

Levi's Call

Introduction

Please open your Bibles to the Gospel according to Luke chapter 5. You will find the text of our message in Luke 5:27-39.

Bible

(27) *And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.* (28) *And he left all, rose up, and followed him.* (29) *And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.* (30) *But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?* (31) *And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.* (32) *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* (33) *And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?* (34) *And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?* (35) *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* (36) *And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth*

*a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent,
and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. (37) And no
man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be
spilled, and the bottles shall perish. (38) But new wine must be put into new bottles;
and both are preserved. (39) No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth
new: for he saith, The old is better.*

Luke 5:27-39 - KJV

1...The CONVERSION (vv. 27-28)

Illustration

You have probably never walked up to a complete stranger anywhere at any time and said, "Follow me." If you tried, you would likely get a variety of responses without someone standing to follow you with no questions asked.

I put it to the test several times this week in the local area...JK. I did not do it...

Explanation

After He healed the paralytic at the house in Capernaum, Jesus went out and "saw" Levi.

Do not gloss over the word too quickly. This does not identify a passing glance or looking over a crowd. The word means to look closely at, to look attentively. Our word "theater" comes from this word. It represents the idea of gazing with a purpose.

Jesus had an appointment with Levi, even if Levi didn't know it.

However this event went down, at some point, Levi looked and locked eyes with Jesus. When he did, Jesus said, "Follow Me."

I do not think Jesus was a total stranger to him. At some time, Levi saw Him, witnessed a miracle, heard Him preach, etc. So, when Jesus said, "Follow Me," Levi had some idea of what He meant. This was the call that resulted in his conversion.

What did the call involve?

A...Levi received a call to BELIEVE

Explanation

Following Jesus always begins with belief. Levi, like the other disciples of Jesus, did not understand it all, but must have recognized Jesus's claim to be Israel's promised Messiah. Jesus called him to believe Him.

Application

Have you believed in Jesus? Not do you believe that Jesus existed as a real historical figure, lived a good life, taught some beneficial principles, died somewhere at some time, etc.?

Have you believed that He is the perfect Son of God Who came to this world, lived a perfect life as the God-man, died on the cross as the Lamb of God Who took the sin of the world, rose to

life on the third day, and alone can forgive your sin and save you?

Bible

(30) *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (31) Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Acts 17:30-31 - KJV

Application

Paul preached in Athens nearly 2,000 years ago that we have all been called to believe in Jesus. Jesus came, lived, and died for you. He paid the penalty for your sin at Calvary. God the Father poured His just wrath on Jesus so that you could have the opportunity to be saved. Then, He rose from the dead. Believe in Him.

B...Levi received a call to BELONG

Explanation

Not only did Jesus's call involve believing, but it also involved belonging. If Levi chose to follow Jesus, he would belong in two new ways.

1. Belong to Christ
2. Belong to Community

As a tax collector, Levi was hated by everyone. Not the way we might grow disgusted with our tax system and dealing with the IRS, they hated tax collectors because of what they represented. Jewish tax collectors collected taxes on behalf of the Roman government. So, Jewish tax collectors were traitors. As soon as a Jew took that position, he was excommunicated from essentially every form of Jewish religious and social life. He was a shame to his family and heritage.

Jesus offered Levi something wonderful. His call demonstrated love, grace, and mercy beyond imagination - something no one else had offered. If Levi accepted, he would belong.

First, he would belong to Christ.

Application

When a person trusts Jesus Christ for salvation, so much changes immediately. Search "in Christ" in the New Testament, you'll find these realities for those who are "in Christ":

- Redeemed (Rom. 3:24)
- Not condemned (Rom. 8:1)
- Free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2)
- Inseparable from His love (Rom. 8:39)
- Approved (Rom. 16:10)
- Sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2)
- Wise (1 Cor. 4:10)
- Alive (1 Cor. 15:22)

- Triumphant (2 Cor. 2:14)
- New (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Free (Gal. 2:4)
- Brought near (Eph. 2:13)
- Partakers of God's promises (Eph. 3:6)
- Saints (Phil. 1:1)
- Consoled (Phil. 2:1)
- Perfected (Col. 1:28)

These sample what is true of and for those who belong to Christ.

Explanation

Second, Levi would belong to community.

Levi was not the first, nor was he the last, disciple called to follow Jesus. Others were following Jesus and others would. He was called by Jesus into a community unlike any he had ever known or could ever know.

Bible

(5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Romans 12:5 - KJV

Application

A saved person never walks alone because he is in Christ and because God places him or her into a community of other Christ-followers. You have brothers and sisters. You belong to a family.

C...Levi received a call to BECOME

Explanation

The call to follow was a call to accompany Jesus, to be in the same way with Jesus. It identified learning from and growing more like Jesus.

Application

Following Jesus leads to becoming more like Jesus. Those who truly follow Him should be looking more like Him the longer they follow Him.

Explanation

Levi's response to Jesus's call represents his total commitment to everything the call included. He believed in Jesus and went forward with abandonment to all else.

Application

Have you heeded the call?

Have you believed?

Do you belong?

Are you becoming?

2...The CHANGE (v. 29)

Explanation

Levi accepted the call to believe, belong, and become.

How did that show up in his life? How was he changed?

Levi changed in many ways, but one particular change shows up immediately. Look at verse 29 again.

Bible

(29) And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

Luke 5:29 - KJV

Explanation

The greatest transformation in Levi's life is seen in his desire to share Jesus with others.

Had he had other feasts in his own house before? Probably.

Had these “friends” joined him before? Probably.

But this feast was for “him” - Jesus. He set up this feast and invited the guests so that he could honor Jesus, as well as identify with Jesus so that his “friends” would know he was made new by Jesus.

Illustration

Pastor and author, David Guzik, noted that “a saved man doesn’t want to go to heaven alone” (Guzik).

Application

Who are you taking to heaven with you?

Who are you working to take to heaven with you?

Who are you praying to take to heaven with you?

Do not overlook the simple, practical ways you can work to take people to heaven with you. Levi had a dinner and invited people over.

Can you host a neighbor, co-worker, or classmate for a meal? That simple activity can be a catalyst to introducing them to Jesus.

3...The CONTENTION (vv. 30-39)

Explanation

Following the healing of the paralytic, the Jewish religious leaders have transitioned from investigating Jesus to antagonizing Jesus. At this point, they sought to discredit Him. Later, they would seek to destroy Him.

How did they seek to discredit Him in this account?

A...They questioned His ASSOCIATIONS (vv. 30-32)

Explanation

Look here again at verse 30.

Bible

(30) But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Luke 5:30 - KJV

Explanation

Note first that they did not directly question Jesus, but His disciples. The Jewish religious leaders, who would be His most ardent human adversaries, sought to discredit Him to His own

followers.

Application

Often, those who contend with Jesus will not contend with Him directly, but will contend with His followers. Your enemy, who is spiritual and not fleshly, will do the same in your life. He'll use various tools and methods to discredit Jesus to you. You'll often face attack in the very places where you are following Jesus.

Explanation

How did that play out here?

They questioned why the disciples, who were following Jesus, associated with known publicans (tax collectors and traitors) and sinners.

The disciples may not have had the answer at that point, but Jesus supplied it for them.

Bible

(31) And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. (32) I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Luke 5:31-32 - KJV

Explanation

Jesus revealed that He came for those who recognized their need for Him.

Who is that?

Those sickened in, with, and by sin.

He did not come for the righteous, not as those who are truly righteous, but see themselves as righteous. He came for those who are sick, know they are sick, and know that they cannot do anything to alleviate or cure their sickness. In answering this way, Jesus identified His and His disciples' reason for associating with publicans and sinners.

Application

We cannot be afraid to associate with sinners for the sake of reaching them with the Gospel of Jesus. I am not speaking of an unwise, unhealthy cooperative relationship, but a genuine life-sharing and giving relationship that allows for Gospel conversation and invitation to take place.

Bible

(15) And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Mark 16:15 - KJV

Application

"Go" and "into" represent crucial words in the text. We have to go into the world.

Bible

(18) *As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.*

John 17:18 - KJV

B...They questioned His ACTIVITIES (vv. 33-39)

Explanation

After questioning His association with known publicans and sinners, the religious leaders questioned His activities - specifically related to fasting. Though the Old Testament required only one annual fast during the Day of Atonement, several additional fasts became traditional. Some Pharisees regularly fasted two days per week. Fasting represented, for them, demonstrations of piety. However, it became a point of pride. That's why, in Matthew 6, Jesus spoke about those who fast and make it known.

Jesus responded to their question with three illustrations: a wedding feast, a patch of new garment on an old, and new wine placed into old worn bottles (skins).

These illustrations seem primarily geared to two applications.

First, Jesus was present with His followers. Like would be true of the celebratory wedding feast, His followers should rejoice while He is present.

Application

While Jesus is not physically present with us and we experience difficulties in this life, let's remember that He has provided for us to have and practice joy.

Explanation

Second, Jesus presented God's kingdom through the lens of the New Covenant, while they were looking for Him to present God's kingdom through the lens of the Old Covenant. They wanted Jesus to fit their mold and revive Judaism. Jesus wanted to transform the corrupt human heart, not reform the outward appearance of religion and ritualism. However, He identified man's tendency to resist change.

Application

Jesus's work in your life and mine represents a work of transformation, not reformation. He's not looking to correct you, but to change you.

Jesus's work and the building of God's kingdom will take on forms that may seem unusual, new, or different to us. We need to be careful about resisting change or different, simply because it is change or different.

Conclusion