

PRELIMS. I was fascinated reading this passage this week. On the **basis** that Jesus' Mission is the **model** for the Church's Mission we can learn a lot from this passage regarding our function as a church in the world and in the community.

The OCCASION

I once walked past an Inland Revenue Office with a friend – as we did so he let out a **curse** re the tax office! 'Robbers, they want all your money'. The very **sight** of the building made him **angry** – he did not want to be reminded of anything about it – he disliked the people who worked there! How **different** from our Lord! We read here that He "*went out and saw a tax collector...sitting at his tax booth*"[27]! Jesus **heart went out** to the man **in love**! We are not told anything about Levi - his **profession** had a very very bad name for dishonesty, but maybe he was an honest one?

It amazes me how **little information** God gives us about people's **conversion** – important people like Levi here! For such an important aspect of life, it amazes me that God has not furnished us with more data and examples! In fact we do not know about many of the disciples – how were they converted? It seems, gradually, slowly, **undramatically**. Paul and Jailer were **exceptions** - not the norm! All Jesus said here was "*Follow Me*" and Levi "*got up, left everything and followed Him*"[28]! That was it! No struggle! No words! We do not read of Kirk Sessions and examinations – not even the OT re the **proselytes**! No record of testimonies or confessions or even a promise of commitment! Just the invite "*Come with us and we will do you good*"![Num 10:29]

Of course there **may** have been a lot going on in Levi's mind and soul that is not recorded. If there was, the Holy Spirit has seen fit not to reveal it to us. But what ever went on **before** Levi's decision to follow the Lord full-time, he certainly **was aware** of what it meant for him **afterwards**! It was a time of **celebration**! It called for a Party! "*Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd*" came [29]! It was 'for' Jesus – in **recognition** of Him! Levi was obviously a person of means – but he also had a sense of **occasion** and **purpose**! He would be truly 'excited' himself about his 'call', but he certainly wanted to **share** the occasion and use it as a **testimony** - to his **unconverted** friends and working colleagues! *I would love to know what he put on the Invitation Cards? 'Come and Meet My New Master'? 'Come Celebrate My Promotion'? **APP** Could you invite your working colleagues to such an event? Then why not invite them to Church?

It was quite a **mixed bunch**! I would be surprised if some of them did not **drink too much**! Or if some of them did not engage in **bad language** and impure talk! So our Lord **does know** what it is like to be at Social Gatherings where there are all kinds of people present, & knew how to **behave**! **APP** When **we** are in such situations, God is **testing** us, for we have a **golden opportunity to shine for Him**! These are **great opportunities** – for many (but not all) at social gatherings, there is an **etiquette** – a **politeness** – people will be 'on their toes' **not to offend** or 'put their foot in it'. They will be **prepared** to hear a wide variety of opinions! So – you be alert and don't miss out on **God-given** opportunities to speak up for Him! Be sure to be **positive**, not negative!

The COMPLAINT

Note **who** it came **from**! God's Covenant people of the day! The Church! The "*Pharisees... teachers of law*" (God's law!)[30]! It amazes me that the **problems** our Saviour had in the Church, was **not** from the **liberals**! It was not from the **unbelievers** and the **sceptics**! It was from what we would call the **hardliners**! Those who kept the Sabbath '**too**' strictly! Not from those who disbelieved in the doctrines but who went overboard with it! (I recently heard from an orthodox evangelical who moved from a 'liberal' C of S to a Reformed Church. His problems in the new Church are such that he said 'I would **prefer** to be dealing with 'unbelieving liberals' than intolerant and bigoted evangelicals!) What an indictment!!

The complaint was 'This is not 'wholesome' company for us! "*Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?*"[30c]! Tax collectors and sinners are no people for the church to mingle with! We

ought not to be seen with wicked people. They were not 'at home' with those who did not share their faith and manners! They **felt uncomfortable** in their presence – because they were **not used** to it. It **threatened** their **comfort zone!** Few things causes more unrest than a threat to our comfort zone! If you want to 'stir up' a congregation, threaten their comfort zone!

So they could not understand how Someone claiming to be **holy**, would **fraternize** and **associate** with those who were obviously **unholy!** You see, they had **rules/laws**, about who they were to be seen with. Who they were to have as friends. And so a '**cult**' **element developed!** Over time, a **practice** will become **common** > then it will become the **norm** > then **tradition!** It will become part of the **culture!** Then it will become a **law** that must not be broken – it will be a **sin** to break it!

What happened? They were actually **adding** to the Word of God! This sin is far more common than realised! It is a sin in God's sight to make **more laws** than He Himself has established. One of the last warnings in Scripture is "*if anyone **adds anything** to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book*" – it comes **before** "*if anyone **takes away** from this book*" [Rev 22:18cf]! Moses was **warned** "*Do **not add** to what I command you*" [Deu 4:2 **repeated** 12:32!] Sol = "*Every word of God is flawless...do **not add** to His words or He will rebuke you...*" [Pro 30:6]!

It **always** was a principle with God, not to add to His commands. God knew the **tendency** of man (especially sinful man, who was regenerated) to be **more holy** than God Himself. We err on **both** sides - on the side of **broad-mindedness** – and on the side of **narrow-mindedness!** Our narrow-mindedness actually comes from a **spirit of self-justification**, from a desire to **earn** or be **worthy!**

The REBUKE

Christ had to rebuke them by reminding them of the **great mission of the Church** – to go into the world and **bring sinners** to **repentance!** That is what the Church is all about! Bringing sinners to repentance! (Sadly some Xns have no problem going into the world – but they neither repent themselves of their sinful lives nor do not they have the **motive** of bringing others to repentance!) Christ here is rebuking the Church of His day of failing to be the salt that seasons, light that shines!

God only asks us to **devote one day** out of seven with His people! The **rest of the week** we are with the world! God **planned** that for a **purpose/reason!** We have to 'shine' **there!** That is where God wants us to be – with the "*the sick*", the sin-sick! "*I have not come to call the righteous*" Jesus said. "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor*"! *I believe that just as there should be **discipleship classes** for teaching doctrine etc, so there **ought** to be **training classes** for teaching believers how to **wisely share their faith!** The Church will need to focus on that aspect for the future! If we are not gifted to put in a word, let us be sure we **live** in such a way that our lives will **provoke** questions. It is in the **context** of **provocation** that Paul talks of salvation for Gentiles "*But through their fall, to **provoke** them to jealousy, **salvation** has come to the Gentiles*"! [Rom 11:11]

Levi himself records something Jesus **actually said** on that occasion which Luke omits! Of course, being a Jew, and writing to Jews, Levi is aware of their **inclination** to be **exclusive** so he helpfully tells us Jesus added "*But go and **learn** what this means: I desire **mercy** not sacrifice*" [Mat 9:13]. Jesus is **quoting** from **two places** in OT [1Sam 15:22 + Hos 6:6]! I love the way the NLT puts it "*Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I **want** you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.'* For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough"!! Did you get that? God wants us to be more **merciful** towards unbelievers instead of being

This is the meaning – God is **far more merciful** than any man is! I believe this is one of the most **stunning discoveries** that will be **revealed** on Judgment Day! By then it will be too late! 'If only we knew and had believed that God was really willing to accept our repentance!' **Simple, straight-forward, uncomplicated, honest** repentance, is something God rejoices over – and responds to!

Jesus asked the Phars "*to go and **learn** what this means*" - for those accustomed to living on the 'safe' and 'severe' side of the law, it might **not** be an **easy** lesson to learn! Prayer/grace/patience, and above all something of the **love** of Christ is needed to learn it! We are here to **help** the world!