

# Weekly Encouragement

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Crossing the Rubicon

By Rev. Peter Eng



*"After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, he rose and followed him" (Luke 5:27-29).*

Money is high on his priority list. "Popularity is overrated," has been his mantra. "I don't care if people don't like me so long I am rich." When Levi meets his daily tax victims, he asks, "What tax can I levy on this person? What rule do I use to exact the most out of him?" Levi doesn't really mind losing friends to gain money. "Friendship is overrated" so concurs his tax-collector friends. Who needs to be liked when they have their own

mutual affirmation and support system?

But something happens to Levi. It is Jesus. Jesus speaks truth to his heart. Jesus does not condemn him. Jesus does not look at his greed and reject him. Jesus speaks to his deepest needs and Levi knows his value system can never be the same again. This man, Levi knows, has the words of life.

When Jesus invites him to follow, Levi does exactly that. Like the other disciples, Levi leaves everything to followed Jesus. But unlike the erstwhile fishermen, Levi will never go back to being a tax-collector. Leaving everything is not a reorganization of his business and making it turnkey as did the fishermen (not suggesting it is wrong).

For Levi, leaving everything means hosting a farewell banquet for his publican friends. At this terminal moment, he announces to his friends he is leaving the tax-collecting business and tells them he has become a follower of Jesus. He introduces them to Jesus so they too can listen to Jesus and experience his goodness. It is likely that Levi lost the

most in following Jesus, and in such a way that his new life has no option but forward.

Levi is not required to abandon tax-collecting. John the Baptist has been teaching tax-collectors their moral obligation is simply not to collect more than they ought to ([Lk 3:12-13](#)). His action is not motivated by moral necessity but by a clarity of focus.

Peter candidly asks Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will we have?" ([Matt 19:27](#)). And Peter did return to fishing, if only for a short time. But Matthew will never return to tax-collecting. Matthew has greater clarity in vision and greater consistency in action than most.

Matthew chose a route of no-return.

In 49 BC, Julia Caesar defied the Roman Senate to disarm his army before crossing the Rubicon River. When Caesar refused and crossed over as a military commander rather than a civilian, he declared war on Rome. He would now either be the ruler of the entire Roman Empire or be executed for treason.

Levi decides he has come to that point in his life when he needs to move ahead in such a way that there is no return. He crosses his Rubicon at the banquet. Among all the disciples of Jesus, Matthew gives us the clearest marching orders, no doubt, because his commitment sees it with the greatest clarity. He closes the life of Jesus with the words,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Levi is remade into Matthew. He is the man who finds Jesus, fixes his eyes on Jesus, and never looks back. Nothing is more lovely, more valuable, and more worthy of total devotion than Jesus.

Is there a Rubicon for us to cross?

**Note:** The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.