

Luke 5:27-32

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Date: 06 October 2015

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[0 : 00] My basic assumption as we come to this passage today is that it's not just an interesting story but that Jesus calls you and me today.

! There's a challenge, a big challenge in this passage but there's also a comfort and I'm guessing you'll need to hear one of those two things.

I'll let you decide what that is. But in chapter 5, if you've got your Bible open you can see what else has been going on in that chapter. At the start, Jesus has called Simon Peter and then there's a whole thing with Peter not catching any fish and then just being blown away by who Jesus is.

As he puts his nets down and gets this great catch of fish and Simon Peter realises his sin and says, away from me Lord, I'm a sinful man in verse 8.

You've got the cleansing of the leper just after that and Jesus reaching out to the untouchable who no one else would go near. And leprosy just so obviously a picture of sin that just pervades us from head to toe.

[1 : 15] Then you've got the healing of the paralytic in verse 17 onwards and it's so clear by the end of that passage that Jesus is not just concerned with healing our bodies but actually it's forgiveness of sin that is our big problem and that Jesus meets.

So there's this big theme that as Jesus comes into contact with people, their sin becomes all the more evident but so does his ability to rescue them from it.

So we shouldn't be scared about talking about sin. I know sometimes Christians, some churches are a little bit scared to talk about sin. Maybe you have been in the past, maybe you are now. But actually we shouldn't be because it is the very thing that when we see it for all its horror, we start to see Jesus and his ability to save us and our need for him.

So Luke is showing us Jesus' priorities and as we see what he says, we can't think Jesus has just come for religious people, people whose idea of a Sunday morning is watching songs of praise, you know.

Actually he's come for everyone. He's come to forgive sins which presupposes that there are sins to forgive. And so it's no surprise that the next thing he does in the passage we read is to call a sinner to follow him.

[2 : 39] There he is in verse 27. His name is Levi. Levi. These six verses are, you know, it's a short unit but it's quite punchy isn't it?

It all happens very quickly. If you were to think about it like a film, you'd have two big scenes. First of all, verses 27 and 28, you could say at the office.

It's at the office isn't it? Because Levi's there at his tax booth. And then, of course, it's back at home. But first of all, scene one, at the office, verse 27.

Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. Follow me, Jesus said to him. Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Just like that, as Tommy Cooper would have said.

I'm sure at breakfast that morning when Levi left the house, she did not expect him to come home. Early, first of all. And with a P45 form.

[3 : 43] Saying his job was finished. And he had a new life ahead. Maybe you saw that story last week of the man a hundred years ago whose wife sent him out to buy a set of dining chairs and he came back with Stonehenge.

He'd gone to an auction. Stonehenge was out for auction. And he bought it. It was brilliant. We don't even know Levi was married, so I'm sort of speculating a little bit. But he goes to work, normal day, comes back as a disciple.

He will be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, following Jesus, I know the word follow doesn't have quite the same impact today, does it?

Thanks to the online social network Twitter. Where following someone just means that you subscribe to what they might say. Which may be sensible or may not. I mean, you may or may not listen to it.

Levi, though, will truly follow Jesus. He will spend his life helping his fellow Jews in particular understand who he is. Now, what made him do that?

[4 : 46] We're not told. Something about Jesus' words caused everything else in Levi's life just to take a back seat. He's a tax collector.

When your country is under occupation, I don't need to say it's obvious you don't win any brownie points by collecting taxes for the enemy. That's what he's doing. In their eyes, particularly the Pharisees' eyes, he has sold himself.

He's on a level with the prostitutes. Who is he today? Well, he's somebody, he's anyone who has just turned their back on trying to pretend to be a moral person in any way.

At the weekend, he will do anything else apart from be at church. That's the one place he won't be. He'll be having a barbecue with his friends at home. He'll be out in the country, getting away from town.

He'll be perhaps working weekends, if you can justify it. He'll be watching the sport. That's Levi. Last place he'd be is in church. Maybe that was you at some point.

[5 : 51] Maybe it still is you. Maybe actually you can see yourself in Levi quite a bit. Socially, he's got loads of mates. But spiritually, well, he's the unlikeliest man to be a disciple of Jesus.

But there's some sort of emptiness, some sort of realisation going on in Levi. But Jesus, and you can see that Jesus fills it. Maybe he's stood at his tax booth and heard some of Jesus' teaching wafting on the air.

And he's caught some of it. And he just, he's become convinced. So there's the question. What made Levi just get up and follow Jesus? Well, we're not told exactly.

But there's another question we could ask. Arguably even more important. Not just what made Levi do it. But what made Jesus do it? If you're on a disciple recruitment drive, why would you go for that man?

And we do know the answer to this question because it's explained in scene 2 at Levi's house. We've had at the office. Now it's back at the house.

[6 : 58] Verse 29 onwards. And Levi's clearly, he's not short of a bubble too. He can invite friends. Probably a load of other people who don't really give a stuff about religion either.

I'm sure in many ways it was a great party. If you've been to parties, you know that parties like that, with those sorts of people, can sometimes be more fun than with people like the Pharisees. I'm sure it was a great party. But Jesus' presence highlights something else.

Levi's purpose for this party is different. He's clearly invited his friends for the sole purpose of connecting them with Jesus, hasn't he? When you find something good, you want to share it with friends.

And that's what's going on here. But not everyone sees things quite as simply as this. Verse 30, we see that the Pharisees and the scribes complained to his disciples, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

In other words, they are not suitable company for someone like you, who claims to be a teacher, a rabbi. They're basically saying that he's condoning the behaviour of these people.

[8 : 06] But Jesus' reply is very clear, very thought through of course. Verse 31, Notice here that Jesus doesn't give a general, Oh, I love everybody, sort of answer.

He's quite specific. He says essentially, Well, where would you expect to find a doctor? Would you go to a gym when you need a doctor? Have you found the gym up?

Well, no, because they're fit and healthy there, some of them. If you, you go to your surgery, don't you? You go to the doctor's surgery, or to the hospital. A doctor, when they qualify, I've got a friend who's a junior doctor, she is looking for jobs in hospitals, in surgeries.

That's the logical place to be. That's Jesus' simple logic here. Why would he keep sick people at arm's length? If he is the great doctor of the soul?

So there's a challenge here, when we're tempted to think that we're more righteous than other people. There's a real challenge for each one of us.

[9 : 22] But I think none of us are free from this attitude that the Pharisees and the scribes show. In their treatment of others, in their attitude to Jesus, in their view of themselves, they've got a problem.

And Jesus challenges them with these verses. And in terms of... I don't want to go through all of those, but they're so intertwined.

Their view of other people, their view of themselves, their view of Jesus, they're all intertwined. And perhaps it's good to think about it in this way. I've got a little story that will just help us to understand why their view of Jesus and others and themselves is so wrong.

Here's the story. It's about a woman in a village. And she buys something from the market one day. She's a very house-powered woman.

And she discovers something that is... claims to be soap powder that washes things whiter than any other soap powder. So she brings some home. And she washes her family's clothes, her children's muddy t-shirts and things.

[10 : 39] She lives in this village where her garden overlooks mountains in the near distance. And she hangs her washing up with great pride, comparing it to her neighbours.

It looks so much better. The weather, though, changes. It's looking a bit changeable. Over the mountains, the sky is looking threatening. And the next morning, when this woman opens her curtains, it is a glorious day.

But something has happened during the night. There's been snow falling onto the mountain. Now she looks out. She sees her washing. She looks at it, and the first thing she thinks is, who's been dirtying my washing?

Because yesterday it looked great next to her neighbours. But suddenly she sees it against the backdrop of the snow. And then, I'm quoting, it says, she stopped and understood.

Nobody had dirtied her washing. But snow had fallen in the night, and the mountains behind her home were covered in dazzling white, too bright to look at. Against that sparkling purity, her sheets looked almost grey.

[11 : 50] Wow, she thought. They are nothing to God's whiteness. Now, do you see my point of telling that story? It's because the Pharisees, they're like people who found some soap powder.

They think they've scrubbed themselves up. And they think they look white and pure, compared to the people who haven't even tried to scrub themselves up, who look grey and dirty in the corner, the sinners and tax collectors.

But Jesus, when he comes along in his pure, white holiness, compared to them, they and all of us are filthy.

We've shown up. And that is why when Jesus says, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He's not saying, I've not come for you, Pharisees, you're righteous.

He's saying, actually, you're all grey. You're just different levels of grey. Different tones and shades of grey. But you're all sin sick. You all need a doctor.

[12 : 52] Now we make this mistake all the time. In our world, as long as we can find someone else, greyer than us, then it makes us feel just a little bit superior, doesn't it, inside.

It's crazy, isn't it? You can walk into work, and you can, because you went to church the day before, you can just feel a little bit morally superior. It's stupid. But that's what we're like.

But if you and I were held up against God's purity, we'd see how foolish and deceived we are, and what sinners we are. So you see how our view of Jesus, our view of others, and of ourselves is so intertwined.

And maybe you need to hear that challenge today. Have you fallen under that deception that you're whiter than you think, and it's causing you to look on others as being the greys?

We're all greys. Jesus is the white, the pure. He's the one, the doctor we need to come to. There's a challenge. But there's also a comfort here in these verses that if we missed it, we'd be overlooking the best, best fit in these verses.

[14 : 04] Because these words and actions of Jesus are a comfort to all those who in a very profound sense start to realise that they're grey, they're grubby, they're sinners.

And maybe you know what it's like to be shunned by somebody. Maybe you've felt that at some stage in your life.

But look at Jesus. He hates the sin, but he still comes alongside these sinners. He loves these sinners. Which means there's no one here in this room whom Jesus would, you know, he would avoid.

He'd say, no, you're too grey, you're too dirty for me. He comes to wash us clean. He's the doctor who comes to deal with sin. He comes to be among sinners.

If you're feeling like a sinner without hope, Jesus is your man. We see it in all of the rest of Luke chapter 7 when a notorious woman comes weeping.

[15:10] She goes away finding forgiveness. Still in chapter 15, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, and the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

We see it in another tax collector in Zacchaeus in chapter 19. Well that invitation from Jesus is the most important invitation Levi ever received to follow me.

you could say it's a command really. But it's still the most important invitation that you or I will ever receive. And here's a question for you.

What have you done with Jesus' call to follow him? What have you done with that call? We saw two surprises. The fact that a man like Levi is following Jesus.

Surprise number one. Surprise number two, the fact that Jesus is calling Levi. Third surprise, that Jesus offers our call to you as well.

[16:17] Now of course there are great differences between us and them but the same essential leaving behind of the old life.

The walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Relationship with your heavenly father restored as sins are forgiven. That freedom that comes with forgiveness of sin.

That lightness of heart that comes with knowing that there is a point now to life. It's following Jesus.

And maybe like him you're here today and you know you're like Levi you're chasing the material things but you're feeling spiritually barren.

While Jesus says it's not too late I've got something much better. This is the point to living. It's the most exciting thing to follow Jesus if you know a Christian here you're with them ask them about it.

You might think well this Jesus he's about to die he's going to end up on a cross very soon. You Christians are crazy to want to follow this man. Yes he's about to die.

[17:26] He's also about to rise. And to entrust your life to him therefore is to put your life into the hands of somebody who has gone through death knows what's beyond can take you there as well.

And one day we'll find ourselves before this same Jesus he will not just be a 2,000 year old sorry not 2,000 year old but 2,000 years ago he won't be an historical figure with sandals and a robe on he will be the judge he will be your judge and mine and we will find that we give account to him to this Jesus but for now he does not condemn he reaches out to you he says follow me it's the greatest invitation Levi followed him just like that my question for you is today for all of us are you following this Jesus in the same way I'm going to pray let's ask that God's word would stay in our hearts and do its work in us let's pray