God calls us children and that's what we are.

That's what we have become. There's no escaping it. That call is final. That call is decisive. God calls his people to himself and calls them and makes them his children.

[ 15 : 37 ] And so that's part remember I told you there's these two interlinking ideas. That's just the first part where it's God's decisive! Final!

So to speak! Gracious action to take command of our lives. To redefine us. To make us new. He's calling us by name and that changes everything.

It changed everything about your life. He gave you a new identity. He gave you a new purpose. He took control of your life and now you answer to him and so that's part of it.

Call also means summons. So we have the naming of things and we also have the summoning of people. In Genesis 3 you see it right there God is calling for Adam in the garden.

You all know what that is. You're calling for your children. You call for your wife to come here for something or whatever. That's what it is. He is calling Adam to his side.

[ 16 : 45 ] It's a kind of summons. And that's how Jesus uses the word in John chapter 10 which Ben read for us. He calls his sheep and his sheep now get up and they walk and they come to him.

Now so God's calling us is not just this decisive action to take control of our lives and redefine us. So from now on we are children. it's God saying come be with me. Come live with me. Come close to me. Come near to me. Psalm 73 it's good for me to be near God. So Hosea 11 1 God says I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. Now there's a little bit of both actually in this verse. God was saying get out of Egypt and come be with me. Come follow me.

[ 17 : 51 ] And he's also saying you're my son now. He's defining Israel as a son. And I think as you look at the entire Old Testament when God drew out Israel out of Egypt he was establishing them and making them his son.

So he was redefining them. They were just once a people but now they're my people they're my son and so you're my child. And so the Old Testament has also so there's those two interlinking ideas. And we're going to see how they play out. But it's the naming of something and establishing who they are and what they are. It's taking command and it's also summoning to be near.

The Old Testament also has another way of talking about God's calling. And it's where God calls and no one answers.

God calls and no one answers. God calls and no call that is irresistible. So God calls Israel out of Egypt and they come.

[ 19 : 08 ] But there's another where God calls and people don't answer. Isaiah 65 12 I will dust in you for the sword and you will all bend down for the slaughter for I called but you did not answer.

I spoke but you did not listen. Or Isaiah 66 4 for when I called no one answered and when I spoke no one listened.

Jeremiah also talks this way while you were doing all these things declares the Lord I spoke to you again but you did not listen I called you but you did not answer.

So the Old Testament has these two very different categories of calling. On the one hand you have a call that is irresistible that is decisive that is now it's commanding it's powerful it's a call that defines us and then you have another kind of call where people reject it where he's speaking and they don't listen that he calls them to himself and they don't come he tells them what they are supposed to be and they don't listen they don't do it they're deaf they stop up their ears so what are we to make of that that tension that that contrast where some calls are quite irresistible and some calls are apparently quite resistible that's what the theologians call the general call and the effectual or the effective the powerful call so the Bible the both the Old and the New

Testaments talk about two different kinds of calls now I've been talking mostly about those effectual calls those powerful calls because in the Christian life it wasn't just the general call that was resistible that came to you it was God's powerful breaking into your life and saying this is who you are you are a son of God now now live like this this is what you are this is!

[ 21 : 37 ] We get up and we come to him but both Old and the New Testaments they talk about both of them and so let's just talk about that general call for a minute because it is important it's very important it's important because it helps us to understand not only the Bible and how it's talking about different things but it helps us understand what is going on in the world so let's talk a few minutes about the general call Jesus says that many are called many are called but but what few are chosen many are called but few are chosen well how are they called how are these many called well there's a few ways he calls in nature there's

I'm going to just talk about three different ways that God is saying come seek me come follow me come worship me come be near me one is in nature psalm 19 the heavens declare!

the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of his hands day after day they pour forth speech and night after night they display knowledge the heavens are calling all men to know God to worship God to see God to understand God to see what kind of powerful and good creator they have the heavens are calling out to men to worship God to know him Paul talks about it in Romans 120 that through the creation God's eternal power and his divine nature the fact that he is God is clearly seen by what is made so that men are without excuse they could see it they have seen it they have heard it and they have said no they have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness so

God's call general call comes to us through nature and everyone sees it and everyone hears it and so that men are now without excuse they can't say I didn't know he never was talking to me well he was and through creation it's called general revelation God's general call also is through providence providence I've asked Andrew to read Acts 17 26 through 27 from one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole world and he determined the set times set for them and

the exact places where they should live God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us okay so that's providence God establishing where people are going to live in the times that they live in and Paul says there was a purpose for what God was doing in arranging these things and he says it was so that men would seek him X 14 16 in the past he let all nations go their own way yet he has not left himself without testimony so God left a testimony for these nations he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy that's God's providence it's it's it's upholding and caring and all of his creation all every creature and what Paul is saying there in Acts 14 is the Lord did that in order to leave a testimony with the nations there is a

[ 26 : 12 ] God he is good he is kind he is powerful he's greater than us and we should now seek him it's a call that goes out to all men to hear and it's a call to seek and define that's God's call through providence but there is also another aspect of this general call and what is it it's the gospel call men have got into all kinds of trouble in their own hearts and in their churches and Christian men have because they've sort of lost sight of this aspect or it doesn't weigh as much as it ought to in their own hearts but God's general call goes out through the gospel and it goes out to all men not just the elect not just the chosen but to all men and the question that comes does well does

God mean it is it a real offer well I think you can tell it's a real offer a couple things because God commands it he he's he's in earnest he's serious about this he's commanding it you don't just command things that you have a moderate opinion about that you don't care about no you command your children to do something if you want them to do it if you're saying you don't have an option to do otherwise I want you to do this so and then you see the seriousness of it because when his preachers his apostolic his apostles go out and they preach that gospel it's not somehow we're going to narrow this down to the elect that we somehow have figured out and then say now here's the good news for you it's a command for everyone and it was at the very beginning of the Christian church so remember Peter is now preaching to the masses in Jerusalem and Acts 2 38 he says repent and be baptized every one of you and he's speaking for the Lord Jesus he's speaking filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit has now empowered him and is inspiring this message and the message is not okay this very narrow select group it is everyone repent be baptized come close or Acts 17 30 he commands all people everywhere to repent so it's a command but you also see in Jesus life and Jesus preaching it's a earnest plea it's a heartfelt plea for them to come to him for them to listen to this call so

I've asked Jim Lipp to read Matthew chapter 11 28 through 30 come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls from Rio is easy and my burden is life so Jesus is now preaching come to me all you who are weary come to me if you're weary and burdened that's the general call it's sincere it's heartfelt it leaves men without excuse it's God commanding it's the Lord pleading with men to repent and what repent means is to turn from your sin and to walk to the Lord to turn around from your sin and to now face him live in the light of his face instead of in the darkness it's to reject sin and to accept and follow him now so it's come to him and it goes out into all the world it's going out yes not so clearly through nature and through providence but it is coming crystal clear through the gospel everyone is invited everyone is invited everyone is urged everyone is commanded come to me it's the call come near to me now the vast majority of people they don't hear that they don't hear it so

God is pleading God is commanding his prophets and his apostles and the Lord himself are preaching this call and men the vast majority don't hear it don't listen so Isaiah 6 and Mark chapter 4 so you have in the life of Isaiah in the ministry of Isaiah and in the ministry of the Lord Jesus the same verses apply and it's be ever hearing but never understanding be ever seeing but never perceiving make the heart of this people calloused make their ears dull and close their eyes otherwise they might see with their eyes hear with their ears understand with their hearts and turn and be healed the general call for the vast majority of people according to the

[ 32 : 19 ] Bible doesn't soften the hearts of those who hear it in fact it does the exact opposite it calluses their hearts it dulls their eyes it dulls their ears it doesn't soften them it hardens them to grace now a picture of this is so let's say you're sleeping maybe this happened this morning you're sleeping and someone burst into your room and turns on the light and starts yelling for you to get up what is your general reaction when that happens to you don't you dive deeper into the covers don't

you you put the covers over your head and if they keep yelling what do you do you start yelling back at them right be quiet I

I'm not I and so the call the light it has the exact opposite with you it makes you go deeper into the darkness it makes you go it gets you more hostile to the person who's calling you that's the same thing so you go further into the covers the light makes you hide deeper that's what the general call has the tendency to do so they hear it and and eventually they so callous their hearts or they grow hostile to it or they go deeper into the darkness!

hide themselves from the light because they love the darkness they love it and so they don't want the light they don't want the truth now here's the question at one time I was doing that and you were doing that and so this is where we can say thank God there's more than just a general call there is more than just that general resistible call that goes out because in power and intense personal love for his people he comes to the door of their heart and he demands it's like God personally coming he doesn't send the word out through some sort of radio commercial he knocks on the door of your heart he opens the door of your heart he comes right in and he calls you to himself by name and that's what we were talking about at the!

yes it's through the preaching of the word it's through the reading of God's word it's through the gospel but it's more than that it is God himself coming in that the Holy Spirit coming through the preaching of God's word and it's God saying now get up wake up come to me and the dead men hear it and so there's this room and this happens the room full of people and some of them are still outside of Jesus Christ there's more than one of these unsaved people in the room and the preacher starts speaking and what happens is like one of those insects that are stuck to the tray that word comes in and sticks you and now you can't get out you can't escape it the gospel comes and sticks you and you're trapped and you can't escape others hear it and ignore it others hear it and go deeper into the darkness but something's happened to you like a lightning bolt hitting you the shepherd says your name and he says your name and he says come follow me and it's effectual so you're in the same bed with everyone else you're asleep with everyone else in the bed and you're loving the darkness but when the voice says to you get up you find that you want to get up you have to get up you do get up the light comes on and for the first time you say

I love the light I want the light I don't want this darkness anymore and we're going to talk about being born again that's these things go together and now you have this new love and this new you and you get up and you follow him so the person next to you they dig deeper into the covers and you say out of the darkness sorrow and night Jesus I come Jesus I come to you into your gladness freedom and life Jesus I come to you so that's what it's to be called it happens first at the beginning but it does have this powerful lasting effect and demand upon you it's a permanent summons it's a call to belong to him permanently to follow him forever to live with him forever to live face to face name to name with him for you to be his from now on so let's just talk a little bit more about that call and I want you to think about it for yourself personally who is calling who's calling you in the [ 38 : 24 ] Bible in the Bible most of the time the father is calling you when the word shows up in the New Testament it's generally God calling you as in distinction to God the son or Jesus Christ it's God the father who calls his people and yes Jesus as the shepherd calls but most often just talking about generally we don't want to say it's always the father what one does they all do what one person in the trinity does the whole trinity does but what we see is it's God the father generally who is in the forefront and the father then is lovingly inviting you he's lovingly calling you by name he's lovingly saying now you're my child there's none of this business about the father sort of reluctantly having dealings with his people there's none of this business about the father consenting unwillingly to his insistent son's request as if

Jesus Christ has to beg and plead and just twist the father's arm in order for the father to have anything to do with us that is so foreign to the Bible no the father calls we don't have time to turn to all those verses but the idea the father himself loves you he loves you he wanted a relationship with you he wanted you close he wanted you to be his child and so he calls us he saves!

in the Bible it is almost always God the father calling and so I just want you to see Christian I want you to see and to feel to know this that the father has this personal love for you this personal heart toward you he wanted you that's why he called you you didn't voice yourself on him the son didn't voice you on him no he put forth his divine power and made you come to him now how did he call you well the means is through the gospel message it's through the good news it's the good news that breaks down those barriers that clears the mind but it's it's more than that because the general

call is the same gospel call there there's something distinct about this effective call he calls you by the spirit the

Holy Spirit comes and puts the power in the word the Holy Spirit is the one that comes into your heart so my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words I'll tell you this you know as a father and as a pastor that sometimes I look back on some of the things I've said and I'm like those are persuasive words I don't know how you resist that and yet you then you realize it's not by persuasive words have you ever I'm sure I'm not the only one I'm not trying to be braggadocious but you're like I've laid it all out I've done everything I can do I said everything I can say I can't think of anything else this should be a convincing case and it's not it doesn't convince and so what Paul is saying my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the spirit's power the holy spirit makes those arguments persuasive the holy spirit makes those words persuasive and so that

Sunday or whenever it started to happen when you were aware of it or not gradually or suddenly when God put his finger on you and said your name spoken to your heart he convinced you the holy spirit came with power so the spirit is able to make the dead to live the deaf to hear the blind to see and he's able to cut through all that darkness and that confusion and to make us see and God said get up and the spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead raised us from the dead now last and final Lee what were we called to well this is where our memory verse comes in so our memory verse is 1st Peter 1 15 through 16 what were we called to he called us to holiness and he called us to heaven now it's the call generally primarily in the first place is a call to

[ 43 : 40 ] God himself to belong to him it's a summons to God it's a summons out of darkness and into his presence into his life into his light but as when God or as God calls him calls us to himself he calls us to holiness he calls us to heaven so our memory verse is about that calling to holiness so let's say it together it's it's 1st Peter 1 15 through 16 and it's but just as he called you so just say it with me 1st Peter 1 15 through 16 but just as he called you is holy so be holy in all you do as it is written be holy because I am holy since it's a holy God who called you to live with him now you have to be holy you should be holy you should pursue a life of holiness but this is where we're going to end it's also

God summoning us into his kingdom into his glory to heaven it's a call that begins on earth but it only reaches its fruition when we're there in heaven so when the when when we're finally where we are or where we were supposed to be where God wants us to be we're we're now in heaven and so now it's perfect holiness it's perfect happiness it's living in the presence of God forever and ever in that place and so the call will finally reach its fruition when we are in a in heaven when we hear with a loud voice a voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God that's where God's calling in your life is taking you it is through holiness and to holiness but it's ultimately to his and so we're going to live with him forever so just two very brief things take heart take heart you've been called he knows your name he's calling you and secondly be holy be holy we're dismissed