

Luke 5:27-32

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[0 : 0 0] I want us this morning to focus on the section of the calling of Levi, and verse 27 to verse 32.

The little town of Capernaum, on the north shore of the lake of Galilee, was all abuzz with it coming. There was a stranger in town, and everybody, but everybody, wanted to see this Jesus. The crowds were coming to see Jesus of Nazareth, to hear his teaching, and to see him perform miracles. And so they came to the house that Jesus was staying in, in Capernaum, and so much of the crowds that the men who brought the paralytic had to go into the roof, because they didn't get near the door. The town was buzzing with excitement. This is a big thing. People were coming, as it says in the text, from all over Galilee, from Judea and Jerusalem. Also, this tiny town, this insignificant town, to see Jesus, to hear Jesus. Great excitement.

And so I asked him, if Nelson Mandela was to appear in one of my villages, it would be something similar. People would walk, walk miles to see Madiba, as he was called up for the people.

They'd be so excited that he was there in their midst. And it's the same here. People are coming from great distances, just to see Jesus. Who came? Well, the religious leaders were there.

The scribes and the Pharisees, all wanting to note this new religious phenomenon. Ill people, sick people, walked or were carried or brought to see Jesus. All coming to listen to him.

[2 : 1 3] To see him, to hear him. Poor people came. Rich people came. He is the center of attraction. They want to see Jesus. They want to hear Jesus. Thousands upon thousands came to Capernaum.

Just to say, I was there. I saw him. I heard him. He did a miracle on me. I heard his teaching. I was challenged. And Jesus, as we read in the passage just before this, healed this paralyzed man brought by his friend and forgave his sins. And the people were shocked in awe. There was great tension in the crowd.

Capernaum, it seems, is in turmoil. The news is going through the clouds right around the town. Everybody's interested. Except it seems just this one person. Levi. Sitting at his desk. Working.

He's not interested in going to see Jesus. He's working. He's collecting the taxes.

History is being made and he's not interested. Though later he'll become one of the first church historians. So who is Levi? What's he doing there? Well, we read that he's a taxman. A publican. A civil servant of the day.

[3 : 5 0] Now, it's times like this when ministers start talking about taxmen and they have to put this sort of blanket apology out to say, look, any here, this doesn't, you know, sort of, this is not for you or this isn't about you.

Or a comment on your lifestyle. But Levi belonged to a very disreputable trade. He was obviously a very learned man, this Levi. He had to have a good education.

He had to be able to read. Not many people could read in the age. You must definitely need to count. You can't be a taxman without being able to do your sums. He was good, I'm sure, at his job, quick on his feet, able to collect taxes from those wishing to avoid and to evade.

He would obviously probably have been a local man. Local men know the local crooks and know how the local businesses are doing. So there could be no sob stories and, well, it's been a bad year this year when the man is a spy in the midst.

He knows what's going on. And obviously he could become very hardened and cynical, thinking that everyone was just a cheat, trying to avoid paying their dues.

[5 : 10] Levi, because of his trade, was obviously loaded. It was a lucrative employment being a tax collector in those days. It was, as I said earlier, a dishonest profession.

People collected the taxes imposed by Rome and then they would levy a bit for themselves. So that 10% tax would become 13% or 15% with all the profits going to the tax collector himself.

Always keeping a bit for himself. And he collected the local taxes that were due and also taxes on the custom of all the goods that were tacking through and the trade routes that went through Capernaum.

Making sure that he got his cut from everything that went through that town. He wouldn't have been mega-rich, but he would have been very rich in comparison to his neighbours in Capernaum.

And he would have been greatly loathed. Loathed. Loathed by almost everyone, except probably, as we read, tax collectors and those on the edges of society.

[6 : 29] The Romans who employed tax collectors didn't like tax collectors. They would be regarded as dishonourable. Lacking loyalty to the people by willing to work for them.

The Jews would have loathed Levi immensely. He would have been regarded as a collaborator, a traitor, working with the enemy who were squatting in the land.

Doing the dirty work for the oppressors. And so, Levi would have been lonely. Very few friends.

Not much in the way of a social life. He would have had very few that he would have as close to him from outside his own family.

And he would have also been very much a lost soul. What do I mean by that? He would have been separated from God.

[7 : 44] Living between two worlds. Sort of between the Jewish world and the Roman world. And not really fitting in between. His dishonesty would have made him a sinner in the eyes of God.

And the religious leaders and synagogue rulers and attendants would have regarded Levi as a blatant out-and-out sinner. And religiously unclean because of his working on the Sabbath and his contact with the Gentiles, the Romans.

He would have been regarded by the religious authorities as a sinner. You notice at the end of the passage where the religious leaders come and say, Why is this Jesus equal with tax collectors and sinners?

They were grouped together. Levi would have been separated from God.

He would not have been able to attend the synagogue. And probably he would have lost all inclination for faith, for the scriptures, for the hope of the Messiah, of God himself.

[9 : 03] And he would have been unable to attend the flat temple. Probably unwilling or inclined to go and offer sacrifices to repent and confess his sins and get right with God.

So spiritually he's adrift. Not really interested. And yet despite this man Levi being low and lonely and stuck spiritually, dressing, he does seem very content in life.

Where the whole of the town of Capernaum is a buzz of excitement, he's sitting there. Come on, do some work. Must get the taxes in. I'm not happy in life, but I'm content.

I'm content to do the job. I'm content to make money. To earn more. To levy more in taxes. I don't care how loathed I am.

Everyone hates me. I don't care. I'm sitting here, with my pen and my ledger, writing in, collecting more taxes from those who are gathering to see this Jesus.

[10 : 20] I'm not interested in God. What a contrast to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is running around trying to jump up to the sea behind the cloud and goes and climbs a tree to see Jesus.

But this tax collector, this Levi, sitting at his desk, content. Oh, I don't want to see this Jesus. I'm content here.

I'm coasting. I've got a comfortable lifestyle. Why should I be interested in Jesus? I only feel worse about myself. I feel more hated.

An outsider. I'd rather sit and work and wait for this Jesus to leave. It's just a five-month wonder. He's going to be disappearing soon.

The only thing that lasts are deaths and taxes. So I'm going to sit here and collect more and more and more. I've made my bed.

[11 : 18] I'm going to lie in it. I'm not interested in Jesus. I'm sad to say there'll be some here today who'll be saying exactly the same.

I'm not interested in Jesus. He's a nice guy. But he's not for me. I'm content with my life. It's not perfect.

I make mistakes. But I don't want to feel any worse. I don't want to get all religious and heavy. I'm content. I'm content. I'm here because my mum and dad have brought me.

I'm here. It's a tradition. But I don't know why. It's just one of these things I do. I come and I sit. I'm content.

I'm happy in my life. I'm happy in my work. I'm happy in college. But don't give me this Jesus guy. I'm happy to come to college to start freshers.

[12 : 22] I'm happy. But I don't need Jesus Christ. I'm looking forward to making my money, having my house, and getting on with life.

But don't give me the burden of Jesus. Perhaps you are sitting like Levi to death, head down, trying to avoid Jesus.

Thinking your life's content. Building your life. Gathering your riches for this earth, but storing up none in heaven. spiritually addressed.

Spiritually starting to wander. Drifting in your heart, in your relationships. I don't need this Jesus. I'm content. There's something missing in your life. If that is, and that's Jesus Christ, if there was something missing in Levi, that that's about to change.

Because Jesus comes out. Jesus comes out of that house and he has performed one of his greatest miracles. And immediately he turns, he sees Levi sitting at the desk.

[13 : 34] At his tax booth. And there was a sudden call. Jesus takes the initiative. He sees Levi sitting there. And he calls to him, follow me.

Jesus knows that bless himself. Levi is just going to sit there and sit there and sit there and let this opportunity pass on by. Jesus takes the initiative.

And that is the biblical pattern. Right through from Genesis to Revelation, it's always God taking the initiative.

The first step in creation or in the Exodus or in the sending of his Son Jesus Christ.

God taking the initiative and Jesus, God's Son, takes the initiative here and says, follow me. He follows the divine pattern. Follow me, Levi.

[14 : 37] What a simple call that is. That's it. No long sermon. No three points. I think most ministers can't get three points out of follow me. simple.

No reason to believe that they had met previously and had discussions about the spiritual state of Levi. Have you ever considered a career change, Levi?

No, none of that. A simple call. Notice what Jesus doesn't say to Levi. Oh, Levi, you haven't been to synagogue for ages.

I really, really think you ought to go to synagogue. Hear more about God's word because it points to me. And then, come and see me. He doesn't say to Levi, look Levi, I know how bad your life's been.

I know your sins. Suggest you get to the temple pretty quickly. Get yourself sorted out before God. Few, you know, few sacrifices need to be made for your sins.

[15 : 40] He doesn't say that. He says, follow me. He says, come on, get up, move.

He demands an immediate response. There's no time for excuses. Follow now. The direct plan comes to him.

And Christ says the same to us. Follow me. no time for excuses. Only Levi could have had excuses.

Oh, Jesus, you know, you're asking the wrong man. You don't know how bad I am. I really ought to get myself right before I can do anything. And we make the same excuses.

Oh, I'm not that, I'm really not the kind of caliber Jesus wants. I really ought to be a lot better. I really ought to be reading the Bible a lot more. My prayer life ought to be better than this before I can get called.

[16 : 43] Or you say, well, I think I'll postpone Jesus' call up because, you know, I've got four years ahead of me in Aberdeen to study. And it's exciting times and I want to share in those times.

And maybe, yeah, probably, I'll come at the end of four years and then I'll be ready to follow Jesus. Or some might be saying, well, I'd love to, but I really need a sort of Paul on the Damascus road kind of conversion experience first.

And then I'll be ready. That'll satisfy me. Jesus sees Levi and he calls. He says, you're the one I want. I know your past sins, Levi.

I know your dishonesty. I know the extortion that you've been carrying out. I know that you're religious. I know the blasphemy that comes from your lips and the crude jokes.

I know it all. But you're still the one I want. Now follow me. Jesus deals with Levi and he deals with us where we are.

[17 : 55] There's nothing that Levi could have done to prepare himself for that call and there's nothing that you and I can do to prepare for Jesus coming and saying follow me.

Pick up your cross. Follow me. There's nothing we can do to prepare ourselves and there's nothing we can do to save ourselves. It's all of Christ.

It's not you do a bit, God does a bit in response. God calls. If not we try to save ourselves, God comes in and helps us fill up the missing quota.

It's all of God. It's all of Christ. There's nothing that we can do to make Jesus save us. Jesus calls. We have to answer.

A simple call, a sudden call, no time for excuses. No time to go off and prepare ourselves. Well, actually, this is a very difficult time in my career.

[19 : 02] I'd love to come, but you don't know my workload. It's really, really busy. I can't afford the time. Jesus calls. We have to follow.

Whatever that might lead. To mission fields. To ministry. To Sunday school work. to cleaning the brachies. All for Christ.

He calls simply. But let's look at Levi. Look as he responds.

No excuses. No procrastination. No, well, let me go and talk about it with the wife. He responds immediately. confronted by Jesus of Nazareth.

Sudden call. He gets up and follows Jesus right there and then. He doesn't come with the litany of excuses.

[20 : 06] He follows immediately and he leaves his desk behind. Can you imagine the ledgers sitting there? the money sitting there?

They need the pen sitting there. I sure there are some few dishonest people running up and filling the name and pretending they've added more money to the kitty.

He leaves it all. I work my notice. He leaves his desk. He leaves his work. He turns his back on his life, his work.

He leaves everything behind. No hesitation. No notice to the employers. He trusts Jesus and he follows him. Responds immediately.

And it's a costly discipleship. It's going to cost Levi. This action is decisive. He leaves absolutely everything behind.

[21 : 08] And his whole life changes at that moment. His security, income, his home, his work. Everything is going to change because Jesus is called.

I've got to follow. I think if you compare Levi with the rest of the disciples, looking at a human level, Levi leaves the most.

He seems to be the one who's got the best employment, or the most lucrative employment. He caused Levi greatly to follow Jesus Christ.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they kind of could have gone back to the fishing boats. And after the death of Jesus, they did go back to the fishing boats for a while.

But for Levi, he leaves that desk and boom, that job is gone. There is no coming by. We can't trust you, Levi. You wrecked in the middle of an important time.

[22 : 11] But he leaves. His career is over. He'd probably never get his job back, even if he was to go back the next day.

There would be somebody else willing to do it for the money. But if he were to say to Levi, look what it cost you. Look at what it cost you.

Your income compared to the average income of the age. What's trying to end it? Is it worth it? Is it worth it, Levi, to give all that up and follow Jesus Christ?

It's a yes. No question. Absolutely. Glad I did it. Glad I followed Jesus Christ. He's worth far more.

I'm glad I followed him. Jesus gave him a brand new life. A brand new chance. A whole huge group of friends.

[23 : 16] A man whose social circle would have been very very small. Wow. He's now in Jesus' group. With other disciples and all the others besides Jesus.

He's got a new purpose in life. He's got a new job. But that said the only thing he did take with him was his pen because he became Matthew the recorder of Jesus' life.

From taxman to disciple and historian. But it cost him immensely in human terms. Comfortable job.

But he found a destiny. Great income. But he found honour. He had a social group but a much wider one with real family and friends in Christ.

Security yes but now he has eternal security with Jesus Christ. Is it worth it Levi? Oh absolutely to be with Christ and his people.

[24 : 28] Notice what happens. It's not just enough for Levi to say thank you very much and fully there's a great outpouring of thankfulness in Levi's life.

Levi had received this greatest gift he'd ever had acceptance with God's Son. And he responds with what he has with a great outpouring of love.

He spontaneously throws a party. And it's not like a small dinner party. It's wide open. Can you just imagine 20's wife I'm following Jesus.

We're having a party. What will we do? A couple of chickens. Chickens! No way! We're killing the fatty calves. Caves! Plural! Kill them all!

Because I have received so wonderfully from Christ. Will we have some wine? Yes, get the wine, get the wine. Shall we get the \$3.99 bottle of the \$10.99 bottle we're saving for a special?

[25 : 32] This is the special thing! Get the best! Go to the shop, buy the best! Because Christ is coming to this home and we are going to have a party that we have never had before.

Because here's a man who wants me, who loves me, who accepted me. I know who this man is and I am following him.

There's no, well I suppose I should invite him around for a dinner. The non-admit will you have had the tea? Not some three vines.

Nothing like that for him. It's outpouring of thankfulness and love in response to Christ's love himself. What a dinner party.

and all the guests that he could muster. All the tax collectors from the area. And all the discrepancy people. All the sinners.

[26 : 30] All the ones, the Pharisees that were tut-tut-tut-tut. All in that same room. Come and meet Jesus. He's changed my life.

He could change yours too. Come and see him. Don't delay. He's wonderful. Come and see this man. He's so thankful.

What an evangelistic dinner party. Thrown open to all. All those that the religious authorities said, nothing here you don't.

Clean up your life and then you'll think about it. Not with Jesus. What a party. What a time. What a time. no grim reservation.

No spirit of sadness as he saw the money being spent. He's celebrated. It's a celebration on Levi's part. He is just so glad.

[27 : 34] A spontaneous thank you to Jesus for all his love and for his life. And how are we responding to the greatest gift that we ever had of Jesus Christ?

And his death on the cross at Golgotha? How are we responding? Grim resignation? Head bowed down?

Solemn faces? Are we lifting up our hearts and saying thank you, thank you, thank you for all your gifts, but especially for your son Jesus Christ.

He's wonderful. He's loving. We thank you for his sacrifice on the cross for our sins so that we can have a relationship with God the Father.

We can call him Abba, Father, because of Christ. Thank you, thank you. Sadly, too many we hold back.

[28 : 39] We say, well, you know, that's not for us, God. It's okay for the South Africans. They love to rejoice and celebrate.

Ah, nonsense. No Grim resignation. No, well, if I have to, I have to. We have to respond.

And let's do that with joy. See what we have received in Christ Jesus. Think of the eternal rest that we are heading to as we spoke to the children earlier.

There's a prize ahead, far greater than the gold medal at the Olympic Games. To be with Christ. Isn't that a reason for joy?

Isn't that a reason for us to give thanks? Do we share the love of Christ? Do we keep it back?

[29 : 40] Oh, Levi didn't hold it back. He's thankful. He wants other people to be thankful too. Come and see this Jesus. Come and see he can change you too.

But it doesn't stop from Levi anyway. It doesn't stop at this party. It's not like, well, that was a great night, wasn't it, Jesus? You go well.

As we say in South Africa, go well. There's none of that to Jesus. He's going with Jesus. He says, I'm leaving home.

You look after the family, dear. I've got to go with Jesus. I've got to follow him. He gave himself completely to the laws. To this Jesus Christ, who will give himself completely on the cross and say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That's how much God gives. He scares not his son. That's how much Jesus gives for us. And Levi gives what he can.

[30 : 56] He gives himself. He follows Jesus. He goes with Jesus for those years and goes around all those dusty, dirty villages listening to Jesus, being with the people, eating the crowds.

He heads to Jerusalem and Jesus says, I'm going to die. I'm going to die. Understand me, I'm going there to die. He's there. Levi's there. He's noting it all.

It's going to be written down one day. He's going on. He's following Jesus. He goes there all the way. to the cross with Jesus Christ.

And it doesn't stop there. Because he goes on and on with Jesus Christ, serving him wholeheartedly, not grudgingly, with everything that he has, utilizing the gift that God has given him, in Christ's service.

There are we, things, where are we today? Whole hearted in our love? Or is the temperature cooling a bit?

[32 : 10] How are we doing in our life and our witness? Do the people know we're Christians? Does the person in the next room in the halls know I'm a Christian?

how are we doing in serving the Lord? What is our attitude like? Are we doing it with thanksgiving or with the spirit that is sour?

don't stop short with the Lord? He didn't stop short with you. He enables you to go on.

He strengthens us in our faith. But he wants us to go on, all of us, to serve him. Let me conclude.

Levi was at work. Sitting at the desk. I don't want anything to do with Jesus. Quite happy, just interested in this Jesus man.

[33 : 20] He didn't see the miracle of the man raised from his mat. Didn't see it. And yet, the Pharisees who did see are the ones who come in the end and say, what's this Jesus doing eating with sinners and tax collectors?

They are the ones who are criticizing Jesus, yet they have had the benefit of seeing a part of his glory revealed. Levi didn't say that. But he responded when Jesus called.

Where are you? Sitting at your desk. Sitting on the side legs, carping, moaning, back there. What's this Jesus person?

Look at all these people who are coming to church. how are you responding to this Christ? How are you going on with him?

With love, joy, with thankfulness, with outpourings that are spontaneous of praise and thanks?

[34 : 42] Christ. Are you sitting on the sidelines criticizing? Oh, don't be like the Pharisees. Don't be like them. They lost out big time here.

They're the big losers in this passage. They're the ones looking from the outside when the party is going on. Because they won't cross the threshold to be with Christ.

Don't be like them. Let us trust in Christ. Let us follow him regardless of the cost. Wherever it may lead us, let's do it with thankfulness and joy.