

Jesus Came to Call Sinners

Luke 5:27-39

Key Verse: 5:32

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

In chapter 5, as Jesus was preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick, he began to call disciples. It was the beginning of a movement that would spread all over Israel and even to the whole world. Inevitably, Jesus' movement came into contact with the entrenched establishment of Judaism. As it did, there was conflict. The Jewish religious leaders could not accept Jesus' teachings due to their pride. In the face of this conflict, Jesus clearly stated the purpose of his coming into the world: Jesus came to call sinners. Jesus also explained that his disciple making ministry could not be merged with Judaism, but had to be carried out independently and freely. Today let's accept Jesus who calls sinners, and learn his heart and his ministry.

I. Jesus calls Levi the tax collector (27-32)

In this part we can learn Jesus' hope upon Levi, a sinner, in calling him to be his disciple. We can also learn Jesus' view of Levi and of all sinners. In fact, Jesus teaches us the mind and heart of God.

First, "Follow me" (27-28). Look at verse 27. "After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus said to him...." "After this" connects this event with the previous one. Jesus had healed a paralytic and forgiven his sins, proving this authority by making the man walk. The man jumped up and praised God. Sin is the real problem of all people. Sin makes us powerless and miserable. There is no human cure, even with modern technology. But Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus heals our souls and restores the image of God in us. Then we can live dynamic lives and inherit the kingdom of God. After sharing this good news, Jesus went out. Jesus saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. In Jewish society, tax collectors were social outcasts; they were bracketed with public sinners. Levi would not have felt welcome where the Pharisees were, listening to Jesus. Levi must have tried to ignore what was going on. He just minded his own business in his tax booth.

How did Levi become a tax collector? As a young man, he must have been bright and talented. In America, the land of opportunity, he would have had a promising future. But not in Israel. Under Roman oppression, most Israelites barely survived, without hope to change their condition. Levi's options were limited. It seemed that he either had to submit to the colonial system, join the resistance movement, or become a priest. Levi must have struggled to find the way of happiness. At last he decided to become a tax collector. It was a bold decision with clear consequences. The upside was that he would make a lot of money and enjoy privileges with Rome. The downside was that he would be regarded as a national traitor and a selfish parasite, who would do anything for money. Tax collectors can be compared to drug dealers in our time. This decision required Levi to count the cost. Levi made such a decision, believing that money would make him happy.

We can understand Levi. In this age of materialism, many people really think that money can buy happiness. The success of greedy people is often admired. In this time of economic crisis, having a good job seems like everything. But there are many things money cannot buy. As we know, Michael Jackson died last week. He grew up in a poor family. But as a gifted singer and dancer, he gained great fame and wealth. They call him "the King of Pop." But he wasted his money on a frivolous lifestyle. Some days he spent a million dollars just for fun. Still, he was not happy or satisfied. So he took drugs to find peace and to sleep. According to news reports, it was a drug overdose that killed him. We must know that money cannot buy happiness, friendship, dignity, or life. Levi found out too late that he had made a foolish decision. He felt trapped. What was worse, he was corrupt and sick, like a spiritual leper. So he sat all alone in his tax booth.

Levi was despised by almost everyone. Good Jewish mothers would have scolded him, "Shame on you! Think of your parents!" Then they would tell their children, "Don't grow up like this wretched man!" Socialists would have said, "You capitalist pig! You are the source of all the evil and suffering in our nation!" The rabbis might have said, "Can you feel the flames licking at your flesh! It is just a matter of time until you burn in hell!"

However, when Jesus saw Levi, his response was completely different. Jesus said, "Follow me." This was a call to be Jesus' disciple. It was an invitation to a deep personal relationship. Jesus wanted to share his life with Levi as a friend and shepherd. Jesus was willing to care for Levi until he was changed into a really good man. How could Jesus do this? It was because Jesus has

power to forgive and cleanse our sins. And Jesus is willing to heal sinsick people. Jesus fully understood Levi's inner agony and he wanted to save him from his sins. Jesus also saw the good side of Levi. He was hardworking, diligent, a good manager, and he knew how to make costly decisions. He was also a writer. One day he would write Matthew's gospel.

Here we learn that Jesus sees sinsick people with hope. Jesus calls sinners to new life. I heard Jesus say, "Follow me," as a college student. At the time I was seeking money and women and had become deeply involved in an ungodly relationship. I felt very fatalistic about the future, as though I would be a corrupted accountant with a legacy of dirty activities and broken relationships. Then I heard Jesus' voice, "Follow me." Jesus had hope for me to begin a new life and to be his disciple. Jesus' hope brought bright sunshine to my dark heart, and empowered me to begin to follow him.

How did Levi respond? Look at verse 28. "...and Levi got up, left everything and followed him." Here the author likens Levi getting up to the paralytic. Levi's inner man had been paralyzed by selfishness and love of money. But when he heard Jesus' words, power surged through his soul. Levi could get up and follow Jesus. Levi left everything behind. Levi committed himself to Jesus immediately, and with no strings attached. This is the kind of person who can be trained by Jesus. To Jesus, useful people are not mistake free. They are those who know they are sinners, accept Jesus' forgiveness, and commit themselves to him. Jesus had a plan to use Levi as his servant. Jesus wanted Levi to preach the gospel to the whole world. But first, Levi had to learn of Jesus, especially Jesus' inner life. Levi had to learn to love God first, and to love others as himself. He had to learn the compassion of Christ, and how to share the gospel with others. It required a decision that counted the cost. Levi made such a decision. Of course, Levi lost his high-paying job. But Levi gained Christ, the love of God, and a new life with a new hope.

Second, "I have come to call sinners to repentance" (29-32). As Levi walked away from his tax booth, he must have felt a thrill of joy in his soul, and a deep sense of peace came over him. Jesus became his friend, a friend who cared for him and would help him grow as a good man. Jesus was sure that Levi would be a great man of God. Buoyed by Jesus' absolute faith in calling him, Levi felt that his future was bright. The possibilities were limitless. He was making a brand new start with a clean slate, and with the best teacher who ever lived. With his soul full of hope, Levi might have danced and sang to himself, "Oh what a wonderful, wonderful day. Day I will never forget.

After I'd wandered in darkness away, Jesus my Savior I met." Then it began to dawn on him that Jesus was the Messiah who could give new life to anyone who believed in him. Levi wanted to share the joy of his new life with all his friends, who were mostly tax collectors. Levi decided to host a dinner party in Jesus' honor. So he took money out of his secret hiding places and went shopping. He bought fattened calves and emptied the aisles of local grocery stores. And they began to celebrate. It was not just a dinner party; it was the celebration of a sinner's repentance. The joy of the party came from heaven itself. The angels were singing and Almighty God was smiling at Levi's repentance. This heavenly feast was reflected in Levi's dinner party for Jesus.

However, there was a group of people who not so happy. They were the Pharisees. They criticized Jesus' disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" To their way of thinking, public sinners should be ostracized and segregated for the good of the community. To associate with them was to condone their sinful lifestyle. They thought they were right to criticize Jesus' disciples.

Jesus overheard their criticism and responded. Let's read verses 31-32. "Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" The mind of Jesus was very different than the mind of the religious leaders. Jesus saw sinners as those who were spiritually sick. Just as he had compassion on the man with leprosy and the paralytic, he had compassion on spiritually sick people. Jesus saw them as patients who needed healing. Jesus did not sit back and criticize them. Jesus took up the responsibility of a spiritual doctor to heal them. This led Jesus to the cross, where he shed his blood to heal our sinsickness. Here we can learn Jesus' heart. It is like that of a doctor for his patients. When we come to Dr. Jesus with our wounds and sicknesses, he does not criticize us for our mistakes. He accepts us and heals us with his precious blood. Jesus was not justifying Levi's sinful life. But instead of banishing him to a sinner's colony, Jesus would make him well.

We must know the mind of Jesus toward sinners. When Steve Stasinis first came to worship service, he had long hair, a heavy metal t-shirt, and chains hanging from his pants. Many people were afraid of him. But Mother Barry said, "I like your hair style. It looks like Jesus' hairstyle." Dr. Samuel Lee and others embraced him with love and hope. Then he could begin to grow spiritually and he met Jesus personally at the '97 MSU conference through

John 14:6. Suppose he had been cast out from that first worship service. We would have lost a gifted American gospel worker. But when God's servants embraced him with the mind of Christ, he began to change into a man of God. Our ministry must be a place where sinners meet Jesus and begin a new life. Let's learn the heart of Jesus who came to call sinners.

II. New wine into new wineskins (33-39)

The religious leaders brought another issue to Jesus. They noticed that John the Baptist's disciples often fasted and prayed and so did the disciples of the Pharisees. When these men began religious training, the changes in their behavior were obvious. However, Jesus' disciples went on eating and drinking with no notable change in their behavior. Jesus' disciples might have had pockets full of food they had taken from Levi's party. Perhaps they were munching and crunching at that very moment. The religious leaders were puzzled by Jesus' disciples and they were also upset that Jesus' disciples seemed to be having so much fun, while their own lives were dreary and boring. They wanted everyone to be as dreary and boring as they were.

How did Jesus respond? Look at verse 34. "Jesus answered, 'Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?'" Jesus compared his disciples to guests of a bridegroom at a wedding. A wedding is a time of joyful celebration. It is not a time to fast and mourn. The guests of the bridegroom rejoice because they share his joy. Jesus is the bridegroom, and he had come to claim his bride by calling sinners to repentance. When one person receives forgiveness of sins, they are overjoyed. There is great joy in heaven and great joy in Jesus; his disciples share that joy. So they must celebrate and eat and drink freely. However, there would be a time to fast and pray when Jesus was taken from them to go to the cross.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees would not go away soon. They were just beginning to demand his disciples to follow all their traditions and practices. The Pharisees had a fixed idea of religious life, and they wanted to press Jesus' disciples into it. So Jesus told two parables to illustrate that his call to discipleship could not be combined with their religious practices.

The first parable was about new garments and old garments. Here the new garment is the tapestry of disciples Jesus was weaving together as he called them one by one. Jesus would not take one his disciples and stick him in the

Pharisees' religious system. Jesus' disciples could never fit in. They were fishermen and tax collectors who had no idea about the disciplines and education of a Pharisee. If one of them went to Pharisee school, he would likely fail. But what was worse, Jesus' tapestry of disciples would be torn.

The second parable was about wine and wineskins. New wine, which emits carbon dioxide gas as it ferments, was poured into treated goatskins, which had been sealed where the legs and head had been. This wineskin had a property of flexibility. It could expand as the new wine was fermenting. But after a few months, the fermenting process slowed considerably and the wineskin began to harden. Then it was only able to hold old wine. If new wine was poured into an old wineskin, it would burst the skin and the wine would run out and the wineskin would be ruined. So Jesus concludes in verse 38, "No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

In terms of this parable, Jesus' disciples were like new wineskins. They were flexible because they were willing to learn from Jesus. They had tasted his grace of forgiveness of sins and had committed their lives to him. They were willing to follow him anywhere and do whatever he told them to do. As they learned from Jesus and formed a Christian community, they would show the love of God to the world. Jesus helped them, not by means of regulations, but by teaching them his own mind and heart. They would change from the inside out through the life of Christ in them. Jesus was willing to invest his time, his love, his wisdom and everything in these men to bring about this transformation. Jesus would bear with them patiently, even though they made many mistakes and did embarrassing things. Jesus was sure that in the end, his disciples would become like him. However, the religious leaders wanted to impose their own rules and practices on the disciples from without. To this, Jesus said, "No." Jesus created a spiritual environment where his disciples were free to grow in relationship with him. Jesus would not allow anything to hinder the formation of this environment.

At the center of Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ. Through relationship with Christ, we are transformed. We can grow when we come to Jesus in repentance and receive his forgiveness and healing. We can help others to grow by bringing them to Jesus in the same way. For this, we must have a new wineskin like heart that receives his Spirit and allows him to work in us. Then we can always be full of the new wine of the gospel.

Finally, Jesus commented that those who have gotten used to the old wine like it better than the new. Those who have fixed habits and patterns of life have a hard time changing. Jesus knew the religious leaders were rigid. Jesus understood them. They were condescending and sure of themselves because they really thought their way was better. But in this condition they could not contain the new wine of the gospel.

In this passage we learn the mind of Jesus. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. Jesus forgives our sins and leads us into a new life of learning of him and of growing to be like him. It is the most joyful and meaningful life. Have you accepted this call? Let's accept it today. Let's also remember that Jesus' gospel, like new wine, cannot be contained by old wineskins. Let's yield our fixed ideas and habits to Jesus as he lives in us through the Holy Spirit, and allow him to change us as he pleases. And let's learn the mind of Jesus toward others as well.