

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Jesus Dines with Sinners**

*Luke 5:29-32*

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# Jesus Dines with Sinners

## Scripture

The four Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospel authors are often called “evangelists.” One reason they are called evangelists is because each author wanted to communicate the good news of salvation in such a way that unbelievers would understand, believe, and be saved.

Last time we examined the account of Jesus calling a man named Levi to follow him. Remarkably, Levi, who was a hated tax collector, immediately left everything and followed Jesus. Levi was dramatically saved and became not only a disciple of Jesus but also an apostle of Jesus. Today, he is better known as Matthew, the author of the first Gospel.

After Levi left everything to follow Jesus, he threw a great party for all his friends. Jesus, of course, was there too, dining with sinners, the friends of Levi.

Let’s read about Jesus dining with sinners in Luke 5:29-32. Let’s begin reading at verse 27:

<sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.”

<sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> **And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.** <sup>30</sup> **And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”** <sup>31</sup> **And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.** <sup>32</sup> **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”** (Luke 5:29-32)

## Introduction

Jacob de Shazer was sent as one of Jimmy Dootlitttle’s

raiders on Japan on April 18, 1942. At the time he was an atheist, believing in no God. During the air attack enemy anti-aircraft bullets hit his plane and he was forced to bail out. He was captured and imprisoned by the Japanese for 40 months – 34 of them in solitary confinement. During his imprisonment he thought certainly his life was approaching the end. He saw three of his companions shot by a firing squad and saw another die of slow starvation.

During the long months of imprisonment he pondered the question of why the Japanese hated him and why he hated them. He began to recall some of the things he had heard about Christianity.

Boldly, he asked his jailers if they could get him a Bible. At first they laughed boisterously as at a good joke, grew ugly, and warned him to stop making a nuisance of himself. But he kept asking. A year-and-a-half later, in May 1944, a guard finally brought him a Bible, flung it at him, and said, “Three weeks you have. Three weeks, and then I take away.” True to his word, in three weeks the guard took the Bible away and De Shazer never saw it again.

However, in those three weeks of intensive searching in the Bible, De Shazer came to understand the gospel. He saw God as utterly holy and himself as utterly sinful. He learned that God sent Jesus into the world to pay the penalty for his sin. He repented of his sin and turned in faith to trust in Jesus as the one who paid the penalty for his sin. De Shazer was converted to Christ and became a changed man.

As the war came to an end, De Shazer was released from Japanese captivity on August 20, 1945 and he returned home.

However, in 1948, De Shazer, his wife, and infant son were on their way back to Japan as missionaries, where he served for thirty years, all because he was converted to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

When a person is converted to Christ, remarkable changes take place in that person's life. This may not be as evident in a person who is converted as a young child. But, people who are converted to Christ when they are older see very noticeable changes in their lives.

When Jesus met Levi that day in Galilee and called Levi to follow him, Levi was dramatically converted. His life was completely changed.

## **Lesson**

The analysis of the conversion of Levi as set forth in Luke 5:29-32 illustrates what happens when a person is converted to Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Conversion Brings Joy (5:29a)
2. Conversion Produces Evangelism (5:29b)
3. Conversion Provokes Criticism (5:30)
4. Conversion Concerns Sinners (5:31-32)

### **I. Conversion Brings Joy (5:29a)**

First, we learn that conversion brings joy.

Let me recap briefly. Tax collectors were among the most hated people by the Jews in those days. At that time the country of Israel was occupied by the Romans and was therefore subject to Roman rule. The Romans employed Jews to collect taxes for them, and so tax collectors were regarded as traitors.

But not only were tax collectors viewed as traitors, they were also hated because they overcharged the Jews on their taxes. The Romans allowed the tax collectors to keep whatever money they collected over and above the amount that Rome required. So, tax collectors forced the Jewish people to pay outrageous amounts in taxes. Tax collectors, therefore, were very

wealthy because they had done so well skimming money from their fellow countrymen. And they were doubly hated for that!

In fact, tax collectors were viewed by Jewish people as belonging to a class of people that included thieves and murderers! Moreover, tax collectors were barred from entering the Temple or any Jewish synagogue, and so they were not able to participate in worshipping God.

It is likely that Levi's tax booth was on one of the main roads. It was something like one of our modern tollbooths. He probably had met Jesus with his growing band of disciples. Perhaps he had even heard Jesus teaching, and may have longed to have his sins forgiven, just as Jesus spoke about!

And so, one day, when Jesus came along and said to Levi, "Follow me," he did not have to wait for a second invitation! Leaving everything, he rose and followed Jesus (Luke 5:28).

Don't miss Levi's decisive decision to break with his past in order to follow Jesus. Earlier, Luke told us about Jesus calling Simon Peter, James, and John to follow him (5:1-11). You may recall that they were partners in a fishing business. Luke said that "they left everything and followed him" (5:11). However, they still had their boats and could have gone back to their fishing business, if things did not work out as well as they might have hoped. In fact, they *did* go back to their fishing business after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (John 21:1-3).

But for Levi there was no turning back. Once he left everything, he would not have had the funds to buy the rights to collect taxes again. He had more to lose than the other disciples, and he really left it all behind. He was completely converted to Christ. In a sense, it was all for Christ or nothing.

An indication that Levi's conversion was genuine is that his conversion brought him deep-rooted joy. Luke said that **Levi made Jesus a great feast in his house** (5:29a). Levi simply had to celebrate his faith, forgiveness, and freedom.

Perhaps some looked at Levi and thought that he was a

fool to give up all his worldly wealth to follow an itinerant preacher from Nazareth. Even though Jesus was still very popular at this point, it did not appear that anyone was going to profit personally from following Jesus. So, why give up a comfortable lifestyle and get all religious?

But, of course, the people would not have seen Levi's spiritual gain. They simply saw his financial and worldly loss. Later, Jesus would ask people, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:25).

Many people today scoff at those who become Christians. They see someone who is successful in terms of finances or popularity or power, and cannot understand why he would give it up for Christ. The reason he gives up everything for Christ is because he has come to understand that though he may gain the whole world, he will be eternally lost without Christ.

The story is told of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., who was strong and healthy as a child. Early in life he determined to earn a lot of money, and he drove himself to the limit. At age 33, he earned his first million dollars. At age 43, he controlled the biggest company in the world. At age 53, he was the richest man on earth and the world's only billionaire at that time.

Then he developed a sickness called "alopecia," where the hair of his head dropped off, his eyelashes and eyebrows disappeared, he shrunk in size, and began to look like a mummy. His weekly income was one million dollars, but he ate only milk and crackers. He was so hated in Pennsylvania that he had to have bodyguards day and night. He could not sleep, stopped smiling, and enjoyed nothing in life.

Doctors predicted that he would die within the year. The newspaper had gleefully written his obituary in advance—for convenience in sudden use.

But those sleepless nights set Rockefeller thinking. He re-

alized that he “could not take one dime into the next world.” Money was not everything. He then understood that gaining the whole world was useless unless he was converted to Christ.

The next morning found him a new man. He began to help churches with his amassed wealth; the poor and needy were not overlooked. He established the Rockefeller Foundation whose funding of medical researches led to the discovery of penicillin and other wonder drugs. John D. Rockefeller began to sleep well, eat well, and enjoy life.

The doctors had predicted he would not live over age 54. He died just shy of his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>2</sup>

Conversion to Christ brings joy.

## II. Conversion Produces Evangelism (5:29b)

Second, notice that conversion produces evangelism.

Levi had the joyful, liberating experience of having his sins forgiven and life transformed by the gospel, and he wanted all his friends to know that too. So, along with Jesus, **there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them** (5:29b) at the great feast in Levi’s house.

I mentioned previously that all the Jews hated Levi because he was a tax collector. So, who do you think would be Levi’s friends? Why, other **tax collectors**, of course. Luke also tactfully mentioned that along with the **tax collectors** there were **others** at the great feast. So, who are these “**others**” that Luke mentioned? Well, Levi himself told us in his Gospel – the Gospel of Matthew. He said that they were “sinners” (Matthew 9:10). Presumably, this group included “thieves, thugs, enforcers, drunks, and prostitutes.”<sup>3</sup> These are the very people whom Jesus had come to seek and to save (Luke 19:10)!

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 332.

## To Seek and To Save the Lost

We should not think that the gospel is for people who have it all together. The good news of forgiveness and conversion is for those who don't have their lives "together." The gospel is for those who recognize that they are sinners.

I love the hymn that is titled "Just As I Am, Without One Plea." Sadly, this hymn has been so overused at evangelistic services that we tend not to sing it much. Charlotte Elliott wrote the words of this hymn in 1836, which has been included in virtually every English-language hymnal. The text of the hymn emphasizes Christ's call to "come" (Matthew 11:28), Christ's role in salvation (1 Peter 2:24), God the Father's love (Luke 14:22-23), and his willingness to receive sinners (Revelation 22:17). Listen to how Elliott put it:

Just as I am—without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—though toss'd about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings within, and fears without,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind,  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Our Own Hymn Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1883).



Conversion produces evangelism. Levi was so overjoyed by what had happened to him that he wanted others to know that they too could be changed. That is why he threw a great feast.

Bishop J. C. Ryle, the first bishop of Liverpool, made a very strong statement about conversion producing evangelism when he said, “It may be safely asserted that there is no grace in the man who cares nothing about the salvation of his fellow men.”<sup>5</sup> That statement should cause us to examine ourselves.

We say that we care about the salvation of our family and friends and neighbors and colleagues. But, how do we demonstrate that we care? Surely, we tell them about Jesus!

I remember a friend saying years ago that he loved the Puritans. The Puritans lived during the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain. Their writings are still read and appreciated by many today. When my friend was asked which Puritan authors he had read, he could not name one. So, did he really love the Puritans?

Similarly, it is one thing to say that we care about the salvation of others. But, if we never tell them how to be saved, if we never invite them to hear the gospel, do we really care?

Conversion produces evangelism.

### III. Conversion Provokes Criticism (5:30)

Third, observe that conversion provokes criticism.

Luke said that **the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at Jesus’ disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”** (5:30). In those days, no self-respecting Jew would eat with **tax collectors and sinners**. To associate with those who were considered unclean in a religious sense was to make oneself unclean as well.

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<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke, Vol. 1* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 149.

One can see the self-righteousness of **the Pharisees and scribes** just dripping off their lips as they uttered what they thought was a stinging rebuke.

Conversion often provokes criticism, doesn't it? People who don't understand the things of God will criticize those who embrace the gospel. But don't be deterred by that.

Today people will say things like, "Christianity is a crutch," "Christianity is narrow-minded," "Christianity is for failures," and so on.

Listen! Let people say what they will. Christianity provoked criticism even when Jesus was here. The issue is this: Is Christianity true? If it is not true, then do whatever you want to do with your life. But, if Christianity is true, if it is true that there is a heaven and a hell, if it is true that when you die you go either to heaven or hell, then it is important to make the right choice now, regardless of the criticism you may encounter.

#### **IV. Conversion Concerns Sinners (5:31-32)**

And finally, Jesus teaches us that conversion concerns sinners.

Apparently, Jesus overheard the criticism of the Pharisees and their scribes. **And so Jesus answered them**, in two parts (5:31a).

First, Jesus gave an analogy, pointing out the self-evident fact that **those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick** (5:31b). The Pharisees and scribes would have agreed with Jesus that the tax collectors and other sinners were spiritually sick. In fact, according to their own theology, they were the sickest of the sick. But how could the Great Physician not minister to them? Jesus' answer to them was a powerful rebuke of their own cold and callous hearts. Surely, they should have ministered to the sinners.

And second, Jesus answered them from his own personal authority as God incarnate, declaring, **“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance”** (5:32). This statement by Jesus is filled with irony. The Pharisees and scribes believed that they were righteous. In fact, they believed that only those who were righteous were the ones who got to heaven. So, they did not see themselves in need of a Savior. So, when Jesus said that he did not come for **the righteous**, he essentially left them in their own self-righteous folly.

Jesus came to save people who recognize that they are sinners and in need of a Savior. Jesus did not come for those who think that they are righteous. In fact, they typically don't think that they need a Savior anyway.

What do you think of your own spiritual condition? Do you think of yourself as righteous or unrighteous? Do you think of yourself as good or bad?

Friends, Jesus is only for those who know that they are sinners, unrighteous, and bad. He cannot do anything for those who believe themselves to be righteous and good.

Conversion concerns sinners.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the conversion of Levi as set forth in Luke 5:29-32, we should joyfully share the gospel with others, regardless of the responses we might receive.

Luke has given us a wonderful illustration of what happens when a person is converted. Sadly, most of us forget what it is like to be lost and under the wrath of God. Let us ask God to renew the joy of our salvation so that we will share with the lost the good news of salvation. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, I thank you for the conversion of Levi. It is such a wonderful illustration of what happens when a person is converted to Christ.

God, there are people here today who are not converted to Christ. Enable that person to trust in Christ alone.

And God, there are many here today who are truly converted to Christ. Enable us to share joyfully the gospel with those who are not yet Christians, regardless of what others may think or say.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!